



# INDEPENDENT

## **These are the right-wing think tanks pushing for a worse deal than TTIP after Brexit – and their influence is frightening**

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March 12, 2018

With the demise of the toxic Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), you'd be forgiven for thinking we can all breathe easy, safe in the knowledge that our environment, food, public health, NHS and democratic sovereignty are no longer under threat.

Unfortunately, you'd be wrong.

If you thought TTIP was bad, a future UK-US trade deal could smuggle all those nasties back in, and probably with a larger chance of success.

We're talking beef injected with growth hormones, chickens washed with chlorine and – most worrying of all – widespread use of antibiotics in agriculture, boosting bacterial resistance to drugs, an existential threat that is right up there with global warming and nuclear war.

Not to mention the threat to our democracy itself posed by the infamous Investor-State Dispute Settlements (ISDS) whereby private companies can sue a government for loss of profits, effectively influencing legislation. And of course, nationalised industries like the NHS will be up for grabs again with the US seeking to prise it open and parcel it up for big business.

All these things, the US will be pushing for in any trade deal. And what protection do we have against them? The answer is worryingly little. Why? Because we have a Conservative government that is largely in sympathy with many of the US aims.

And lest there be any doubts about just how sympathetic the parts of Government tasked with negotiations are, we only have to look at the recently leaked documents from the Initiative for Free Trade (IFT). These detail plans for an “unprecedented” coalition of right-wing libertarian and hard-Brexit think tanks to hold “shadow trade talks” that will “hash out an ideal” US-UK trade deal.

This coalition includes groups like America's Cato Institute, co-founded by billionaire oil magnate Charles Koch, which frequently lobbies against climate change legislation. On the UK side, you can count The Legatum Institute, a free-trade Brexiteer think tank that has

recommended dropping the EU's precautionary principle to boost trade— the very thing that protects us from all those chlorinated chickens and hormone-fed cows.

There should be little doubt that this coalition will be pushing for the most pro-business, screw-the-little-man trade deal possible. They will not hesitate to drop any and all protections to promote free trade. And their influence is frightening. The organisation Trade secretary Liam Fox founded, Atlantic Bridge, provides links between several of these neo-con and far-right think tanks across the Atlantic. He even helped launch the IFT, the group organising the talks.

At the IFT launch party, he told its founder, Conservative MP Daniel Hannan, he would be “a very, very willing partner in your great and wonderful quest.”

This was a launch party attended, incidentally, by Boris Johnson and held in the Foreign Office, a move that was criticised as breaching the ministerial code, so partisan was the message it sent out.

Apart from their close interweaving with government, the groups making up the shadow talks have huge resources and influence on both sides of the Atlantic. Their connection with big business means they have the money and power to get what they want. To do this, they intend to draw up model legislation that will provide a “blueprint” for actual negotiations. This method of effectively pre-writing the rule book has been used successfully before by the right-wing think tanks involved, such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). Its “Mandate for Leadership” document included 344 policy recommendations for the Trump administration, 64 per cent of which were adopted, according to the group.

Libertarian-style free trade will be the big push of the recommendations these think tanks produce, and that means a threat to our food and environmental protections, workers' rights, democratic sovereignty and NHS – all the threats we thought we'd seen off with TTIP. But what could make a UK-US trade deal even worse than TTIP is that we have even less say in what gets traded away and less power to stop it.

At least with the EU-US deal there would ultimately have been a vote in the EU parliament allowing MEPs from all member states to have their say. But if Liam Fox's trade bill goes through, the Government will have the power to pass trade deals with Trump and co without a trace of scrutiny or veto from MPs. It would effectively give negotiators carte blanche to trade away any and all of our hard-won protections without the nuisance of democratic oversight.

TTIP was bad but it was public awareness and pressure that ultimately saw it off. The journey towards a UK-US trade deal has only just begun. Already the forces of global capitalism and big business are seeking to mark their influence on it. Just as with TTIP, they hold all the cards, but just as with TTIP we have awareness, numbers, and ultimately our voices as our weapons.

And we will need them. It's going to be a long, hard struggle.