

The **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership** is a proposed formal agreement between the European Union and United States which aims to liberalise one-third of global trade. The negotiations were planned to be finalised by the end of 2014.

The content of the agreement as well as the reports on TTIP negotiations are classified from the public. Following leaks of parts of the contents of the proposed agreement in March 2014, increased security was put in place by the European Commission, introducing a new rule that means politicians can only view the text in a secure reading room in Brussels, to avoid any further leaks of information about TTIP to the public.

Only a handful of people can access the documents known as Consolidated Texts, which are the drafts containing the most recent results of the negotiations. In the EU, authorised readers include the European Commission negotiators, most of whom are from the Directorate-General for Trade, and some EU members' ministers and MPs. Upon the insistence of the US, the documents are no longer transmitted electronically or as printed documents. They are only made available in a highly secured room in Brussels or in a number of US embassies in Europe. In all these secured rooms, phones or other types of scanning device are forbidden. Blank sheets of paper, marked with the reader's names, are provided upon which visitors can jot down their comments.

The controversial agreement is criticised and opposed by unions, charities, NGOs and environmentalists, particularly in Europe. TTIP aims to:

- reduce the regulatory barriers to trade for big business
- liberalise food safety law
- liberalise environmental legislation
- liberalise banking regulations
- reduce the regulatory powers of trade unions and employee rights
- tighten laws on copyright
- liberalise data privacy laws

TTIP has been described as reducing the sovereign powers of individual nations and as an assault on European and US societies by transnational corporations.

Democracy

TTIP wants to introduce the **Investor-State Dispute Settlement** which will allow an investor to bring a case directly against the country hosting its investment, without the intervention of the government of the investor's country of origin, in other words, companies will be able to sue governments if those governments' policies cause a loss of profits.

Environmentalists, unions and consumer organisations on both sides of the Atlantic have demanded that ISDS be dropped from the trade talks. France and Germany want it removed.

ISDS has been described as a one-way street by which corporations can challenge government policies, but neither governments nor individuals are granted any comparable rights to hold corporations accountable. It could not only undermine the power of national governments to act in the interests of their citizens, but even undermine the democratic authority of local government.

As an example of an existing bi-lateral trade agreement between Germany and Sweden, the 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.

Hundreds of similar cases are taking place around the world at the moment and are held before an Arbitration Tribunal made up of corporate lawyers appointed on an ad hoc basis with a vested interest in ruling in favour of business.

The proposed **Investment Tribunal Court** was declared illegal by the German Association of Magistrates.

NHS, Education and Public Services

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, water and utility services, postal services and prison service to US companies. This could essentially mean the privatisation of the NHS.

It's worth noting the IMF conditions on "Structural Adjustment" include:

- Privatisation, or divestiture of all or part of state-owned enterprises.
- Cutting expenditures, also known as austerity.

Food and Environmental Safety

Documents released in May 2015 showed that US negotiators put pressure on the EU over proposed pesticide criteria. A number of pesticides containing endocrine disrupting chemicals were in the draft EU criteria to be banned. US negotiators insisted the EU drop the criteria.

TTIP's regulatory convergence agenda will seek to bring EU standards on food safety and the environment closer to those of the US and aims to remove or reduce restrictions on:

- genetically modified crops
- pesticides
- growth promoting hormones in beef
- pathogen reduction treatments of chicken
- animal welfare
- food rules of origin
- chemical substances
- fracking regulations

US farmers have tried to have the agrochemical restrictions lifted repeatedly in the past through the **World Trade Organisation**.

The EU's **REACH** legislation regulates the production and use of chemical substances and their potential impacts on both human health and the environment.

Banking Regulations

America put into place tougher financial regulations after the financial crisis of 2008 to directly curb the powers of bankers and avoid a similar crisis happening again, and are now stricter than in the UK. TTIP aims to liberalise those restrictions, effectively handing all those powers back to the bankers.

Speaking in The Independent (26th June 2015), UKIP MP Douglas Carswell condemned TTIP as 'a corporatist scam' which could destroy Britain's public services: *'TTIP is not a free trade deal, but one that favours big multi-national corporates over the interests of smaller businesses and most importantly, the democratic right of people to decide public spending policy through national elections. TTIP as it stands could hand the NHS lock stock and barrel to huge business corporations against the wishes of the British people'*

On 8th July 2015, European Union MEP's voted in the European Parliament to approve TTIP by 436 to 241. An amendment excluding Britain's NHS from TTIP was lost by 507 to 142. Labour, Conservative and LibDem MEP's voted in favour of TTIP. UKIP MEP's were the only major British party to vote against TTIP.

John McDonnell, Labour Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, describes TTIP as resulting in a huge transfer of powers to Brussels and corporate interests, that will bring about: *'a form of modern day serfdom'*