



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 25, 2015

Senate Passage of “Fast-Track” Could Slide U.S. Further Downhill

Senate passage of Trade Promotion Authority just before the Memorial Day weekend is an example of the legal saying that, while two wrongs don’t make a right, they do make a precedent.

Should the House, where anti-TPA sentiment is stronger than in the Senate, approve the measure, it will, of course, not be the first time Congress has abdicated its legislative powers to a president in order to expedite a trade agreement. Proponents argue that the authority has been granted to a long succession of U.S. presidents, beginning with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But Republicans, who vastly outnumber the Democrats as supporters of TPA, used to oppose the usurpations of authority by the imperial Roosevelt and his power-hungry successors.



Besides, the American dominance of world markets was far stronger after the United States came out of the great Depression and was arguably the only real winner of World War II. With Germany, Japan, and even most of the nations on the winning side devastated by the war, the United States was the economic colossus. There was no country in Asia to equal the economic power of today’s China and Japan. There was no overwhelming balance of trade between the United States and China, or even the United States and South Korea, as there is today. Many of the industries that created the American-made products the world needed — from shoes and textiles to steel and electronics — have since left the United States and are making products in foreign lands with low-wage foreign workers and selling them in the lucrative domestic market of the United States. Post-war prosperity came before the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Central American Free Trade Agreement, and the trade pact between the United States and South Korea. It was before the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Those who are better at promoting so-called free-trade deals than they are in appreciating their consequences tell us that the deals will increase our prosperity by boosting exports. They prefer the theories expounded in the ivory towers to the facts found “on the ground,” including the shedding of manufacturing jobs, the decline in labor force participation here at home, and the stagnant — at best — real wages of U.S. workers. General Motors, one the world’s largest corporations, has been supplanted by retailers selling foreign-made goods.

“If you want to know if these deals produce or take jobs away,” said John Birch Society CEO Art Thompson, “just go into any Walmart or Target and see what products are imported. Every product not made in the United States has cost Americans jobs here. You do not need a spread sheet from the



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federal government or Chamber of Commerce to tell you that what you see has cost millions of jobs in America.”

The reason our leaders can either be or pretend to be so blind to all this is due to what might be called the one-sided ledger.

“There are two sides to trade: exports and imports,” Thompson explained. “Everyone is talking about exports as a result of the trade deals, but no one seems to want to talk about the imports that will come as a result.” When the imports greatly exceed the exports in dollar value, the result is a net flow of capital from the United States to other lands. The short-term benefits of being able to buy foreign goods made by companies overseas for less money than we would pay when buying from their domestic competitors are more than offset by the loss of jobs when the domestic companies either go out of business or move overseas themselves. And the outflow of capital means less money here in the United States for investment and future job-creation.

Then there are the political consequences when Congress abdicates its power to legislate by renouncing in advance any possibility of amending a bad trade deal. With TPA, Congress may vote only to approve the trade agreement, as presented to it by the president, or reject it altogether. But amendment is a legislative process, and by limiting the legislative power bestowed by our Constitution on the House and Senate jointly, Congress increases the leverage the president holds over the legislative process.

The Constitution also assigns to Congress the power to regulate commerce, both among the states and with foreign nations. Trade Promotion Authority, also known as “fast-track” legislation, compromises that power, again giving the primary authority to the president.

Let us give both credit and blame where each is due. When the GOP-led Senate voted 62-37 on Friday to pass TPA, five Republican senators broke ranks with their fellow Republicans by voting nay — Susan Collins (Maine), Mike Lee (Utah), Rand Paul (Ky.), Jeff Sessions (Ala.), and Richard C. Shelby (Ala.). (One Republican, Michael Enzi of Wyoming, did not vote.) On the other hand, 14 Democrats voted for the TPA, which is viewed as crucial for Obama to get his trade deals enacted by Congress.

Members of Congress are not stupid. Though many have been there too long, they generally come from professions (law, medicine, business) in which they have achieved some measure of success and standing in their respective communities and states. They should have learned more during their time in office than how to compromise the Constitution of the United States and surrender powers the Constitution has assigned to the Congress in which they serve.



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