

Secret Trade Deals. Wikileaks, and the Redistribution of Power

A Conversation with Binoy Kampmark. Global Research News Hour episode 115

By [Michael Welch](#) and [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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"What we are pressing for is not the power to be Big Brother, watching everyone from above, but rather a flock of Little Sisters, watching government from below. All that the Wikileaks phenomenon adds to that effort is the ability to share information beyond the control of any one government's laws limiting that effort." -Micah L. Sifry [1]

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As these remarks are being written, leaders from twelve Pacific Rim countries, including Canada, are meeting in Atlanta Georgia in order to hammer out an Agreement-in-Principle on the largest economic treaties ever contemplated, the so-called Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP.)

As was disclosed on a [previous program](#), the TPP has been drafted with an unprecedented degree of secrecy, and has been criticized by environmental and social justice groups for compromising health care access, food safety, the environment, labour rights and a whole battery of areas of concern affecting the wider citizenry.

It was the whistle-blower upload platform Wikileaks which provided some exposure of sections of this agreement. Back in November of 2013, it released the 95 page, 30,000-word draft text of the Intellectual Property Rights Chapter. This [IP chapter](#) detailed wide-ranging measures which would modify laws affecting patents on drugs and other goods, trademarks, copyright, and industrial design. These provisions would have wide-ranging consequences for individual rights, civil liberties, internet providers, publishers, and internet privacy within TPP member countries.

Two months later, Wikileaks disclosed the draft text of the Environment Chapter. The [draft Consolidated Text](#) appears to contain no mandated clauses or meaningful enforcement mechanisms for resolving environmental disputes arising out of the treaty's subsequent implementation.

In her analysis of the Environmental Chapter, Professor **Jane Kelsey** of New Zealand notes that the

environment is threatened by the industrial activity of corporations. [2] The Investment Chapter, if investor protection provisions in similar trade agreements are any indication, would empower foreign investors to sue governments attempting to move or enforce environmental laws which could theoretically cost those companies profits. The Investment Chapter therefore would seemingly override the comparatively toothless mechanisms in the Environment Chapter. This effectively prioritizes profit-making over the welfare of the planet.

Wikileaks has therefore served as a valuable mechanism for providing transparency into secretive dealings by State authorities.

Are there fundamental differences between these sorts of grassroots watchdog mechanisms and the more traditional “top-down” instruments, such as Freedom of Information laws?

Melbourne, Australia based lecturer Binoy Kampmark has made this question the focus of a recent paper entitled: *The Transparency Movement in Geopolitical Economy: WikiLeaks, Economic Diplomacy and the Redistribution of Power*. In this week’s episode of the Global Research News Hour, Dr. Kampmark elaborates on the merits of this emerging form of hactivism using the TPP as a case study.

Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, teaching within the Bachelor of Social Science (Legal and Dispute Studies) program. He spoke to the Global Research News Hour October 2, 2015 while in Winnipeg, Canada to present at an International Geopolitical Economy Research Group Conference.

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Notes:

1) Micah L. Sifry (February, 2011) [Wikileaks and the Age of Transparency \(p. 164\)](#)

2) <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/21372-wikileaks-on-the-trans-pacific-partnership-environment-chapter-toothless-public-relations-exercise>

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