

"No" to the Trans-Pacific Partnership

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During the period of the last three Sundays of the Church's calendar year, when the gospel readings each Sunday gave insights as to what the Reign/Kingdom of God looks like, our government was in the process of trading away our independence and sovereign rights to overseas trans-national corporations.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), is the antithesis of the values that the Reign of God promotes. The Gospel proclaims that Jesus, announced his mission as 'to bring good news for the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed' (*Luke 4*). Wherever these teachings are practised, they are a sign of the Reign of God.

The TPP represents a rejection of these critical teachings of Jesus. Instead, it stands for the values and interests of overseas corporations, whose base line always is profit for shareholders.

This trade agreement, long in the making, is nearing its final phases. Its aim is to carve up more of the world's resources and place them in the hands of the already rich and powerful. From the beginning, at the insistence of the trans-national corporations, the process of negotiation has been shrouded in secrecy. One wonders what message John Key gave to the CEOs he addressed during the APEC meeting in China in November.

The spin from our government about TPP is always positive. All will benefit, they say. No worries. Spin, spin, more spin. Spin is usually nothing more than lies in chocolate coating. This TPP spin is simply one big lie. They claim benefits will trickle down to everyone. This is untrue. It will be the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised who will suffer most.

Last year, Pope Francis wrote: 'Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume economic

growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater economic justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve

trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the current economic system... The worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose.' *The Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, #54-55

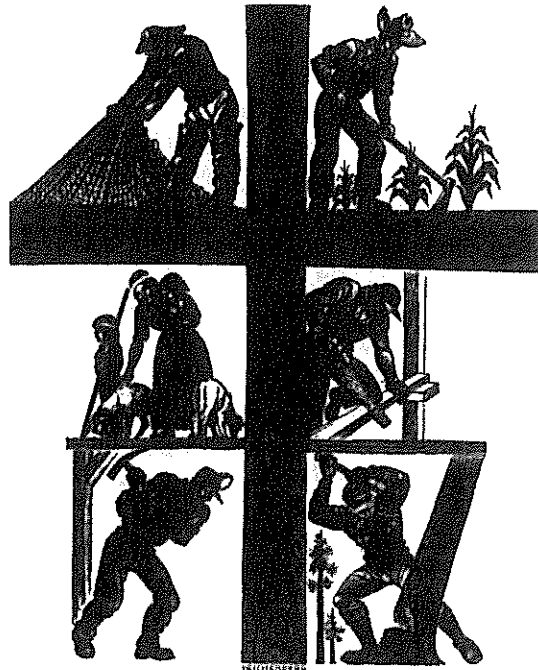
Trickle-down economics

The TPP philosophy is 'trickle down' on a world scale. It allows trans-nationals to have more and more influence over the lives of the vast majority of the world's poor and marginalised, ordinary workers, indigenous minorities,

the chronically sick and the bulk of the elderly. These groupings will find themselves increasingly unable to access much of what has been built over decades as infra-structure in this country. Little will trickle down to them! The same will apply to similar groupings in the other 11 countries engaged in the negotiations, including Japan, Australia, Canada and the US.

Here are some of the things we are trading away, in part if not wholly.

- The TPP will give international corporations the right to sue our democratically elected government if we interfere with their profits and don't toe their line on issues like imports, workers' rights and the Treaty of Waitangi. 'Any NZ government could be sued if it wanted to re-claim ownership of electricity, stop building private prisons, phase out Charter Schools or bring in costly mining regulations.' *The Nation*, TV3, 26 October 2014.



- Governments are already being challenged under existing free trade agreements. For example, in Australia, by Phillip Morris challenging over plain packaging of cigarettes; in Egypt, for increasing its minimum wage; in Canada, by a US drug company because Canadian judges invalidated two patents; and in Germany, over its decision to phase out nuclear power.

- Public health care will be threatened. A public open letter signed by 270 top healthcare professionals and sent to the Prime Minister in May 2014 stated, 'The TPPA threatens the future of health in New Zealand by elevating 'investor rights' of trans-national corporations over the right of the New Zealand people to develop, adapt or improve domestic regulatory policies according to the changing health needs.' In simple terms, profit margins of overseas investors will, in some instances, decide health policy in New Zealand, and can override NZ government policy in the interests of their investors.

- In particular the healthcare professionals appealed for clarity and background papers as to New Zealand's position on Investor State Dispute Provisions, the clauses which allow corporates to override democratically elected government decisions. They received neither clarity nor background papers. As Tim Groser, Minister of Trade, insightfully noted, 'Those people who are

opposed to the agreement want access to the texts so they can blow them apart.'

- The TPP will prevent Pharmac from bulk bargaining some generic drugs at the lowest price, increasing the costs of our medicines. Overseas trans-national corporations will ultimately decide what drugs Pharmac can buy in bulk. The decisions will largely be determined by how much profit they can make, not on the needs of the patients.

- The TPP will create job scarcity by allowing foreign contractors to underbid Kiwis contractors.

- The TPP will undermine our government's ability to fund and use state-owned enterprises such as Kiwibank, ACC, public health and public education.

- The TPP will enable our environmental protection legislation to be over-ruled by mining companies and deep sea oil drillers.

- The TPP threatens employment laws in New Zealand, which protect workers basic rights. Remember the fiasco surrounding the filming of *The Hobbit*, when our actors' rights to collective agreements were ripped to shreds by the Hollywood moguls who flew in to protect their profit-making interests. Expect more of the same.

- The TPP represents the sale of New Zealand's sovereignty to overseas trans-national corporations, and greatly reduces the effectiveness of our democratic processes. It is an attack on democracy itself.

Who are we?

Members of Te Wairua Maranga Trust, which publishes this paper, have since 1989 been operating as a community following a Catholic Worker spirituality. We view the Treaty of Waitangi as our nation's founding covenant. We try, however inadequately at times, to live the Sermon on the Mount and its modern implications. We operate three houses of hospitality in Christchurch named after Suzanne Aubert, Joseph Cardijn and Thomas Merton. We offer hospitality to people in need either on a temporary or more permanent basis. We have a continuing outreach to a number of families offering friendship and support. We promote non-violence and a 'small is beautiful' approach to life, practise co-operative work and peace making, focus on issues of justice, support prison ministry, help create intentional communities, and try to practise voluntary poverty and personalism.

We engage in regular prayer and we also celebrate a liturgy every Wednesday at 6:00 pm at the Suzanne Aubert House, 8A Cotterill St, Addington, (off Poulson St, near Church Square), followed by a shared meal. Anyone is welcome – phone Francis, 338-7105.

We do not seek funding from traditional sources. We hope to receive enough to keep our houses of hospitality open and our various works going. Catholic Worker houses do not issue tax receipts since they are running neither a business nor a church social agency. We invite people to participate personally and unconditionally. Should you wish to make a regular contribution, you may do so through our Te Wairua Maranga Westpac Trust holding account (number 031703-0036346-02). Donations may also be made to **Te Wairua Maranga Trust, Box 33-135, Christchurch.** *The Common Good:* Editor: Jim Consedine - jim.conse@xtra.co.nz; Layout - Barbara Corcoran - burkespass@gmail.com

It's a no-brainer

One would think that signing up to this bizarre pact would be an absolute no-brainer. Only the wealthy and already powerful are going to benefit. There will be no 'trickle down' to the masses.

But that is the point. The rich and powerful always want more. Through their corporations which rule the world, they keep grabbing more to themselves. They don't care about the common good. They never have done. That is the lesson of history. Look at the multi-million dollar salaries given to many CEOs. Through the TPP they will have a chance to create many more in their own image and likeness. And keep the poor and workers in their proper place by chipping away at the few rights still left to them.

One must wonder where the prophetic voices of the Church have been these past few of years. Where does it leave our teaching on 'the preferential option for the poor'? What about the principle of subsidiarity? Who is going to protect human rights and freedoms when the corporates gain even more power? Who is going to speak for the environment? For our very planet?

It is not surprising that major environmental groups including Greenpeace are horrified at what is being proposed. These are scary but critical questions that require greater, more repeated prophetic leadership from all sectors, including our Church leaders.

The TPP places our independence and our sovereignty as a nation at risk. It is time to say 'no, no, never,' to the Trans-Pacific Partnership.