



**Toxic treaty: a new EU-US trade deal threatens to weaken controls on hazardous chemicals in Europe.**

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## EUROPEAN UNION/UNITED STATES

### TTIP-ing point

When President Obama visits Brussels for a summit meeting at the end of March, governments will be hoping negotiations on an EU-US 'trade' deal are about halfway through.

However, the European Commission blinked early in the face of widespread hostility to the secretive talks. So March will also mark the start of a three-month consultation on one controversial component – private business tribunals – which would allow corporations to sue governments over claims that legislation had reduced their profits. The planned Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is not really about trade. It is about turning business deregulation into permanent policy on both sides of the Atlantic, without any democratic opportunity for future change.

Negotiators say they want TTIP to act as a model for the whole world, which means that thereafter, no country could have an independent economic policy.

Obama is due to meet European leaders on 24 March in Brussels. The city is buzzing with controversy about TTIP, just two months before Europeans elect a new EU Parliament which will have the final say on ratification.

The fourth round of negotiations, due from 10-14 March, will be overshadowed by a Commission propaganda exercise. It will endeavour to assure voters that the proposed private business tribunals are harmless, despite the fact that their decisions will be taken by corporate lawyers, not judges, and would override every country's highest court.

The new treaty would hit laws on everything from car safety to food safety, animal welfare, healthcare and banking – in fact, everything that is not specifically excluded. And very little has been.

Negotiations were publicly launched by David Cameron at the G8 Summit in Northern Ireland in June 2013. But for 18 months before that, US and European authorities took advice behind the scenes on what big business wanted.

One of the corporate lobby's most audacious demands is to remove the European Union's hard-fought-for 'precautionary principle', which applies to many areas of environmental and safety legislation. This principle has protected Europeans from GM foods and many toxic chemicals which are permitted in the US.

Current proposals also risk permitting the import of US-made vehicles that do not satisfy safety and environmental norms determined by the EU, and removing the reinforcements of financial regulations that have come in since 2008. ■

**Thomas Lines**