

CETA: What's in the deal?

by **Stuart Trew**

By October, negotiations between Canada and the European Union on a corporate rights treaty called the **Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement** – or **CETA** – will be four years old. The Harper government's failure to get a deal done is a testament to the success of our campaign and others to educate the public and elected officials about the dangers in the agreement.

On the other hand, as you read this, Canada and the EU may have announced a conclusion to CETA negotiations, or that they have a “deal in principle.” If that's the case, we will be pushing hard to ensure the public is given the opportunity to see, change and ultimately reject CETA if the deal is not in the public interest.

The Council of Canadians has been front and centre in the campaign to expose and challenge the Canada-EU negotiations, thanks in large part to the help of our members and volunteer activists.

For example, there was a huge response from Council of Canadians members and online activists to a CETA petition, which we delivered to Brussels in September to the President of the European Parliament. The petition, which was signed by more than 5,000 people, tells members of the European Parliament that our federal government does not have our support for CETA.

Through its participation in the Trade Justice Network, the Council has also been taking that message to provincial governments participating in CETA negotiations. The network sent a letter to all premiers and opposition leaders this summer demanding a public review of the EU deal before any province can approve it.

Over the past four years, the Council has campaigned on four of what we consider to be CETA's worst elements.

Public procurement

CETA will ban “buy local” policies that can help us re-localize our economy, protect the environment and create jobs. Cities as big as Toronto, Victoria, Hamilton and Red Deer have asked to be exempted from these ridiculous CETA rules. We will continue to engage our local governments to make sure all municipalities are informed about the results of any concluded agreement and have the opportunity to opt out of CETA, or at least its procurement chapter.

Water services

Leaked CETA texts revealed that Canada was unwilling to exclude drinking water, sanitation and other water-related services from an investment chapter that would lock in existing privatization and encourage more private delivery of water services. The EU and its member states were requesting a complete carve-out for their water services, which would help shield public decisions related to water services (for example, the re-municipalization of privatized systems, or the creation of new public water utilities) from trade or corporate lawsuits. We will vigorously oppose any EU deal that threatens our public water systems.

Longer monopolies on pharmaceutical patents

It is almost certain that the Harper government granted more patent protection to brand name drug companies, as demanded by the EU and Big Pharma lobby groups in Canada. The EU will make no changes to its own patent system, showing just how unbalanced CETA will be. According to a 2012 federal assessment that the Harper government tried to suppress, these changes could cost Canada up to \$2 billion annually. More than two-thirds of people in Canada oppose extending patent terms in CETA. Parliament and the public should have the right to revoke any changes promised by the Harper government in the final EU deal.



Council of Canadians Executive Director Garry Neil delivered more than 5,000 petitions to EU Parliament in Brussels. Signed by Council members, the petitions tell members of the EU Parliament that Canadians do not support the Harper government in CETA negotiations.

Investor “rights”: Canada is facing nearly \$2.5 billion worth of corporate lawsuits under NAFTA's investment protection chapter, including one from an oil and gas company against Quebec's moratorium on fracking and another from pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly against Canada's legal system for reviewing patents. Australia, South Africa, India and a dozen Latin American countries either have stopped signing investment treaties that give corporations the right to sue governments for public policies they don't like, or are rejecting existing treaties. Our petition to the EU Parliament asked that these corporate “rights” be taken out of CETA.

As you can see, CETA is a lot like one of Harper's omnibus budget bills. It's one-tenth trade and nine-tenths ideological or pro-corporate changes to public policy that will undermine our ability to create and improve public services, protect the environment, keep health costs low, and create good local jobs. It will be a huge assault to democracy if, after agreeing to all these changes in closed-door talks with EU negotiators, Prime Minister Harper then gives us no opportunity to decide whether the deal is really in our best interests.

Stuart Trew is the Trade Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.