

The world trade organisation



The World Trade Organisation is an organisation in which countries from all over the globe can commit to and then trade under, enjoying the many benefits such as a growing markets, rules and regulations which prevent unfair trading. In theory it allows every country to be on a level playing field. “ The WTO is a rules-based, member-driven organization – all decisions are made by the member governments, and the rules are the outcome of negotiations among members. (WTO web-site) The organisation is in theory liberating developing countries, preventing the more developed countries having dominance as a result of their sheer size and resulting force, and throwing their weight around.

Unfortunately the latter appears to have occurred. With not just one country but a select few of the most developed countries having an overwhelming influence over some of the most important WTO’s decisions. They have seen the WTO as an opportunity to take control from the top, fully aware that their will be few substantial objections from developing countries from fear of repercussions, such as a decline in inward investment into their country and a stop in demand for their products. It is not through the WTO’s preference that this has taken place, it appears as though they have little alternative other than to give a majority of power or at least show little resistance to their demands.

They have within their borders some of the leading markets in the world, what would the WTO be without them? It would have relatively little relevance in the overall world economy. An organisation consisting of developing countries would be a waste of time, any rules and regulations would simply prevent those countries from even having a chance of staying

with in distance of the most powerful developed countries. This is not my own harsh criticism of the WTO, this is the general consensus amongst some of the developing countries representatives serving at the WTO conferences. There is a growing frustration that the US and the EU particularly the UK are having too much of a leading role in an organisation which is supposedly democratic. There are many examples of the WTO violating their own principles all of which need detailed examination to understand the cause of their frustration.

The two countries who I have concentrated on the most are the UK and the US; this is because they are the two who are the main culprits in the eyes of those being unfairly treated. A main source of displeasure is that of the sheer demands and amount of hours required at the conference with an average of 12 meetings a day all roughly starting at the same time. This may appear as a tedious complaint, however it is vital to have a representative at each and every meeting to put across their opinion and discuss their countries own problems and ideas of trading. There is an enormous demand on governments to provide a presence at the meetings or be left behind. For the larger governments this is of no concern, they have the human resources to cover such demands and when in need of expert advice they can fly in experts from the relevant ministries.

But the smaller countries with only a limited finance from the government struggle to keep up. This is evident from the interview with an African negotiator on the web site of CAFOD. ([www. CAFOD. org](http://www.CAFOD.org)). “ It’s not workable.

They know you are weak and you walk out frustrated. I've been attending meetings for four years and it's hard to write two lines about how my country has benefited. " From this it could be believed that it is a deliberate intention from the WTO, or dominating countries to timetable meetings in such a compact way preventing the less developed from even attending let alone contributing to the meetings discussion. If not deliberate then it is negligence on their part, not taking in to consideration their restricted resources but this is unlikely. This is blatant oppression of the less developed countries.

If " all decisions are made by member governments" isn't it a vital requirement for all governments to be present? The counter argument for this could be that it is an expectation of the WTO for all governments to have a representative attending every meeting and if not the blame can only lay with that particular government. This collapses with the mentioning of the " Green Room" meetings on the Corpwatch website. " The WTO and the major developed countries attempt to have a non-transparent and exclusive process, with " Green Room" meetings of a handful of pre-selected countries" It can't be expected for all members of the WTO to decide on issues when they are not even present, not through their own resources but through lack of invitation. This is only one example of the devious techniques used by the WTO to favour the powerful countries. A prime example of the on-going theme of under minding the smaller countries at meetings can be of the last minute declaration issued at Qatar at the Geneva conference 2001. The chairman and director general constructed a declaration totally

ignorant to the views of the developing countries and totally biased towards the leading countries.

Furthermore the Chairman was to add insult to injury by “ refusing to include opposing views of many developing countries in the text or in an annex” It doesn’t just rely on the status of the country as to whether or not the WTO treats you oppressively, it depends on the nature of your trade. If the leading powers, (this being the US and UK rather than the WTO itself) can benefit from an adaptation of the regulations, then they will see fit to do so, by manipulating the organisation. Australia being a wealthy country itself is having difficulty with the WTO’s stance or lack of it on subsidies into agriculture. Australia no longer gives subsidies to their farmers, this being in line with the idea of free trade, which the WTO promotes and regulates. However they have been severely undermined by the continuation of subsidies in “ wealthier trading partners” countries, no guesses required on who this might be. They are allowed because of the US and Europe’s power to write the rules to suit themselves.

” (www. caa. org. au) As a result, being undermined means being undercut on the world market.

Australia are being punished for abiding by the rules of the WTO, whilst the US and EU are helping themselves to an unfair competitive advantage. It is too simple to conclude that the WTO is totally to blame for the oppressive attitude towards less developed countries, and those with unpopular products. Because there are two other crucial players in this farce that they call a democratic organisation. Both the US and EU are displaying a lack of

ethics in their attempt to personally mould the WTO into an organisation which works towards their own trading ideals, consisting of no moral principles. The WTO has to foot some of the blame. Reading through the literature offered on the official web-site.

They promote themselves as a saviour to the dysfunctional world trade economy. Some could claim these current times a success. The WTO now functions in accordance to the US' and EU's expectations. If this is the future of the WTO then there will never be a level playing field; the likes of Africa will always be shooting uphill.