



## **TOXIC TRUTH TALKING POINTS**

### **The Casualty Count**

Over the past few years, Toxic Trade has attacked everything from pet food to toys to tires to medicine.

- In February of 2006, four-year-old Jarnell Brown died of lead poisoning after swallowing a bracelet, produced in China, which was 99% lead.
- In 2007 as many as 1,950 cats and 2,200 dogs died when 60 million cans of Melamine laced pet food made it into the country from China.
- In the second half of 2007 over 25 million imported toys were recalled because they were deemed unsafe for children.
- At least 81 people have died from contaminated doses of the blood thinner heparin. Authorities believe that the contamination made it into the supply chain in China.

### **Toxic Trade, Toxic Imports**

This seemingly sudden glut of toxic imports is the outcome of a fifteen-year experiment in free trade.

- So-called 'free trade' agreements go to great lengths to protect corporate profits but do little to protect workers or the environment.
- Under most agreements, corporations are able to sue states for impeding their right to make profits, but workers rights and environmental standards are unenforceable.
- Major free trade agreements include: North American Free Trade Agreement (1994), the establishment of the World Trade Organization (1995), the establishment of Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China (2000), Central American Free Trade Agreement (2005).
- Major importers have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to political candidates to ensure that these free trade policies are enacted. Over the past decade Wal-Mart, Coach, and Target spent a combined \$76 million on political contributions and \$125 million on lobbying.

### **The Attack on Workers.**

Beyond opening our borders and homes to toxic products, free trade has cost millions of Americans their jobs and paved the way for sweatshops around the world.

- In the decade following NAFTA's passage, 1.6 million American jobs were displaced due to imports from Mexico and Canada alone.
- In the 5 years following China's ascension to the WTO almost 2.1 million jobs were eliminated as a result of our trade deficit with China.

And the wave of free trade has also paved the way for sweatshops overseas.

- Workers in factories producing products for Wal-Mart spend as many as 85.5 hours on the job each week and earn as little as 54 cents an hour
- Nearly 3.3 million people around the world live on less than \$2 a day and 12 million people, roughly as many people as live in New York City and Chicago combined) are working in slavery.
- As many as 50,000 fingers are accidentally sliced off in Chinese factories each month.

### **A Toxic Environment**

The toxic trade crisis is having a devastating impact on the environment.

- Without strong enforceable global standards, manufacturers can, and in fact, have shifted production from country to country in a quest to find the weakest environmental regulations.
- In some cases regulators choose to turn a blind eye to major corporate polluters for fear of losing jobs and investment.
- Last year China surpassed the US as the world's largest emitter of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Currently 25% of China's carbon emissions come from export production.
- For years Indonesia has been flooding the US market with illegally logged timber. As a result of this export dumping, thousands of American paper workers have lost their jobs.

### **No Defense**

The US regulatory framework simply cannot keep consumers safe from the glut of dangerous imports.

- Before NAFTA was passed, the US imported around \$590 million worth of goods. In 2006 the US imported \$1.86 trillion worth of goods. \$3.5 million worth of goods enter the country every minute.
- The Food and Drug Administration only has the capacity to test 75,000 shipments each year.
- The Consumer Product Safety Commission has is now operating on only 40% of it's 1974 budget.

### **When Will It End?**

Stopping the toxic trade crisis isn't a matter of passing a single law or renegotiating a single trade deal. Stopping this crisis will require comprehensive action in legislation, trade policy, and consumer protection.

- Trade agreements must protect workers rights and the environment, not just corporate profits.
- Consumer protection agencies must be given adequate resources to screen for potentially dangerous products.
- Corporations that import unsafe products must be held accountable for their actions.
- US Trade officials must work through international trade bodies to ensure that trade rules are fairly enforced.