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Ireland's rocky road to CETA (Comprehensive Economic & Trade Agreement)

Sharon Briggs writes about the horrors of CETA and ICS (Investor Court System).

Back in 2008 when a huge bank bail-out was on the horizon, the rich EU and Canadian vampires were sitting at their round table planning a way to implement a new trade deal. Sharon Briggs argues that this is no ordinary trade deal, and we must drive a stake into its very heart. This trade deal must be stopped before it sucks us dry.

This is a pig in a poke, and we must look inside the bag before we buy it.

The CETA trade agreement is being sold to us by the EU like it's a fat juicy pig, saying it will "cut tariffs and makes it easier to export goods and services, benefitting people and businesses in both the EU and Canada" this falls way short of its true intention.

But like most things the danger is always in the silence, it's not what the government is saying, it is what they are not saying that needs our attention, and if you look in the bag you will see it's full of snakes.

These snakes are disguised by certain types of "non-discriminatory regulations" that are restricted by the agreement, even though they are unrelated to trade these regulations are a danger. We will lose more than we will gain from such a restrictive trade deal. Let's look into it.

For me the CETA scene-setting should be ringing alarm bells as it exposes the Irish government's true colours, their support for such a regressive economic agreement is not in our interests.

Rather than telling us it is a battle for global expansion of corporate rights in the name of "trade" you are being told this deal will be great for us all. As it stands Tariffs on most Canada-EU trade of industrial goods have already been removed or substantially reduced and are generally low with tariff rates of on average 3.5% for EU exports to Canada and 2.2% for Canadian exports to the EU.

Gains from tariff removal will be minimal but given that average tariffs are currently higher on EU exports than Canadian exports, the EU economy would gain more from mutual tariff removal. The removal of tariffs will create winners and losers in Canada.

Canadian sectors facing reduced EU tariffs could benefit through lowering the price of their goods. But producers on both sides will find it difficult to compete with cheaper imports following tariff removal. (Canada imports \$1.6 worth of goods from the EU for every \$1 in goods it exports).

This has not been the case for Canada, as Canadian agriculture has lost around 10% of its exports to Europe since the start of the CETA agreement.

CETA's rights are the only rights.

The Regulatory Cooperation Forum, which is only vaguely defined and appears to be open to the direct influence of corporate lobbyists. (Further tying the hands of governments, by requiring them to; consult with foreign governments and investors before instituting new trade-related regulations).

To ensure CETA's rights are the only rights, a new Investors Court System will be implemented which will contain measures to protect investments - while claiming it enshrines the right of governments to regulate in the public interest, it includes the right of corporations suing the government when regulations affect a foreign corporate investment.

CETA contains a chapter on sustainable development and workers' rights. Its language is aspirational and not enforceable, the aspirations fall nothing short of faking your profile on Facebook to garner likes.

CETA will have to have restrictions on regulations which will apply not only to services but as well to the pursuit of undefined "economic activities," the CETA could undermine the ability of governments to re-regulate in areas like oil and gas development, mining, and forestry where they have experienced "negative consequences" from deregulation.

Although the CETA deal talks about worker's rights, it does not include an effective enforcement mechanism to ensure that worker's rights are respected. Canada has failed to ratify two core International Labour Organization Conventions.: No. 98—Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, 1949. No.138—Minimum Age, 1973.

Canada has also failed to ratify key conventions on labour mobility, protecting the rights of migrant workers. Like they are the best country to speak about workers' rights?

CETA provides multiple grounds for public services to be challenged.

The negative list approach adopted in the CETA means all public services are covered by these provisions unless explicitly carved out by negotiators. You have to put things you don't want to fall under the agreement on a list.

The "list it or lose it" character of these commitments is a high stakes gamble with public services. The CETA provides multiple grounds for public services to be challenged.

CETA is a one way system that locks in current and future privatisations and could discourage governments from introducing new public services.

Ticking time bomb.

Back in December 2020 a vote to ratify the CETA deal saw an outpouring of public anger and the vote was pushed back by the Green party due to this public pressure. Eamon Ryan was terrified his party would split and used the delay to email members telling them accepting the deal was part of the Programme For Government.

This put the vote back to February - this for me a good thing, as it allows the opportunity to raise more public awareness of what this corporate deal contains and how it will impact on every one of us, on so

many levels.

I don't trust the Greens, and don't believe for one minute they will stop this trade deal. The agreement will now go before the Oireachtas European Affairs Committee for further scrutiny before being put to a vote in the Dáil.

Protection should not sink your neighbours.

Although the deal will now go into the Oireachtas European Affairs Committee. It still needs to go back to parliaments in Europe before it can be finally ratified. I hope it will not pass.

European trade policy can't continue along the path it is currently travelling. It is clear this corporate agreement creates even less democracy in an already stunted democracy. To prevent this corporate coup from happening we need to put pressure on the government parties particularly the Greens.

Ultimately we need a fundamentally different approach to economics – where economic planning is democratic and focused on the needs of people. An alternative socialist approach to economic policy needs to be developed, one that puts human needs and the battle against climate change ahead of the neo-liberal economic dogma of the global vampire elite.

The RED Network (incorporating Rebel Telly) are a network of radical socialists within the political party People Before Profit, a 32-county people power movement on the island of Ireland.

www.rednetwork.ie