

## TTIP Protest

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February I joined eighty other people at St Pancras Station to travel to Brussels to protest against TTIP. We were made up of members of Global Justice Now (formerly World Development Movement), 38 Degrees and War on Want. When we got to Brussels we linked up with other campaigners from across Europe, including Friends of the Earth Europe.

We had a full programme of activities for the two days and there was a great buzz and energy from all the campaigners. We started off by being taken on a tour of Brussels by the Corporate Europe Observatory. (This is a research and campaign group working to expose the power that lobbyists have in the EU.) The tour was called 'Know your enemy'. We were told that there are a staggering 20,000 lobbyists in Brussels representing big business and their aim is to influence EU policy making, which is generally bad news for social justice and environmental protection.

In the evening we attended a debate and question and answer session with various campaigners. We were then told that the TTIP negotiators were due to meet the following day and that the location of their secret meeting had been discovered. It was decided that those who wished would meet to protest outside the building, we were warned that there was a small chance of being arrested. Some of us met early the next day to stand outside what appeared to be an office building in the suburbs. People were arriving to go to work while we held banners and chanted in a good natured fashion. 'T.T.I.P. – graveyard of democracy' and 'Cecilia Malstrom hear us say – we don't want TTIP – no way.'. Two Scots arrived in kilts which added a bit of excitement as they were being worn in the traditional manner. No one of any importance appeared to go into the building and the security men appeared unconcerned about our presence there.

We then took a tram across Brussels and walked across the lovely Parc du Cinquantenaire or Jubelpark (confusingly everything in Brussels has two names) to the Commission Building at Schuman. It was a beautiful sunny but frosty morning. We gathered on a large roundabout outside the building. FOE Europe had brought an inflatable Trojan Horse which was very eye-catching. There was a group playing and then speeches from representatives of various organisations, mostly in English but one in French.

We then walked to the parliament building, passing a large number of armed soldiers on the street. Security levels were high following the recent shootings in Europe. The Parliament building is quite a fortress and it took a long time to get everyone in to the building in small groups of ten people at a time, this was despite the fact that we had all submitted our details in advance.

We were met by the Green MEP's who provided us with some sandwiches for lunch. They spoke about TTIP and explained their stance which is that they are completely against it and as a result they are not taking part in the negotiations. They praised us for our campaigning and encouraged us to continue.

We then moved to another part of the building where we met Labour MEP's. This turned out to be our own Jude Kirton-Darling, who sits on the Trade committee and a

Scottish MEP called David Martin who is the chair of the committee. They both gave a short presentation and then took questions. Following a shouted additional question about the definition of public services, David slammed his fist on the table and said 'if you are going to interrupt, you can piss off.' You can imagine that this did not go down too well and unfortunately it set the tone for the rest of the meeting. The Labour MEP's are taking part in negotiations and are trying to argue in favour of a 'good TTIP'. Some activists were disappointed with this stance, believing that this is a contradiction in terms and thinking that they have sold out. In their defence Jude says that in her view the only way to have an influence is to take part in the debate.

We then split into regional groups in order to talk to our own Labour MEP's, which meant that I met Jude, along with all the Yorkshire campaigners as there was no Yorkshire MEP available that day. Everyone else left at 4pm to get their train back to London but I was staying on. Jude took me up to her office for coffee and I met our other MEP, Paul Brannon, formerly of Christian Aid. They have adjacent offices and share their staff, who are quite an international group with specialisms in trade and agriculture (Paul is on the agriculture and rural affairs committee). The offices had space for discussions and meetings and a lobbyist came to see Jude while I was there. She also had her own bathroom and shower.

Jude then took me on a tour of the parliament. She pointed out the television area and showed how members and reporters are able to use different styles of interview setting, either studio or informal with the parliament in the background. People were being filmed as we walked around. She took me up to the top of the building to stand in the striking cylinder-shaped glass dome and look at the view. Because of this dome the building is ironically known to locals as the "Caprice des Dieux" (whim of the gods), which is the name of a cheese with the same shape. Up the centre of the building there is a large steel tree twining up many floors.

We went into the parliament chamber and I sat in her seat while she showed me the voting system and the translation facilities. The EU ushers were outside the chamber, they are dressed in tails with silver chains, white shirts bow ties and gloves and it is their job to know all of the 753 MEP's. The scale of the building is quite overwhelming, we seemed to walk along endless corridors connecting different parts of the building. The MEP's have their offices with colleagues from the same party, it was a shock to see Le Pen posters on some of the windows as we walked around.

A brief summary of the issues around TTIP is as follows. It is a trade deal which is being negotiated between the US and the EU with the aim of reducing any barriers to trade taking place. It appears that large corporations are influencing the negotiators in the hope of being able to operate in a less regulated market place.. One aspect is the question of 'scope', of what will be included in the deal. Corporations would like more areas to be opened up to them; this is why campaigners fear that the NHS may be at risk of becoming privatised.

Another issue is the matter of the different standards that are currently in place on each side of the Atlantic. An example is the use of insecticides; large numbers of products are banned in the EU while America allows their use. Also Americans are happy to eat hormone reared beef washed in lactic acid and chicken rinsed in chlorine while Europeans have prevented such cost effective methods of food production.

This leaves campaigners wondering whose guidelines will be applied and fearing that there will be a general lowering of standards.

However, the biggest concern about TTIP is an element called ISDS. This stands for Investor State Dispute Settlement. Currently about 20% of world trade deals contain this element so we have had the chance to see how it works in practice. It gives corporations the right to challenge national governments over any legislation they might want to introduce. The much quoted example of this is that of the Philip Morris tobacco company who are taking legal action against the Australian government for legislating that in future all cigarettes must be sold in plain packaging. Philip Morris fears this will reduce their profits. The legal action does not take place in Australian courts but in a special corporate legal system using special lawyers who both represent the parties and also form judge and jury.

The other concerns about TTIP are that the negotiations are taking place in secret with little input by elected representatives so that we, the general public, are mostly being kept in the dark about what the deal might mean. Another problem is that the agenda appears to be directed by the corporations with the result that the trade deal will benefit big business rather than the consumer.

It is very good news that awareness of TTIP appears to be growing and that larger numbers of MEP's are now being lobbied by their constituents. It appears that if civil society and pressure groups can unite across Europe then it will be possible to beat TTIP.

Barbara Welford