

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) Trojan Horse. Selling out Europe to US Corporate Plunder

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Do people in Europe want the likes of Monsanto determining policies in secretive meetings in Brussels? Would they like Unilever, Kraft or Nestle determining what is allowed in their food? Do they want big business removing or weakening health and safety standards and undermining consumer and workers' rights?

In other words, do they want their parliaments to be sidelined by powerful corporations that determine policies behind closed doors with bureaucrats and officials in Brussels?

Decades of hard work to ensure policies are open to democratic accountability and to guarantee ordinary people's rights are in danger of being swept away at the behest of wealthy private concerns.

The great corporate heist continues today in Washington. Shrouded in secrecy and granting privileged access to powerful corporations, the 7th round of negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) will take place amid growing civil society protests at the dangers of the proposed deal for democracy and essential regulations in the areas of public health, safety, the environment and the financial sector.

Dozens of civil society groups from all across Europe have denounced EU plans for 'regulatory cooperation' as well as the continued secrecy surrounding the talks. While EU negotiators have repeatedly claimed that protection levels are not under threat and that standards will not be lowered as a result of the TTIP talks, these statements have been consistently disproved by documents leaked from the negotiations.

In particular, the implications of the proposals for regulatory cooperation at the horizontal level or on specific sectors, such as the EU proposals on chemicals and financial regulation, all suggest that current protection levels (and the possibility for legislators to improve these in the future) will be undermined through the TTIP.

The leaked EU proposal for horizontal cooperation in the field of regulation bears strong resemblance to proposals tabled by a handful of powerful corporate lobby groups.

Kenneth Haar from Corporate Europe Observatory has said:

"The Trade Commissioner has said on various occasions that protection levels, be they on food or chemicals or other areas, will not be lowered as a result of the negotiations. The problem is that everything he does points in a different

direction.”

Big business continues to dominate the discussions, while the majority of the public is being left in the dark about the exact direction of the talks. Instead, they must rely on leaked documents to get information about what is being negotiated on their behalf.

Natacha Cingotti from Friends of the Earth Europe says:

“The leaked EU plans for regulatory cooperation fuel concerns about the negative impact of TTIP on essential protections for citizens and the environment. All the signals lead us to believe the talks are a Trojan horse which risks undoing decades of progress to protect citizens and our environment and benefits only big business.”

The negotiators should allow full transparency around the negotiations.

Max Bank from Lobby Control calls for wide public debate about an issue that will affect all Europeans because regulatory cooperation in TTIP is a covert attack on democracy and regulation.

Corporate interests are driving the TTIP agenda, with the public having been sidelined. Pro-free-trade bureaucrats from both sides of the Atlantic are facilitating the strategy [1]. Despite claims by the European Commission (EC) that the talks are transparent [2], the notes of EC meetings with business lobbyists released to CEO under the EU’s freedom of information law were found to be heavily censored. The documents showed that the EC invited industry to submit wish lists for ‘regulatory barriers’ they would like removed during the negotiations. There is no way for the public to know how the EU has incorporated this into its negotiating position as all references had been removed [3].

Under the banner of ‘regulatory cooperation’, the US wants all so-called barriers to trade, including controversial regulations such as those protecting agriculture, food or data privacy, to be removed. Even the leaders of the Senate Finance Committee, in a letter to US Trade Representative Ron Kirk, have made it clear that any agreement must reduce EU restrictions on genetically modified crops, chlorinated chickens and hormone-treated beef.

The TTIP could also empower corporations to legally challenge a wide range of regulations which they dislike [4]. Even the threat of litigation whereby corporations sue governments for massive amounts of cash could result in the shelving of legislation.

A leaked EU document [5] from the winter of 2013 shows what is at stake with the EC proposing an EU-US Regulatory Cooperation Council, a permanent structure to be created as part of the TTIP deal. Existing and future EU regulation will then have to go through a series of investigations, dialogues and negotiations in this Council. This would move decisions on regulations into a technocratic sphere, away from democratic scrutiny. There would also be compulsory impact assessments for proposed regulation, which will be checked for their potential impact on trade. This would be ideal for big business lobbies: creating a firm brake on any new progressive regulation in the very first stage of decision-making, driving decision making underground and granting both US and European businesses even greater sway over decisions than currently exists.

Ideas that favour powerful business interests could be presented as a done deal without

room for change based on the premise that business lobby groups, the EU and US authorities and a restricted group of officials have already agreed on them [6].

The official language talks of “mutual recognition” of standards or so-called reduction of non-tariff barriers. For the EU, that could mean accepting US standards in many areas, which are lower than those of the EU and for instance the eradication of Europe’s ‘precautionary principle’ [7] regarding genetically modified food and the eventual flooding of GMOs onto the commercial market.

The talks amount to little more than a series of backroom deals, while striving to give the appearance of somehow being democratic. If it goes through, this treaty would effectively constitute a vital part of cementing the ongoing restructuring of economies in favour of financial-corporate interests [8,9]. The trade deal is a unique opportunity to achieve through closed and non-transparent negotiations what hasn’t been possible so far in a transparent and democratic way.

No sector has lobbied the EC more during the preparation phase for the negotiations on the proposed deal than the agribusiness sector [10]. Food multinationals, agri-traders and seed producers have had more contacts with the Commission’s trade department (DG Trade) than lobbyists from the pharmaceutical, chemical, financial and car industries put together.

Of the 560 lobby encounters that DG Trade held to prepare the negotiations, 520 (92 percent) were with business lobbyists, while only 26 (four percent) were with public interest groups. For every encounter with a trade union or consumer group, there were 20 with companies and industry federations.

Pia Eberhardt, trade campaigner with Corporate Europe Observatory recently stated that:

“DG Trade actively involved business lobbyists in drawing up the EU position for TTIP while keeping ‘pesky’ trade unionists and other public interest groups at bay. The result is a big-business-first agenda for the negotiations which endangers many achievements that people in Europe have long struggled for, from food safety rules to environmental protection.”

The TTIP must be stopped.

Be informed and take action:

<http://corporateeurope.org/>

<http://www.foeeurope.org/>

<http://www.s2bnetwork.org/>

<https://www.lobbycontrol.de/schwerpunkt/ttip/>

Notes

1] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/us-eu-free-trade-agreement-a-corporate-stitch-up-by-any--other-name/5339789>

2] <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/18/wrong-george-monbiot-nothing--secret-eu-trade-deal>

3] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/us-eu-transatlantic-free-trade-agreement-more-secrecy--and-more-duplicity-revealed/5369272>

4] <http://corporateeurope.org/international-trade/2014/07/ttip-debunking-business--propaganda-over-investor-rights>

5] <http://corporateeurope.org/trade/2013/12/regulation-none-our-business>

- 6] http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/ttip_covert_attacks.pdf
- 7] <http://www.countercurrents.org/todhunter080914.htm>
- 8] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/free-trade-agreements-the-bypassing-of-democracy-to--institute-economic-plunder/5354197>
- 9] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-us-eu-transatlantic-free-trade-agreement-tafta--big-business-corporate-power-grab/5352885>
- 10] <http://corporateeurope.org/international-trade/2014/07/who-lobbies-most-ttip>

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