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BREXIT, TRADE AGREEMENTS AND 'WAR ON WANT'

The referendum decision in Britain to exit the European Union (Brexit) opens a new chapter in trade relations between the United Kingdom (UK) and a single European market. It also introduces a new phase in the political life of the UK, as many of the powers that had previously been transferred to Brussels will now be brought back to Westminster – including, most importantly, the trade and investment policies that determine our relations with all other countries around the world.

Since the adoption of the Lisbon Agenda in 2000, the European Union (EU) has committed itself to the most extreme programme of neoliberal capitalism in its trade agreements with other countries, relentlessly promoting the interests of big business at the expense of labour, society and the environment. Nowhere has this agenda been more apparent than in the controversial Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) currently under negotiation between the EU and the USA. A standard complaint in every one of the referendum debates that I took part in was the fact that unelected EU bureaucrats were pursuing the TTIP in open defiance of public opposition. This was also the theme of many serious written comment pieces.

An agenda of permanent austerity, deregulation and free market fundamentalism is the EU's standard programme for all peoples, within and outside Europe. Breaking with this model became a determining issue of the referendum for many on the Left.

The Leave vote means that the British people have escaped being party to any future TTIP

agreement as an EU member-state. It is highly doubtful that the TTIP project will be able to survive the UK's withdrawal. What with all the other shocks that have hit the EU-USA negotiations over the past few months, Brexit may well be the last straw that broke the TTIP camel's back. However, it has always been clear that leaving the EU would bring us face to face with a UK political elite that has consistently championed the most extreme neo-liberal positions on the European spectrum. A new UK government could still attempt to sign us up to the principles of TTIP at a future date. And this is the most important point for those of us who have devoted years of our lives to the cause of trade justice. We must now ensure that the British people's decision to reject the EU and its neoliberal programme cannot be twisted into a mandate to pursue the same agenda unilaterally in the UK.

The Leave vote is a rejection of the political caste in this country, as most commentators already agree. That voters in many traditional labour strongholds came out for Brexit must be seen as a call for a new kind of politics based on decisions that benefit the many, not the few.

EU leaders must themselves take stock of why the British electorate defied expectations and swung behind a Brexit vote. The European elite's contempt for the peoples of Europe has manifested itself with brutal clarity in their imposition of austerity on the populations of Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Romania, Ireland and Portugal, as well as their drive to conclude the TTIP negotiations in the face of such widespread public opposition. The news now

coming out of Brussels is that EU trade commissioner, Cecilia Malmström, intends to deny national parliaments their promised vote on the EU-Canada trade deal, CETA. This is just the latest in a series of anti-democratic decisions that EU leaders need to reconsider urgently if they do not wish to be responsible for the further disintegration of the EU.

The fight is on to secure justice, rights and

democracy inside and outside the EU, to reject the appalling scapegoating of migrants that we have seen during the Brexit debate and to stand up for social justice for all peoples. Now is the time to put aside the divisions caused by the referendum and unite behind this common vision of a better world.

Source: John Hilary, Executive Director of 'War on Want'. Version of this article appeared in The Independent'. Slightly edited A Healey.

THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM AND THE WORLD'S FUTURE

Is the World Economic Forum (WEF) the future of global governance? In January 20 – 23 this year, 2,500 people including 40 Heads of State attended the annual Davos Forum, whose stated mission is to 'improve the state of the world ... (and) shape global, regional, and industry agendas'. The WEF carefully blends together many private and public organisations and private institutions and claims that it is accountable to all parts of society, according to The Transnational Institute (TNI). Those present at Davos in 2015 were predominantly men (83%), mainly from Europe and the United States (75%),

Besides the Forum in Davos, there is a year-round membership composed exclusively of 1000 of the world's largest multi-national corporations, most of which have an annual turnover of \$5 billion. Is Davos accountable to society? Not according to research by the TNI, which reveals the make-up of the Board of 24 members: 67% are from Europe and North America; 24% are women; there are no African members; half the Board (12) are currently corporate executives while 4 others have a corporate background. 22 of the 24 went to universities in the USA and Europe and, of these, 10 went to Harvard. Peter Maurer of the International Red Cross is the only Board member who can be said to represent civil society. It is no surprise that there is a 'high prevalence of narrow ideological thinking and conflicts of interest' in the Board.

Some are leaders of 'corporations with a history of social and environmental abuse', yet the WEF claims to promote global citizenship. For example, the Chairman of Nestlé, Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, has stated that to claim that

water is a human right is an 'extreme view'. His corporation has a long record of destructive practice, from bottled water to baby milk substitutes to child labour in Ivory Coast cocoa plantations. Mukhesh Ambani, India's richest man and Chairman of Reliance Industries, has a \$1 billion home of 27 storeys for a family of six, while 40% of India's children suffer from malnutrition. Japan's Heiko Tabenaka is a tax evader and advocate for privatisation of the postal services.

While the WEF presents itself as a responsible global actor, expressing its concern for global inequality and claiming to want to build a progressive globalisation, its structures display the opposite: 'dominated by the richest oligarchs and corporate executives, obsessed with minimising regulations for the sake of corporate profits, it raises questions about whose interests are really served'. Susan George of the TNI called these elites 'the Davos Class, a nomadic, powerful and interchangeable' class that, 'despite its members' nice manners and well-tailored clothes, is predatory'. It is particularly odious that, with no accountability, 'the Davos Class' is able to further its global agenda to serve its own economic interests, severely harming those in poverty around the world.

'There is evidence that the World Economic Forum has:

- stimulated the negotiation of new free trade agreements that have led to job losses and a massive rise in corporate litigations against States;
- facilitated the formation of the G20 that brought a few small actors into global

- policy-making but continued to exclude the vast majority of nations; and
- provided the forum for banks successfully to lobby government officials to limit regulations on the financial industry in the aftermath of the global crisis.’

‘The World Economic Forum has made it clear that it sees itself as a model of how the world should be governed. It actively advocates, through its Global Redesign Initiative, for a shift from *multilateral governance*, based on State-to-State decision-making, to *multi-stakeholder governance*, in which corporations have a much more dominant role, becoming effectively global citizens. This process is already underway as more self-selected

and self-appointed multi-stakeholder forums appear world-wide, eg, the World Water Forum, the Marine Stewardship Council and the Inter-net Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).’

The WEF Board is, in a sense, how the WEF wants the world to be run – by a small group of mainly male corporate executives with the same education and ideological vision, with a smattering of diverse non-corporate actors to give their project legitimacy.

Source: Based on The Transnational Institute publication, ‘Who Does the World Economic Forum Really Represent? An analysis of the Davos Class’. Edited by Mary Boyd.

TRAFFICKED: FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR

An event organised by the Grail and UFER at the United Nations Human Rights Council, 14 June 2016, Geneva

At this moment, 20.9 million people are victims of human trafficking, according to data from *Asylum Access*. This tragedy will not disappear easily, linked as it is to criminal organisations. It is necessary that people all around the world realise that this is happening in their cities and villages, in restaurants they go to, on roads they travel, alongside their lives. And it is important that more of us know how to identify it and are able to combat it and contribute to saving lives..

This year, UFER (International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples) and the International Grail organised a parallel event during the June session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, together with Sisterworks and *Asylum Access*. Our event tried to bring to light the current situation of human trafficking in different areas of the globe and open a discussion of how to help eliminate this scourge. We were pleased to welcome members of several NGOs wanting to hear more and to make new connections for future collaboration.

According to the United Nations (UN), trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of

force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

The consent of a victim of trafficking to the intended exploitation is irrelevant once deception, coercion, force or other prohibited means have been used. Consent, therefore, cannot be used as a defence to absolve traffickers from criminal responsibility.

Ivonne van de Kar from Sisterworks, spoke about the current European reality and stressed how much more information is needed to fight human trafficking. Few States collect data on this matter. Nor is there enough information collected by international organisations. And States have different legal frameworks within which to work on human trafficking. Ivonne told us that it is important that we understand that this tragedy is happening before our eyes,

in hotels, catering, massage salons, among domestic workers and au pairs, in agriculture, construction, shipping, begging, in child exploitation from sexual services to child soldiers, in prostitution, slave labour, trade in organs and baby factories. Human trafficking is present in our societies, even in the smallest of our purchases. *Sisterworks* is a centre of expertise on human trafficking in relation to religion, migration, justice, care and prostitution, and a source for targeted information and policy advice.

According to Asylum Access, there are several major challenges regarding human trafficking today. Karina Sarmiento told us of the mismatch of information between the institutional statistics and the testimonies of personnel working in the field. There is an urgent need for an integrated information and data management system for all government institutions. Also, many still believe that trafficking happens only to foreigners, while we know from UN reports that in the vast majority of cases nationals are involved.

It is good that increasing resources are going

it's 3:23 in the morning
and I'm awake
because my great-great-grandchildren
won't let me sleep
my great-great-grandchildren
ask me in dreams
what did you do while the planet was plundered?
what did you do when the earth was unraveling?
surely you did something
when the seasons started failing?
as the mammals, reptiles, birds were all dying?
did you fill the streets with protest
when democracy was stolen?
what did you do
once
you
knew?

Drew Dellinger

to prevention and to the apprehension of criminals. The subject of healing is one that the Grail is very interested in and it is one of the hardest to deal with. An aim of this event, *Trafficked: from victim to survivor*, was to raise awareness of the experiences of victims and of their journey after being freed into a new life – how can NGOs and governments help the process of healing and re-entry into society? Listening carefully to their needs and setting up accompaniment programs with victims may be a way forward. Could the Grail try to set up such a program or join with other organisations working in this field? Let us share our ideas about this. Please be in touch with me. if you want to participate in this discussion.

UFER organised a seminar on human trafficking in Nepal in 2014, to examine more efficient ways of working against it. For your information, the participants adopted the [Kathmandu Declaration](#) and an Action Plan. (See Bulletin, May 2014).

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