

GATS - Privatising all Services!

In secret, governments are negotiating the end to all non-profit public services. In November 2002, 130 plus governments expect to quietly sign an agreement called GATS, General Agreement on Trade in Services, which will lay all government services open for international tender, and no doubt international labour. That is, foreign, lower paid nurses, teachers, water technicians, posties and transport workers.

Public services are next in line for the WTO's corporate battering ram.

Global corporations have been so successful in persuading governments worldwide that their agendas are the same... that the pursuit of corporate profit and the good of society are one and the same, that their access to many areas of public life has already been attained. Quality of service and democratic access has not necessarily improved.

Services are the fastest growing sector in international trade, and employs 72% of Australians. Services offer rich pickings for canny corporations. And of all public services, health, education and water are shaping up to be the most lucrative. Global expenditures on water services now exceed \$1 trillion every year; on education, they exceed \$2 trillion; and on health care, they exceed \$3.5 trillion.

The USA might suggest a model for the dismantling of public services which GATS will unleash all over the world. In fact, much of the GATS policies and the World Trade Organisation policies are designed to increase USA mega corporation domination of world markets.

In America, health care has already become a huge business, with giant health care corporations registered on the New York Stock Exchange. Rick Scott, the president of Colombia, the world's largest for-profit hospital corporation, is clear that health care is a business, no different to any widget manufacturer.

He has publicly vowed to destroy every public hospital in North America... doctors, he says, are not 'good corporate citizens'. Americans spend twice as much on Health as a percent of their bloated GNP, yet over service the rich, and cannot really care for 40 million of their own increasingly large poor segment of society.

Meanwhile, investment houses like Merrill Lynch are already predicting that public education will be globally privatised over the next decade the way public health has been. They say there is an untold amount of profit to be made when this happens.

The European Union recently announced that every publicly run school in Europe must be twinned with a corporation by the end of the decade. The conquest of foreign market and support of big business has now become a key common strategy among universities around the world. So much for academic freedom!

Many parts of the 'Third World' have been forced to dismantle their public infrastructures in recent decades under International Monetary Fund imposed structural adjustment programs. In order to be eligible for debt relief, for example, dozens of 'developing' countries have been forced to abandon public social programs over the last 20 years.

Millions of people in 100 countries are now without basic social services, lower standard of living than 20 years ago.

The World Bank is now forcing the same countries to privatise their water services and is openly working with corporate water giants like Vivendi and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux, to establish their 'rights' to profiteer in the Third World. Bolivian people have been shot protesting water charges that cost a third of their wages.

Now, through the GATS negotiations, these corporations want binding and irreversible rules guaranteeing them access to government service contracts everywhere in the world. And they are succeeding.

Already, over 40 countries, including all of Europe, have listed education within the realm of the GATS, opening up their public education sectors to foreign-based corporate competition.

Almost 100 countries have done the same with health care. As the new talks progress, it will be very hard for any country to swim against the tide...even if they try.

Disturbingly, GATS also includes authority over 'environmental services' and natural resource protection. Our parks, wildlife, river systems, and forests could all become contested areas, as global transnational 'environmental service' corporations demand the competitive model.

Frighteningly, there can be no local restrictions on quality of graduates and service standards; this would be seen as a "barrier to free trade".

How will 72% of Australian workers in health, environment, childcare, transport, tourist, broadcast, social work, dentist, teaching, and office staff feel should cheap foreign labour enter the Australian work force? It has already happened with the 'Emerald Affair'.

How did we allow Australian public assets like our refugee/prison facilities, to be owned and operated by the multinational USA Corporation, Wackenhut?

Remember Beazley and Howard wanted Australia to sign the MAI Treaty... later shown not to be Australia's best interests! Well, GATS is the rebirth of the MAI, but with more clout!

Perhaps some of the \$800 billion that has come into Australia in the last decade to buy our Australian industries and property, the profits of which leave Australia untaxed, has influenced Canberra.

Ask your, elitist, self-serving, snout-in-the-trough party politicians why they remain silent on the GATS issue!

I can only ask:

- *Have YOU had a gutful yet?*
- *Are YOU hurting enough to do something about it?*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON GATS

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