



Would you believe this?

It's bad enough having to put up with lies and misinformation from our current European bedfellows, but to be lectured to by some American shows the extent to which the US thinks it rules the world. His admonition over Brexit and the threat of a 10 year "delay" before any trade negotiations can be entertained disguises the real purpose of his visit other than to pat his pet lap dog at No 10 on the head. If we leave the EU, the TTIP – the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – is dead in the water. His visit to Europe is expressly to ensure that the EU signs up to this trade "agreement" as the legacy of his Presidency – he hasn't done much else of note to earn himself a lasting place in the history books has he? TTIP? You may be a bit short on details about this little scam, but that has been the deliberate ploy from the outset so pin your ears back, here's the lowdown courtesy of the Independent.

*The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is a series of trade negotiations being carried out mostly in secret between the EU and US. As a bilateral trade agreement, TTIP is about reducing the regulatory barriers to trade for big business, things like food safety law, environmental legislation, banking regulations and the sovereign powers of individual nations. It is, as John Hilary, Executive Director of campaign group War on Want, said: **"An assault on European and US societies by transnational corporations."***

Since before TTIP negotiations began last February, the process has been secretive and undemocratic. This secrecy is on-going, with nearly all information on negotiations coming from leaked documents and Freedom of Information requests. MEPs may have sight of the wording, but only after signing the equivalent of the Official Secrets Act, not being allowed to take notes and not being given sufficient time to read the treaty in full. A truly undemocratic process; even if the Treaty is signed, parts of it will still be withheld from the public gaze.

The covert nature of the talks may well be the least of our problems. Here are six other reasons showing how the democratic process is being hung out to dry.

The NHS - Public services, especially the NHS, are in the firing line. One of the main aims of TTIP is to open up Europe's public health, education and water services to US companies. This could essentially mean the privatisation of the NHS. The European Commission has claimed that public services will be kept out of TTIP. However, according to the Huffington Post, the UK Trade Minister Lord Livingston has admitted that talks about the NHS were still on the table.

Food and environmental safety - TTIP's 'regulatory convergence' agenda will seek to bring EU standards on food safety and the environment closer to those of the US. **But US regulations are much less strict, with 70 per cent of all processed foods sold in US supermarkets now containing genetically modified ingredients.** By contrast, the EU allows virtually no GM foods. The US also has far laxer restrictions on the use of pesticides. **It also uses growth hormones in its beef which are restricted in Europe due to links to cancer.** US farmers have tried to have these restrictions lifted repeatedly in the past through the World Trade Organisation and it is likely that they will use TTIP to do so again.

The same goes for the environment, where the EU's REACH regulations are far tougher on potentially toxic substances. In Europe a company has to prove a substance is safe before it can be used; in the US the opposite is true: any substance can be used until it is proven unsafe. As an example, the EU currently bans 1,200 substances from use in cosmetics; the US just 12. Irradiated food is another example not mentioned by the Independent. In the US the label "electronically pasteurised" is used to describe this function; more economy with the truth would be difficult to find...

Banking regulations - TTIP cuts both ways. The UK, under the influence of the all-powerful City of London, is thought to be seeking a loosening of US banking regulations. America's financial rules are tougher than ours. They were put into place after the financial crisis to directly curb the powers of bankers and avoid a similar crisis happening again. TTIP, it is feared, will remove those restrictions, effectively handing all those powers back to the bankers.

Privacy - Remember ACTA (the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement)? It was thrown out by a massive majority in the European Parliament in 2012 after a huge public backlash against what was rightly seen as an attack on individual privacy where internet service providers would be required to monitor people's online activity. **Well, it's feared that TTIP could be bringing back ACTA's central elements, proving that if the democratic approach doesn't work, there's always the back door.** An easing of data privacy laws and a restriction of public access to pharmaceutical companies' clinical trials are also thought to be on the cards.

Employment - The EU has admitted that TTIP will probably cause unemployment as jobs switch to the US, where labour standards and trade union rights are lower. It has even advised EU members to draw on European support funds to compensate for the expected unemployment. Examples from other similar bi-lateral trade agreements around the world support the case for job losses. **The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada and Mexico caused the loss of one million US jobs over 12 years, instead of the hundreds of thousands of extra that were promised.**

Democracy - TTIP's biggest threat to society is its inherent assault on democracy. **One of the main aims of TTIP is the introduction of Investor-State Dispute Settlements (ISDS), which allow companies to sue governments if those governments' policies cause a loss of profits. In effect it means unelected transnational corporations can dictate the policies of democratically elected governments.**

ISDSs are already in place in other bi-lateral trade agreements around the world and have led to such injustices as in Germany where Swedish energy company Vattenfall is suing the German government for billions of dollars over its decision to phase out nuclear power plants in the wake of the Fukushima disaster in Japan. Here we see a public health policy put into place by a democratically elected government being threatened by an energy giant because of a potential loss of profit. **Nothing could be more cynically anti-democratic.**

Do you get a say about whether this treaty gets signed as Obama wants? No you don't and neither do our MPs nor any MEPs. This is all about BIG powerful corporations getting BIGGER and more powerful. This is why the leader of the "free" world, in thrall to BIG business, the banks and the mainstream media, is here telling us to be good chaps and toe the line.

If you want only one good reason to vote for Brexit, then the TTIP is it.
Make sure you vote on June 23rd.

Clive Hale -The View from the Bridge - April 24th 2016

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