

7 September 2014

Politicians, trade unionists, international development campaigners and civil society groups come together to warn of dangers in EU-US trade and investment treaty

The groups warned that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Treaty (TTIP) would threaten democracy, attack workers' rights, erode social standards and environmental regulations, dilute food safety rules, undermine regulations on the use of toxic chemicals, rubbish digital privacy laws and strangle developing economies.

Kevin McCorry of the People's Movement challenged those in Irish political and business life who are blindly uncritical of TTIP to tell the public how these standards and values are going to be protected in the face of an onslaught that includes secret negotiations, carefully orchestrated and managed propaganda in support and next to no Irish influence on the process much less the outcome of the EU-US deal mongering.

Chlorinated chicken is perhaps the best symbol of the hazards European consumers would face if the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership deal is signed. Though the thought of eating chicken washed with chemicals we use to clean our bathrooms would prove disturbing to many, the negotiation process is shrouded in such secrecy that most people are not aware of what is involved.

An indication of how closely access to information is being managed is the leaked revelation that the European Commission called representatives of EU member states to a meeting in November 2013 in order to instruct them how to control and coordinate future communications around TTIP.

An internal European Commission paper that had been prepared for the meeting (subsequently leaked and published by the Danish magazine *Notat*) called on EU member states to work together so as to combat growing public concern that TTIP would 'undermine regulation and existing levels of protection in areas like health, safety and the environment'.

Regulatory harmonisation means 'harmonising' regulation between the EU and US downwards to the minimum, across all areas.

The US poultry industry does not take steps to ensure that chickens do not get infected with pathogens during the various stages of rearing and slaughter preferring to use chemicals to eliminate bacteria at the end of the production chain. In other words, chemical washes aim to make up for inadequate hygiene on farms and abattoirs.

European agriculture has chosen another strategy to fight meat-borne bacteria. The philosophy of the 'farm to fork' approach is essentially based on the wise proverb prevention

is better than cure. The farm to fork approach requires a series of steps all along the production chain to ensure food sold to consumers ultimately is safe.

The US representative to the EU, Anthony Gardner, recently described these concerns as ‘scaremongering’.

It’s a convenient line for those who want to rush through the talks as swiftly as possible with no details entering the public domain. The hope is that they can be concluded before the peoples of Europe and the USA find out the true scale of the TTIP threat.

Jimmy Kelly, Irish Regional Secretary of UNITE union, said: ‘It’s no wonder that there is a veil of secrecy over TTIP: its advocates, both in the US and in the EU, know that citizens would not tolerate its proposed provisions. We all remember when the Government asked us to vote “YES for jobs” to the Lisbon Treaty. And we know how that ended. TTIP has been billed by the European Commission as the “cheapest stimulus package imaginable” – but the claims do not stack up’.

‘Let us be very clear: There is no evidence that TTIP will create the jobs we need. But what it may do is move jobs around – between sectors, and from countries with high labour and environmental standards to countries with low standards. In this zero-sum game, jobs will be shifted to locations guaranteeing the highest profit and the least regulatory inconvenience to corporations. Rather than creating new jobs, there will be competition for the same jobs – generating a race to the bottom in which all are losers’.

Mark Cumming, head of Comhlámh, spoke of the threat to developing economies: ‘Ireland and the EU have a proud tradition of promoting development aid, this commitment will be undermined through the TTIP as it will negatively impact on countries in the global south, this deal will set global standards and such processes of negotiation should be undertaken transparently in multilateral forums’.

Barry Finnegan, lecturer at the media faculty of Griffith College and researcher with the Irish branch of the international civil society group Attac, said in relation to the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism included in the TTIP negotiations: ‘Why do foreign corporations need to have a legal right to bypass Irish and European courts so they can sue member states for millions of euro in compensation when we improve our health and safety regulations, and our criteria for delivering public services? In the absence of a list of clearly identified problems with the Irish and European justice system, only one conclusion can be drawn from the TTIP negotiators’ desire for a private international court for foreign investors: namely to avoid the jurisprudence and constitutional rights which accompany the application of justice in democratic societies’.

He quoted from a pro-TTIP document published by Business Europe – the Lobby organization for 35 European national business federations, including very our own IBEC: ‘If in the US a domestic law is adopted after TTIP enters into force and its content violates the [TTIP] Agreement, it can still be found constitutional by domestic courts. So the only possibility for the investor to ensure its adequate protection is to bring the claim to international arbitration’. The quote is available [here](#).

Mick Wallace TD said that ‘contrary to what we are being told, the TTIP is not about creating jobs, but about enhancing neoliberalism, and insulating big business from the ballot

box. Should we be surprised that the large corporations have much more of an input into the negotiations than the ordinary citizen?’

John Douglas, the general secretary of Mandate trade union, warned in a statement:

‘As with all free trade agreements the focus will be on competition. Workers in Ireland and across the EU will be forced to compete with workers in the United States. This is something the Irish and European trade unions should be very weary of’.

‘Workers across the EU enjoy superior terms and conditions of employment than their counterparts in the United States. For instance, workers in the US are not entitled to any statutory annual leave whereas workers in the EU enjoy a minimum of 20 days. These entitlements – that were fought for and won by the trade union movement across the EU – should not be lost due to “competition” under the guise of a free trade agreement that liberalizes markets and regulations’.

Stop the TTIP is available as a PDF and can be downloaded at www.people.ie

Ends.

For confirmation and further comment:

Kevin McCorry – 086 3150301