

Obama, Republicans join forces to salvage trade bill

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The Republican majority in the US House of Representatives cemented its alliance with the Obama White House over trade legislation on Tuesday, voting to delay final action on a Trade Promotion Authority bill until the end of July. The purpose was to give the Obama administration and corporate lobbyists more time to pressure House Democrats into supporting the “fast-track” trade legislation, which is needed to push through the administration’s anti-Chinese Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership will establish a “free trade” area involving the US, Canada, Mexico, Japan, Australia and seven other countries in Asia and South America, but excluding China.

Tuesday’s action, applauded by the White House, came on a near-party-line vote, with Republicans backing the delay—and, by implication, endorsing Obama’s campaign for “fast-track” authority—by a margin of 233-6, while Democrats opposed the rule 189-3.

The coordinated campaign of the White House and congressional Republicans in support of the Trans-Pacific Partnership shatters the conventional picture of official Washington, supposedly divided into intransigent partisan camps, with a huge political gulf separating the Democratic administration from the Republican-controlled Congress. Despite the political posturing, however, on issues deemed by the ruling class to be of vital importance, the two parties work together to serve the needs of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus.

This was already demonstrated earlier this month in the bipartisan passage of the USA Freedom Act, which extends the power of the National Security Agency, first enacted in the post-9/11 Patriot Act, to spy on the telecommunications of every American.

Press coverage leading up to Tuesday’s vote underscored the significance of the Obama-Republican alliance on trade. The *New York Times* headlined its report “House Republicans and White House Try to Revive Trade Bill Stalled by Democrats.” The *Wall Street Journal* began its report, “The White House and House Republican leaders Monday worked to find a way to revive trade legislation that Democrats shot down last week.”

Trade Promotion Authority passed the Senate in late May, but the bill was temporarily blocked by House Democrats last Friday when they voted to defeat a component part of the Senate trade bill that extends Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) to workers who lose their jobs due to imports.

Under the existing House rule, Republican Speaker John Boehner had the option to hold a reconsideration vote on the TAA measure Tuesday, but after consultations with the White House, the Republican leadership concluded there was little prospect of reversing the outcome of Friday’s vote on such short notice.

On Monday, there were further discussions, including phone conversations between Obama and Boehner to plan strategy, before the House Republican leadership decided Monday night to seek the six-week delay. On Tuesday, the House voted to approve the new rule allowing Boehner to hold a reconsideration vote on the trade bill any time before July 31.

The vote followed a closed-door session of the House Republican caucus, where Boehner berated members who had voted against the party leadership on a previous rule governing debate on the trade bill. He even announced the removal of three members of the House Republican leadership, Reps. Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, Steve Pearce of New Mexico and Trent

Franks of Arizona, because they had broken party discipline on that vote.

The next six weeks will see a full-scale campaign by corporate lobbyists and representatives of the Pentagon, CIA and other intelligence agencies to insure passage of “fast-track” authority, which the Obama administration requires to push through the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The TPP is the economic/trade component of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” an effort to mobilize US military, diplomatic and economic power against the rise of China, one of the highest priorities of American imperialism and both its parties.

Supporters of “fast-track” authority were quite open about the anti-China purpose of the TPP. Obama himself, in a message issued by the White House after the initial defeat of the trade bill Friday, said, “These kinds of agreements make sure that the global economy’s rules aren’t written by countries like China; they’re written by the United States of America.”

Boehner sounded the same theme, in almost the same words, declaring, “When America leads, the world is safer, for freedom and for free enterprise, and if we don’t lead, we’re allowing and essentially inviting China to go right on setting the rules of the world economy.”

The opponents of the fast-track legislation, including most House Democrats and the AFL-CIO, are no less mired in national chauvinism and anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiment. Not one has criticized TPP because it creates a US-run trading bloc that is a prelude to economic, political and ultimately military conflict with China.

Instead, they demand even cruder protectionist measures, such as declaring China a “currency manipulator,” which could trigger a collapse in trans-Pacific trade and investment and worsen the global slump.

The Democrats claim to be defending the interests of working people. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi declared, “We want a better deal for America’s workers.” Senator Bernie Sanders, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, said on the CBS program “Face the Nation” Sunday, “We need to regroup and come up with a trade policy which demands that corporate America start investing in this country rather than in countries all over the world.”

Hillary Clinton, the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination, has tried to have it both ways. As secretary of state, she was involved in the early stages of negotiating the TPP and supported it. She refused to take a public position on the issue until Sunday, when she told an Iowa campaign audience, “The president should listen to and work with his allies in Congress, starting with Nancy Pelosi.”

The reality is that neither the AFL-CIO nor the Democratic Party has the slightest concern about the jobs and wages of workers, either in the US or anywhere else. This is demonstrated by countless struggles of the working class betrayed and sabotaged by the unions, and by the right-wing record of the Obama administration, which has bailed out the banks and overseen the growth of economic inequality to unprecedented levels.



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