

Corporate economists and similar partisans have spent enormous amounts of time, energy and money defending the notion that markets are the solution to all our problems, particularly that what they call "free trade" among nations will benefit all. But these social theorists have a huge blind spot, right in the middle of their vision: the real day-to-day experiences of workers and their families.

Too many of our political leaders---state, local and national---have been willing to accept the standard economic arguments on faith, the kind of faith that allows people to visualize a fantasy world while a very different reality is staring them right in the face. By now, however, the evidence is excruciatingly clear: In the last decade, Maine has sacrificed thousands of good jobs---families' livelihoods---on the altar of "free trade."

Markets are not ends in themselves, but tools to be employed for the benefit of people. No one opposes trade, or free and open markets, but markets without morals---without some socially-determined element of fairness---are a prescription for disaster. In the U.S. for example, "free trade" once included the freedom to trade in human beings, slaves. Not long ago, "free markets" included the ability to legally exploit children and to freely degrade our environment for profit. Fortunately, the popular will has imposed restrictions on labor markets so that we wouldn't have to work over 100 hours a week to support a family, or work in unsafe conditions, or be discriminated against because of race or sex or age or disability, and innumerable other protections from the uncontrolled operation of "free" chaotic markets.

Just as our own markets had to be restricted to protect basic social values, international trade must be restrained to protect workers and their families, our communities and environment against the worst exploitation the world has to offer. But recent trade legislation has been fashioned by and for those determined to evade any and all restraints protecting our communities and imposing fairness and reason on international markets.

The "free trade" experiments of the last decade have been sold as a panacea, but in reality have been an agent of destruction for societies in all corners of the world. I am here as an eyewitness to testify in particular that they have destroyed families and communities right here in Maine. We need to stop listening to the market-infatuated "experts" on these critical matters, and start listening to our own common sense.

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