

BEWARE THE GATS!

YET ANOTHER INTERNATIONAL TREATY THAT THREATENS DEMOCRACY

Back in 1994 the National Government signed onto an international agreement that aims to lock open all New Zealand's services – including education, health, broadcasting, tourism, waste management, postal services and more - to foreign companies. No one, including Parliament, had any say in how far the Government committed our services to those rules. The Agreement is known as the General Agreement on Trade in Services or GATS and it is run by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva.

Now the Labour Government is involved in new negotiations to bring more of our services under those rules. These began in 2000. On 31 March 2003 the Government is required to tell other WTO members in Geneva what new services NZ is prepared to 'offer'. Yet few people know this Agreement exists, let alone that these new talks are happening and what their effect could be.

The Government has promised to post a 'consultation' document on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) website (www.mfat.govt.nz) but this has yet to appear. That shows how shallow any 'consultation' is likely to be! There is no intention to debate what the GATS means for democracy, te Tiriti and the social, economic and cultural well-being of people in Aotearoa New Zealand – unless we force that debate to happen.

This is basically a re-run of our challenges to the process and content of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, the 'MAI', back in 1998. Coordinated campaigns around the world brought those negotiations to a standstill. We can do it again with the GATS.

Ten reasons why we should be opposed to the GATS

1. Because the Government is negotiating, in secret, an extension to yet another binding international treaty that overrides te Tiriti o Waitangi.
2. Because this Agreement is based on an economic model that treats the world as a market place where every service is a commodity to be bought and sold, and where social justice, human rights, morality and mutual obligations have no place.
3. Because the GATS puts the interests of big foreign corporations ahead of people's rights to affordable, accessible and quality services.
4. Because the GATS is fundamentally anti-democratic: it prohibits central and local government, and bodies who are performing delegated responsibilities, from using policies, regulations and practices that give preference to local firms and restrict foreign control of our services, once the government has 'committed' those sectors to the rules of GATS.
5. Because the secret process of negotiating the GATS denies the public, parliamentary and tangata whenua any effective role.
6. Because the GATS aims to lock us all into the free market model of privatisation, deregulation, unrestricted foreign investment, user charges, contracting out, flexible labour markets and commercial Treaty settlements that we've experienced since 1984.
7. Because this Agreement is meant to be almost impossible to pull back from, even when the market model has failed or people and governments want a different approach.
8. Because the protection 'reserved' for Maori makes no mention of te Tiriti and does nothing to address the real impacts of GATS on recognition of mana whenua, protection of taonga, promotion of the language and culture, creation and protection of decent jobs, culturally-appropriate models of development, affordable access to good quality utilities and services, and ensuring that foreign investment applications don't impede Tiriti claims.
9. Because claims that the GATS will give 'exporters' of services like education, construction, tourism, consultancy and Transend better access to other countries 'markets' are highly debateable, and few ordinary New Zealanders will receive any trickle down benefits while many more will bear the costs of opening up NZ's services to even more foreign control.
10. Because the world needs a different system of rules for an equitable trading system that is based on values of social justice, decolonisation, accountability and self-determination.

Remember the MAI?

The MAI was defeated because people all over the world organized and forced their governments to back down. In Aotearoa NZ that campaign was spread across local government, Maori, students, Grey Power, the Alliance, unions, development agencies, community groups, campaigns against casinos and electricity privatizations, churches, talkback callers, and many more ordinary New Zealanders. Through pressure in Parliament, city councils, the media and other forums we eventually forced the Government to change its position and support the suspension of the MAI negotiations.

Here we go again

There is no evidence that MFAT or the Government has learned anything from the MAI. The negotiations are secret. There has been no public consultation until this belated token effort, which still gives very little information. There have been no open hui with Maori and no sign that a Treaty Impact Analysis has been prepared. There have been no parliamentary debates and local government has been sidelined.

How can we find out more?

To help people understand the GATS, what it means for Aotearoa NZ, and what is proposed in the new round of negotiations, ARENA has produced a detailed guide called *Serving Whose Interests?* It is written by Jane Kelsey and can be bought or downloaded from www.arena.org.nz after 30 January 2003. A copy has been sent to all MPs, mayors and others. More information and links can be found on www.canadians.org, www.wdm.org.uk, www.world-psi.org, www.aftinet.org.au.

What can we do about the GATS?

There are already signs of disagreement within the Government. It's time that people's voices were heard, with demands that the Government:

- Abandons the 31 March deadline and stops its work on the GATS negotiations
- Examines and reports in detail on the implications of the existing GATS agreement for current and future policy and regulation, what it would mean if extended to other NZ services, and what the more extensive GATS rules being proposed in Geneva would mean.
- Commissions an independent Treaty Impact Analysis of what the current GATS rules and proposed new commitments could mean for Maori and te Tiriti
- Opens the debate about who should control NZ's services, based on what principles and priorities, and how NZ governments can reclaim control of these decisions from the WTO.
- Shows leadership by promoting an alternative economic model for world trade that put the rights and needs of people and poorer countries before those of transnational corporations.

What can you do?

- Write to the Prime Minister demanding a proper consultation along these lines.
- Write to your MP, Mayor and others asking their response to ARENA's report.
- Ask your library to order the ARENA report or buy a copy from ARENA (\$20 and \$3 p&p).
- Contact your union – the CTU is coordinating a campaign, details will be on www.unions.org.nz
- Write to the papers, ring talkback, organize meetings and get the word around.
- Join the international day of action on 13 March by organizing local events.
- Other action suggestions are on ARENA's web page or contact ARENA at PO Box 2450 Christchurch, ph. 03 339 6341, arena.nz@clear.net.nz