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### 'TRADING AWAY DEMOCRACY'

Trade agreements topped the agenda of many popular organisations around the world in the last couple of months. The controversial Economic Partnership between West Africa and the European Union (EU) was signed, leaving its critics to ponder the consequences.

On January 20, President Obama delivered what many considered a solid State of the Union Address, sounding as if he was taking steps to protect the middle class and the environment. Then he dropped a bombshell: that he wanted to 'fast-track' two secret trade deals. 'Fast-track' allows him to by-pass Congress and finalise trade deals on his own authority. Speeding up the completion of these deals would undermine workers' efforts and strengthen the mighty hand of the big corporations. The other weakness in the Address was his failure to address the problem of poverty.

Critics believe that trade deals always work to the advantage of the strongest party. They argue that big deals, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) among 12 countries<sup>1</sup>, the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TIPP) between Europe and the USA and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU, will benefit the biggest corporations in the world and jeopardise peoples' health, safety and livelihoods. Jobs are lost as corporations move production to low-waged countries with weak environmental protections.

Over 800 corporations are insiders to the above trade agreements while the public has had no input. But the exclusiveness and secrecy of the negotiations are not the only way trade agreements undermine democracy

The Investor Protection clause, that would grant even greater foreign investor rights than the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has become a main bone of contention. This clause allows for foreign investors to sue governments if they believe a government law or regulation has the effect of decreasing their profits. In this way 'investor rights' can constrain future government policy. Foreign investors are given a powerful weapon to fight regulatory changes. This clause first appeared in NAFTA but was limited to the right of banks to transfer funds freely and be protected from expropriation. Under CETA those rights expand to highly elastic concepts such as 'fair and equitable treatment'. This could hamstring regulators responsible to protect consumers and the environment as well as threaten the stability of the financial system in an emergency.

Canada has been sued 35 times under the 'investor rights' clause of NAFTA. It is the most sued country. To date, six claims amounting to \$171.5 million are settled and many are pending. Under CETA, subsidiaries of USA corporations based in Canada would have the power to sue European governments. This is particularly worrying for Europeans as there are many USA subsidiaries in Canada. Subsidiaries of foreign companies in the EU could do the same to Canada.

Quebec's experience mentioned previously in the Bulletin (March 2014), illustrates the Investor Protection Clause problem. Quebec placed a moratorium on fracking<sup>2</sup> to protect its residents from what it judged a dangerous practice, only to have the USA fracking company, Lone Pine, launch a lawsuit for \$250 million to compensate

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<sup>1</sup> Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and USA.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Fracking' is an abbreviation of 'fracturing' and refers to a method of extracting coal seam gas - forcing large quantities of water and chemicals into the rock, breaking it open to release the gas. Opponents are concerned with the long-term harmful effects on the ecology of the earth, especially water sources.

for their potential loss in profits. Lone Pine says the moratorium violates its 'right to frack' under Canada's trade agreement with the USA. Worse still, under the newer trade deals, it will be nearly impossible for Quebec to defend its laws. If these new trade deals go through, all countries involved would be vulnerable to similar assaults on their ability to protect communities from threats like fracking.

Among other things, the new deals, such as the TPP, TTIP and CETA, are a huge threat to employment, environmental pollution bans, food security and labelling rules, genetic engineering laws and renewable energy. The profit-seeking ambitions of corporations challenge democratically created laws that protect the health and safety of communities and their environments. As Dr David Suzuki, host of *The Nature of Things*, says,

these deals often 'take labour to the lowest common denominator while increasing environmental risk'.

President Obama's desire to fast-track these deals places him on the side of large corporations. He told the American people that key cabinet members have been assigned to push the free trade agenda in Washington. Peoples' movements are protesting that the TPP, TTIP and CETA will undermine everything people have fought so hard for. The President can only proceed if Congress grants him fast-track authority.

*Sources: Transnational Institute, 'Trading Away Democracy', Nov. 2014; Food and Water Watch, Jan. 21, 2015; David Suzuki, 'Canada is trading away its environmental rights', Rabble Magazine, Jan.27, 2015. Compiled by Mary Boyd.*

## STATEMENT ON SAFETY OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs)

For years the safety of GMOs has been debated and we have published a number of articles in this Bulletin. It seemed worthwhile to bring to your attention this Statement by the **European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER)**. It is grounded in comprehensive worldwide research and is endorsed by over 300 scientists, physicians and experts from a range of disciplines relevant to assessing the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). They released this Statement, with detailed references, in October 2014, and its main points are summarised here.

'We strongly reject claims by GM seed developers and some scientists, commentators and journalists that there is a "scientific consensus" on GMO safety and that the debate on this topic is "over". We feel compelled to issue this Statement because these claims misrepresent the currently available scientific evidence and encourage a climate of complacency that could lead to a lack of regulatory and scientific rigour and appropriate caution, potentially endangering the health of humans, animals and the environment.

Some of our objections to the claim of scientific consensus are listed below.

### 1 No consensus on GM food safety

A comprehensive review of animal feeding studies of GM crops found that they fell into two equal groups: those suggesting that GM products were as safe and nutritious as conventional non-GM plants and those raising serious concerns. The review also found that most studies in the first group were performed "by biotechnology companies or associates responsible for commercialising these plants".

Rigorous animal feeding studies would normally involve one group of animals fed with GM food and a second group fed an equivalent non-GM diet. Independent studies of this type are rare, but when such studies have been performed, some have revealed toxic effects. The concerns raised by these studies have not been followed up by targeted research that could confirm or refute the initial findings.

### 2 No epidemiological studies on the effects of GM food consumption on human health

It has been said that trillions of GM meals have been eaten in the USA with no ill effects. However, as GM foods are not labelled in the USA, it is scientifically impossible to trace, let alone study, patterns of consumption and their impacts.

### 3 EU research project does not provide evidence of GM food safety

The report of this project, *A decade of EU-funded GM research*, presents no data that could provide such evidence. Five published animal feeding studies are referenced in the section of the report dedicated to food safety. None of these studies tested a commercialised GM food. None tested the GM food for long-term effects beyond 90 days. None concluded on the safety of the GM food tested, let alone on the safety of GM foods in general.

#### **4 Internet list of hundreds of studies does not show GM food safety**

An internet blog website claims that several hundred studies document the “general safety and nutritional wholesomeness of GM food”. Examination of the studies listed do not provide evidence of GM food safety and some provide evidence of lack of safety. For example, a substantial number of animal feeding studies found toxic effects in GM-fed animals compared with the animals in the control groups. The claims of this website are false and irresponsible.

#### **5 No consensus on the environmental risks of GM crops**

There is not even a consensus on the methodologies that should be applied, nor on standardising testing procedures.

Some reviews of the published data on Bt insecticidal crops [crops grown from seeds modified to contain insecticide] have found that they can have adverse effects not only on the target insects but also on non-target and beneficial organisms. Resistance to Bt toxins has been found in both target and non-target insects, eg, in the cotton-growing areas of China.

As with GM food safety (see 1 above), disagreement among scientists on the environmental safety of GM crops may be related to funding sources. A survey of 62 scientists has found that both funding and disciplinary training had significant effects on their attitudes. Scientists with industry funding and/or training in molecular biology were

believe that they do not hold any particular risks. Publicly-funded scientists working independently of GM companies and/or those trained in ecology were more likely to emphasise the ignorance and uncertainty involved in GM use.

#### **6 Two international bodies recognise risks in GM foods and crops**

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2003) is an international agreement signed by 166 governments that seeks to protect biological diversity. The UN’s Codex Alimentarius is a set of international guidelines for assessing GM seeds and crops overseen by a Commission with 160 member countries. Both these bodies have adopted the Precautionary Principle, which allows signatory states to protect themselves against threats of damage by GM crops.

We support the application of the Precautionary Principle with regard to the release and the cross-boundary movement of GM crops and foods.

#### **Conclusion**

Overall, the outcomes of scientific research into GM crop safety are nuanced, complex, often contradictory or inconclusive, confounded by researchers’ choices, assumptions and funding sources and, in general, have raised more questions than they have currently answered.

Decisions on introducing GM crops into the food supply of humans and animals involve socio-economic considerations and the broader society needs to be included in these decisions. However, they need to be supported by strong scientific evidence on the long-term safety for human, animal and environmental health, evidence that is obtained in a manner that is ethical, honest, rigorous, independent, transparent and sufficiently diversified to compensate for bias.

Decisions on the future of our food and agriculture should not be based on misleading claims that “a scientific consensus” exists on GMO safety.’

## **COMING EVENTS**

**World Water Day this year is 22<sup>nd</sup> March.  
The theme is Water and Sustainable Development.  
For more information see [www.unwater.org/worldwaterday](http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday)**

very likely to be positive about GM crops and

Source: [www.ensser.org](http://www.ensser.org) Edited by A. Healey

## STATISTICS ON TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

In November, the Walk Free Foundation presented the 2014 edition of its *Global Slavery Index*. The declared goal of the Index is to estimate the number of people in modern slavery in 167 countries. 'It is a tool for ... understanding the size of the problem, existing responses and contributing factors, in order to build sound policies that will end modern slavery'.

This year's Index estimates that 35.8 million people in the world live in situations of modern slavery (human trafficking, forced labour, child labour and early or child marriage). This is an increase from the 29.8 million people, estimated in the 2013 Index. The difference is attributed to new and improved methodology in 2014. According to the report, of all people living in slavery, 61% live in the five countries with high populations: India, China, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Russia. The countries identified as making the most efforts to combat slavery include The Netherlands, Sweden and the USA.

Since its first edition in 2013, the Global Slavery Index has been endorsed by a number of politicians, businessmen, anti-slavery activists and academics. At the same time it has been heavily criticised by academics and researchers. The methodology of the 2013 Index was criticised by Professor Ronald Weitzer and anti-trafficking expert, Dr Anne Gallagher, and, more recently, by a team of researchers for the Journal of Social Inclusion, who argue: 'An analysis of the Index's methods exposes significant and critical weaknesses and raises questions of its replicability and validity'. Siobhán McGrath and Fabiola Mieres criticised the underlying politics of the Index, comparing it to the USA State Department's annual *Trafficking in Per-*

*sons* report. They note that the 'good' countries are the developed countries of the Global North, while the 'bad' countries are those that are 'less developed': 'Unfortunately, there is no radical call for redistribution of global wealth here. Instead, the ranking system implies that the blame should be placed squarely on the national governments of the "less developed" countries for the plight of their citizens (even when, in most cases, these citizens travel abroad). This stigmatisation of certain countries suggests that the problem at hand has only "national roots", narrowing the debate towards "national solutions" in the form of "development" It does not take into account the interdependence of regions and countries and the ways that "developed" and "developing" countries interact with and affect each other.'

*La Strada International* (LSI) has consistently advocated caution with data measuring human trafficking, an advised against using such data to justify policies and regulations. Although many reports do give out warnings not to consider the data they present as the 'absolute truth on human trafficking', LSI has observed that politicians, international organisations and NGOs do use such data to advocate for specific issues and policies or to validate their position in the field. Ranking systems and indexes do not reflect thorough impact assessments of government efforts to combat trafficking in human beings, but rather serve the political or financial interests of those who publish the reports.

Source: *La Strada, Quarterly Newsletter Dec. 2014. La Strada welcomes information, reports, opinions from persons and groups working in the field of human trafficking. Email [info@lastradainternational.org](mailto:info@lastradainternational.org)*

**Contributions to Bulletin and responses to its content welcomed.  
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