

NHS PRIVATISATION? INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT?

Is this what the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) could mean for us?

Gus Fagan spoke to the Faringdon Peace Group recently about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the similar Trans Pacific Trade and Investment Partnership (TPTIP) which are being negotiated in secret right now and could have wide ranging implications for us. The proposals cover 60%–70% of the world economy and include trade, businesses, public services, regulations and standards, the legal status of corporations and the legal rights of governments if they challenge corporations. There are many areas of concern.

In 1995 an international treaty redefined hotels, hospitals and banks as tradeable commodities, thus covered by trade law. TTIP would expand that, bringing public services like the NHS into the open market, in effect privatising them.

US safety standards covering for example food, pesticides, environment and products are much lower than in Europe but TTIP aims to harmonise them, thus lowering our standards and making life easier for corporations.

TTIP proposes creating a parallel legal system where corporations can challenge governments if their laws hinder their activities. Only corporations can bring cases, hearings will be in secret and governments cannot appeal.

If fully implemented TTIP would transform the broadly social democratic welfare state of Europe into a US-like liberal free market.

Gus also warned of the implications of TTIP for world peace. Since the Cold War, when Gorbachev envisaged a united Europe from the Urals to the Atlantic, the US has worked to prevent an alliance between Germany and Russia. Through its actions in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine and the expansion of NATO right up to Russia's border, the US has continued to create hostility between Russia and Europe. NATO unites the US and Europe militarily and TTIP would do so economically, both to the deliberate exclusion of Russia. There is a dichotomy in Europe – the relationship with the US is one of competition but also cooperation. It is very difficult for individual nations to resist being part of the club.

Similarly in the Pacific region TPTIP, bringing together the US, Canada, Mexico and Peru in the West with Japan, Vietnam, S. Korea, Singapore, New Zealand, Australia and Malaysia in the East aims to create a huge economic area excluding China. The US is also building up its military in the Pacific and has new military agreements with Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. By 2020 60% of the US naval fleet will be in the Pacific. China meanwhile is proposing its own regional trade agreement with Asian countries which represent 30% of the world's economy and 60% of its population.

Gus urged us to write to our MEPs, who are debating TTIP, to express our concerns. You could also join the '38 Degrees' campaign.

Faringdon Peace Group meets on the first Wednesday of the month, 7.30, Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Rd. On 1st July we will be showing a film 'Beyond Forgiveness' about post-apartheid South Africa, followed by discussion with the producer. All welcome.