TILMA Expands on NAFTA

By Dana Gabriel
Global Research, November 01, 2008
OpEd News 1 November 2008

Region: Canada
Theme: Global Economy

The Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) was signed by B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell and former Alberta Premier Ralph Klein in 2006. It has been hailed as an economic union that will be used as a model for the rest of Canada as the deal is open for other territories and provinces to join. The Yukon and Manitoba have declined to sign the agreement. Saskatchewan has also been reluctant to join because of perceived threats to its Crown Corporations and tax incentive programs. Recently, Premier Brad Wall has been discussing a deal with Alberta that would be similar to TILMA. Many provinces and states are also pursuing similar agreements. TILMA goes beyond other trade deals, with some describing it as more extreme and far-reaching than NAFTA. Much like the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) and plans to create a North American Union, TILMA remains one of those best kept secrets.

Thousands of regulations are currently being reviewed in preparation for TILMA's full implementation in April of 2009. Proponents say the agreement will breakdown current provincial trade barriers, harmonize standards and regulations, as well as grant professionals and those with trade skills easier labour mobility. The truth is that trade barriers between the provinces are already very low. TILMA will encompass provincial and local governments, regional districts, school boards, and health and social services. Ellen Gould said, "what TILMA does is force governments at both provincial and local levels to surrender vast areas of their ability to govern. The agreement is essentially a long list of things government will be prohibited from doing, regardless of whether they are acting completely within their jurisdiction." The current economic climate is being used to push for further privatization and deregulation. TILMA is yet another attack on our sovereignty. Many municipalities continue to oppose the agreement because they understand that it will take power out of their hands. TILMA has been described as a race to the bottom in standards that will reduce labour rights and environmental protections.

Some feel that TILMA will not have much of an impact on provincial labour shortages, and there is a view that many of the so-called benefits have been greatly exaggerated. There are fears that shortages of some skilled professionals in Alberta could acutely worsen under the agreement. Alberta's labour shortages have more to do with economic development and demographics. As a result of TILMA, some municipalities have been hesitant to draft policies favoring the purchase of locally grown foods and manufactured products out of fear that this could result in corporate and investment challenges. Many environmental, public health and safety regulations could be at risk. TILMA will also undercut unions and trade groups, lower standards right across the board, while at the same time severely undermining provincial and municipal autonomy.

TILMA has been compared to NAFTA, but is even more dangerous as it expands investor rights and poses a greater threat to governmental standards and regulations, including health and environmental policies. Much like Chapter 11 of NAFTA, corporations and individual investors have the power to sue governments, in this case at a municipal and provincial level if they feel that their investments are being restricted. In fact, it expands on Chapter 11 under the premise that the investor is correct. The costs of suing are much cheaper than domestic courts and NAFTA tribunals. The speed in which complaints are heard and ruled on seems to also favor the investor, which could create a climate of continuous challenges as investors are able to sue over and over again on the same issue. Writer and CCPA research associate Murray Dobbin stated that TILMA is the, "lowest threshold for launching a challenge of any such agreement." It is even lower then NAFTA. In many ways, TILMA compliments the SPP, and it has also been referred to as a Bill of Rights for corporations. Much like NAFTA, it is designed to ensure corporate profits and further advance continental integration. The power of the people and government is being transferred to unelected bureaucrats who serve and answer only to their corporate masters.

It is no secret that Quebec Premier Jean Charest fully supports a trade deal with the EU. He is also actively pursuing a deal similar to TILMA with the province of Ontario that would include trade and employment. It has been reported that EU representatives are concerned about Canada's federal system, which gives provincial and local governments unconditional control over their communities. Charest has stated that any deal with the EU will have to include all the premiers at the negotiating table. TILMA or any similar agreement will go a long way in further laying the foundation for a North American Union and a trade and investment deal with the EU. Canada is being used to further advance trade in the region, hemisphere, and around the globe. A deal with the EU will help expand NAFTA, and could lead to a similar agreement between the U.S. and the EU.

Stephen Harper received another minority government, but his Conservatives were able to pick up more seats in the House of Commons. He has vowed to set a course of deeper economic integration with the EU. It is interesting to note that part of the Conservative Party 2008 election platform reads, "A re-elected Conservative Government led by Stephen Harper will work to eliminate barriers that restrict or impair trade, investment or labour mobility between provinces and territories by 2010." It goes on to say that the Conservative government is, "prepared to intervene by exercising federal authority if barriers to trade, investment and mobility remain by 2010." It appears as if those provinces that don't comply will be forced to join TILMA or a similar agreement.

The original source of this article is OpEd News

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Dana Gabriel