

## **TTIP Will Make Governments Work for Corporations Rather than Citizens**

Trade Agreement is an Assault on Democracy

Behind closed doors, European and American leaders are negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). This deal would remove barriers that currently stand in the way of businesses on either side of the Atlantic accessing each other's markets such as tariffs and regulatory barriers. Supporters of TTIP claim that it will generate £10bn for the UK economy and £100bn for the EU each year. However, the risks of deregulation far outweigh the costs and when combined with other features of the proposed treaty, such as the introduction of Investor-State Dispute Settlements (ISDS), TTIP poses a significant threat to the democratic process and the very idea of governance in the public interest in European member states.

The 'regulatory convergence' agenda of TTIP seeks to bring European and American food safety and environmental standards more closely into alignment. However, it is understood that in most cases this will mean relaxing European standards in favour of the much less strict regulation in the US. Natalie Bennett, leader of the Green Party, strongly opposes TTIP and claims that it will lead to "chicken carcasses washed in bleach, hormone-stuffed Beef and open season on pollution".

Whilst the appeal of further economic integration within the EU cannot be denied, the reductions in regulation necessitated by TTIP could result in the EU market being flooded by cheaper American products that are of a much poorer standard. The EU itself has admitted that mass unemployment will probably result from TTIP as European companies move jobs to the United States where labour standards and trade union rights are much lower.

The most dangerous element of TTIP is the introduction of ISDS. These will allow private, multi-national companies to sue governments if their policies cause a loss of profits, effectively allowing those companies to bully democratically elected governments into pursuing policies that are in the interests of multinational companies, rather than the citizens they were elected to represent. John Hilary, the executive director of War on Want, described the ISDS and TTIP in general as "an assault on European and US societies by transnational corporations" whilst the environmental campaigner George Monbiot stated that "these rules shut down democratic alternatives" and that "they outlaw leftwing (sic) politics".

At negotiations this Wednesday the European Commission will seek to persuade member states of the benefits of their proposals. Whilst they promise that they will not "give up nor dilute the levels of protection we have in Europe", they are likely to force through ISDS despite the widespread criticism. The German delegation, under pressure from the German public and media, intends to fight the ISDS clause, though they support TTIP in general. 780,000 Germans

have already signed a petition against TTIP, specifically against ISDS and the data privacy laws that it sneaks in through the back door, despite them having already been comprehensively rejected by democratic channels. It is still in recent memory in Germany that the United States hacked into Chancellor Merkel's phone.

The delegation of the United Kingdom also favours TTIP, though they have reservations about the effect it will have on public services. It is undeniable that one of the main aims of TTIP is to open up public services to American companies, which could essentially lead to the privatisation of the NHS. Furthermore, ISDS would allow private firms that are currently running NHS services to sue the government in the event the government attempted to return those services to the public sector. Despite expressing reservations about this, the British delegation has not exempted the NHS from TTIP negotiations in the same way the French have exempted the film industry. This raises questions about how committed the government actually is to maintaining a National Health Service.

France and Germany are expected to attempt to block any attempts to pass TTIP whilst ISDS remain in the treaty though they are happy to risk unemployment and market saturation with low quality goods. Similarly the Latvian and Italian delegations' only major objection to TTIP is the potential risk to the environment caused by unrestricted trade of gas and oil with the US. This lack of unity amongst opponents of TTIP is unfortunately likely to result in the Treaty passing.

The only hope for preventing this Treaty from being ratified comes from the civil society organisations, specifically the STOP TTIP European Citizen Initiative. This group is calling for mass protest and petitioning against TTIP in order to prevent the damage it could cause to the European labour market and quality of goods, as well as the threat it poses to democracy, justice and privacy.

Despite the significant dangers of TTIP, it is likely that negotiations will result in it being passed due to support from all the major players in the EU, albeit with some stipulations. Should this be the case, it will be a dark day for democracy and European and American societies.