



CREA

Center for Reflection, Education and Action, Inc. Hartford, CT

Fall/Winter 2001

# Starting Points

## **Extraordinary Legislation Passed by the House with Little Media Coverage: The Trade Promotion Authority Act**

Most U. S. citizens know that the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the authority to conduct trade with foreign nations and between states. On December 6th, the House of Representatives passed the Trade Promotion Authority Act (HR3005) by the extremely close vote of 215-214.

This Act essentially removes the authority to finalize trade agreements from Congress and gives it to the president, retaining for Congress only consultative or advisory committee positions. Of serious concern here is that the Act thereby removes the constitutional channel for U.S. citizens to participate, through their elected representatives, in decision-making about the trade agreements that affect their lives. This is an extraordinary deconstruction of the democratic process.

The Act also gives the president the power to determine whether another country's regulations are "trade barriers and distortions." (In the World Trade Organization (WTO) this same power is held by a non-elected Dispute Resolution Panel.) An example of where this power may lead is seen in the Act itself, which calls "unjustified" the labeling of food that has been altered by biotechnology, a matter of considerable concern to many consumers. Further, the Act calls for disputes to be resolved by an unidentified "procedure."

One of the Act's stated goals is "to promote respect for worker rights and the rights of children consistent with core labor standards of the International Labor Organization." However, no further reference to labor is made until the very end in section #11, which simply requires that a country live up to its own standards, and then qualifies this by stating that countries have "discretion" in doing this.

The title of the Act does not indicate the seriousness of the issues contained in it. Many U.S. citizens who are concerned about the democratic process, about environmental standards and workers' rights, have tried to raise public consciousness. Such concerns, however, received very little attention in the corporate-controlled mainstream media. When mentioned, the legislation was given generalized, positive, descriptions.

At the time of this printing, the Trade Promotion Authority Act has gone to the Senate, where it is being marked up by the Committee on Finance. It is uncertain whether the vote will be taken before the Christmas recess. *Starting Points* readers are asked to study the Act and communicate with your representatives and your senators about their votes.

The text of the Act can be found by following the links on the Internet web-site: <http://thomas.loc.gov/> Your local librarian can assist you with helpful references.

## **Public Conversation and Democracy in the Aftermath of September 11th.**

The deaths and destruction of the attacks on the World Trade Center, the pentagon and the Pittsburgh plane crash were a tragedy almost beyond our comprehension. We at CREA mourn with those whose lives have been forever changed by the loss of loved ones, or who have been scarred by the physical and psychic consequences of the acts and their aftermath. May the God of all peoples comfort, heal and strengthen them.

U.S. reality now includes feeling threatened, vulnerable, uncertain...things are "out of control." In our search for security, we must make sure that we do not give up those values that make us who we are as a nation.

The standards of free speech, checks and balances, freedom from unlawful search or seizure, public trial with legal representation ....these are crucial to us as a people. They are at the heart of who we are as a democracy. If we give them up, we give up our identity. Rights, once lost, are almost impossible to regain.

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The most difficult time to raise a critical question, to express dissent, is when the country is at war, and "patriotism," as defined by the media, is at its height. It is vitally important that we as a people are alert to the potential for error that such a situation holds.

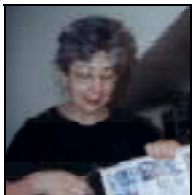
A democracy is based upon the informed decisions of its people. Openness of government and the judicial system, freedom of speech and public conversation are essential to the democratic process. Their loss may well place all of us at even greater risk.

*Starting Points* is a publication of CREA: Center for Reflection, Education and Action, Inc.

CREA is an independent, non-profit 501-c-3 organization dedicated to faith-based social and economic research and education.

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CREA welcomed Sister Carol Kandiko, CSA to our staff in September, 2001. Sister Carol brings to CREA her considerable organizational skills, her background in science and theology, and her desire to use her talents to work for global justice.



Sister Carol puts the finishing touch on the spiral binding of CREA's Mexico PPI report

## Field Research Completed for Mombasa Purchasing Power Index Study



Pictured are the Kenyan women who assisted in the Mombasa PPI study under Sister Ruth's direction.

In July 2001 Sister Ruth traveled to Kenya, for the first phase of a CREA Purchasing Power Index Study in Mombasa, a major port area on the East African coast. Maryknoll Brother Frank TenHoopen, who has served for over twenty years in Kenya, provided gracious hospitality for the two weeks of the study. He also made important connections with the Kenyan women who assisted in the development of culturally-sensitive pricing lists, and who did the actual pricing after being trained.

Passage of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 2000 cleared the way for companies based both within and outside of Africa to establish facilities within Africa and export goods to the U.S. without any quota or duty. The AGOA is a huge incentive for foreign investment, and export processing zones have been established in many countries. CREA asks:

Will the workers receive sustainable living wages in return for their labor?

How do the facilities that benefit from the incentives contribute to the local community?

How much of the profit remains there and how much returns to the company owners?

Will reports about the success of the AGOA include consideration of the distribution of benefits within Kenyan society or will they contain only gross national figures?

This first PPI study will set a baseline of information about workers' purchasing power and will enable future studies to calculate whether the anticipated economic benefit of this trade agreement for Africa will actually reach the Mombassa workers and their families.



Kenyans wait in front of a fashion apparel facility in an Export Processing Zone in Mombassa. © CREA Inc. 2001

## CREA's Mexico PPI Study Becoming Known

CREA's landmark study *Making the Invisible Visible: A Study of the Purchasing Power of Maquila Workers in Mexico, 2000* is gradually reaching people in many walks of life. Orders for copies have been received from universities, labor institutes, justice offices, graduate students, unions, and corporations. It has been presented to Mexican economists, who are considering it for publication.

CREA staff has developed an additional resource. This kit contains a video of a PowerPoint presentation on *Wages and Purchasing Power* given by Sister Ruth at a Living Wage Conference convened by the University of Notre Dame, a booklet containing all the slides used in the presentation in full color, a hand-out sheet for note-taking by viewers of the video, and a background article. An order sheet is included in this mailing for interested readers.

CREA's mission includes the preparation of educational resources to facilitate the analysis of public policies from the perspective of their effects on human lives, beginning from the lives of people who are poor. CREA's staff is pleased to have contributed to the research, production and distribution of these two educational pieces.

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## From Where I Stand... by Sister Ruth Rosenbaum

*All humans are made in the image and likeness of God. Each human being is made in the image and likeness of God.*

### *CREA's Underlying Principle*

Responding to an invitation from the Coalition for the Immokalee Workers (CIW) to do a series of workshops on purchasing power for migrant workers who pick tomatoes in Immokalee, Florida, I traveled there to see how CREA could support their struggle for decent working conditions and a sustainable living wage.

The workers are presently paid at the same per bucket rate as the rate paid in 1978: 40 cents for every 32-pound bucket. They have no sick leave, no paid holidays, no health insurance. The U.S. Fair Labor Act does not guarantee farm workers the right to organize or the right to overtime pay.

In 1995, when growers attempted to drop the wage from \$4.25 to \$3.85 and pay only 10 cents per bucket, the workers organized the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). They received widespread support from religious and national figures, and defeated the attempt.

I spent two days with the workers. Men and women from Mexico, Guatemala and Haiti, they were articulate and animated as they described their working conditions and wages. After the workshops, I went with some of the workers to the parking lot where they wait in the early morning for the buses to pick them up. In the evening, I saw them come off the buses, their clothes covered with chlorophyll. Even then, their sense of personal dignity was evident.

I brought home one of the "buckets" used for picking. It is one thing to read about how much workers receive for picking a bucket of tomatoes, but it is another to encounter the reality of a cubeta. A plastic container that holds 32 pounds of tomatoes, it has no handle, and must be carried on the workers' shoulders. Picking the tomatoes, lifting the cubeta, walking to the truck, emptying the tomatoes into the truck...this has to be done over and over again, at 40 cents a cubeta.

I went with CIW leaders to several housing compounds. One, owned by the tomato growers, is a group of small buildings built on company land. Each building has a small cooking area, a bathroom and one large sleeping area with individual beds and bunk beds crammed so closely together that privacy is virtually non-existent. Similar small buildings on a privately owned plot of land are clustered together with only two showers and two toilets for all the buildings.

A common response to working and living situations like this...whether in the U.S., in Mexico, Asia, or Africa...is that the workers are better off than they would be without a job. This is true. However, their desperate situation is no excuse for exploiting their poverty in order to increase corporate profits.

A major employer, Six L's Packing Company, is one of the nation's largest tomato producers and a contracted supplier for Taco Bell. CIW's repeated efforts to dialogue with Six L's and Taco Bell have been rejected.

The CIW is calling for a boycott of Taco Bell and the mailing of postcards to its management. Concerned shareholders of Taco Bell's corporate parent, Tri-Con Global, are requesting the management to develop an enforceable code of conduct for their suppliers.

CREA encourages readers to support the farm workers' efforts by bringing this situation into public conversation, and joining in whatever way possible in their struggle for justice.



Six workers each pay \$25 a week for these living quarters, six beds crammed into one room.

## Recommended Resources

Many sources of information offer us opportunities to examine what is happening in our world from various perspectives. In fact, we may feel over-whelmed by too much information of any kind, whether mainstream or alternative.

Knowing our own starting point helps us to select from among these sources. Our systemic analysis skills help us to examine them with a critical mind.

Here are some resources CREA has found helpful.

### Web Sites

[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)  
[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)  
[www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)  
(corporate perspective)  
[www/unctad.org](http://www.unctad.org)  
(United Nations' perspective)  
[www.agoa.gov](http://www.agoa.gov)  
(Africa Growth and Opportunity Act)  
[www.CAFOD.org](http://www.CAFOD.org)  
(excellent web-site of this British Catholic organization. Links to many other fine sites)  
[www.art.org](http://www.art.org)  
(Alliance for Responsible Trade)  
[www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org)  
(Public Citizen)  
[www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)  
(Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility)

### Books

*Jihad vs. McWorld*,  
Benjamin R. Barber  
*Nickel and Dime*,  
Barbara Ehrenreich  
*No Logo*, Naomi Klein  
*Fast Food Nation*,  
Eric Schlosser  
*Development as Freedom*,  
Amartya Sen (Nobel Prize in Economics)  
*Crying Out for Change: Voices of the Poor*,  
Deepa Narayan (editor)

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## *Acting for Justice*

[Free Trade Area of the Americas](#) (FTAA) This agreement still under negotiation is the extension of what is called "free trade" to all the other countries in this hemisphere except Cuba. Its goal is to reduce and eventually eliminate tariffs and any other conditions that are considered "barriers" to the movement of goods and services into the signatory countries. It means increased opportunities for consolidation of power and profit to transnational corporations, and overwhelming competition for local industries and farms. The Act allows corporations to challenge publicly funded services such as water supply, health care, education, etc., a huge expansion over NAFTA and the WTO. CREA finds the FTAA provisions frightening in their deconstruction of government, especially the responsibility of government to its people.

*Starting Points* readers are encouraged to become familiar with this proposed agreement, bring it to public conversation, and communicate concerns to your legislators. Relevant web sites are:

[www.ftaa-alca.org](http://www.ftaa-alca.org) The official FTAA web-site

[www.canadians.org/campaigns/campaigns-trade/pub-ftaa2.html](http://www.canadians.org/campaigns/campaigns-trade/pub-ftaa2.html) Excellent analysis.

[Taco Bell Boycott](#) Taco Bell has developed a long-term partnership with Six L's Packing Co., of Immokalee, Florida, for year-round supply of tomatoes. Both have refused to dialogue with workers about ways to improve their wages and working conditions. Supporters of the workers' efforts are asked to communicate their concern to:

Emil J. Brolick, President  
Taco Bell Corporation  
17901 Von Karman  
Irvine, CA 92614

Further information can be found on the web-site: [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)

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CREA is an independent  
501(c)3 organization.



*"Believing that the earth  
is home to all, CREA  
facilitates analysis of  
human, social and  
economic policies from  
the perspective of their  
effects on human lives,  
beginning with the lives  
of those who are poor."*

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