

Greenpeace: Watch out for the big trade war distraction

Monday 18 June 2018, by [STANTON Shira](#) (Date first published: 8 June 2018).

Don't get distracted by the "trade war" on the front pages of the news.

It points our leaders away from what they should be focused on — climate change and peace — and it distracts everyone from the larger overall problems with this global trade regime. Focusing on steel quotas (however important) and peanut butter tariffs is ignoring the forest for the trees. While we should be concerned about our world leaders' ability to constructively come to agreements in the face of a 'trade war', we must challenge the more serious problems of this global trade structure and the consequences trade rules have on our health and planet.

We cannot make the mistake of pretending that everything was better before Trump stopped speaking with US allies and trading partners and started imposing tariffs and quotas against more and more countries and on more and more products. The system was faulty before he came along. When EU Trade Commissioner Malmström [said](#), "Europe is doing good. The U.S. is doing good as well, and that's why we shouldn't jeopardize this by entering into a trade war," she missed the point completely.

People in Europe, the US and elsewhere are not doing well at all. [Inequality](#) in the world continues to climb. Politicians' being obsessed with growth without asking, "[growth for whom?](#)" means that [people are neglected and our environment ruined](#) — sidelined in favour of a growth that benefits a [small few](#).

Environmental indicators are also still getting worse, and the trade system contributes to this.

For example, the "[cows for cars](#)" trade agreement between [Mercosur](#) countries and the EU will only serve to increase meat consumption (and the deforestation caused by intensified soy cultivation for meat) and car usage, rather than putting policy efforts into [decreasing](#) these two strains on the planet.

So let's change the conversation.

Tariffs and quotas should not be abused and used as a bullying tool by the powerful. Trade policy should be about trade only – and not dominate everything else as well. Current trade rules threaten the very laws that are meant to protect us from harmful [chemicals](#) or drive the [transition](#) to renewable energy.

Currently, trade policy is made by the powerful for the powerful. When the EU Commission was working on the trade deal with Japan, they met with [190 corporate lobbyists](#), but no trade union or small and medium-sized enterprise representatives. [Over](#) 85% of the so-called advisors to the US Trade Representative were from corporations and their lobbies before Trump came into [office](#). How are these trade deals supposed to champion the interests of the wider public, if those negotiating the deal don't even speak with us?

This is totally unacceptable. We do not need to buy into a neoliberal undermining of environmental policies in order to trade. A different trade system is possible. A [system](#) that brings about transparent, just and fair trade rules. A system that respects national and cultural values, enables sustainable development and effectively carries out the aims of UN agreements — like the Paris Climate Agreement. A system that prioritises equality and a good life for future generations, and respects human rights and environmental treaties.

Not just another world, but another trade system is possible. Let's keep pushing for it.

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