

**Ruth Rikowski, Globalisation, Information and Libraries, Chandos Publishing (Oxford) Limited, 2005, 393 pages, ISBN 84334 084 4, £39**

Reviewed by John Pateman

This very important book looks at the implications of the World Trade Organisation, (WTO), the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreements. The author examines these issues from an Open Marxist perspective. The result is an extremely well written political analysis of the nature of capitalism and what this might mean for libraries in the future.

Part One introduces Globalisation and the WTO. Globalisation – or global capitalism - is the latest and most developed form of capitalism. The WTO exists to sustain and develop global capitalism. It is an undemocratic organisation and favours the rich countries and big business. “But even if the WTO were to be abolished tomorrow something else would replace it, because this is the logic of global capitalism”.

Part Two focuses on the GATS, which seeks to convert public goods such as health, education and libraries into commodities which can be traded in the market place for profit. Examples are given of the commercialisation, privatisation and capitalisation of library services in the UK. It is argued that Best Value, Public Library Standards and the People’s Network are part of this process. There is some awareness of and resistance to GATS from the library world, most notably from Canadian library organisations.

Part Three considers TRIPS, which aims to convert intellectual property rights (including copyright, patents and trade marks) into commodities which can be bought and sold. TRIPS is more concerned with economic rights, rather than moral rights. For example, TRIPS can have a very negative impact on traditional knowledge. Indigenous medicines are patented by pharmaceutical companies without any recognition or reward given to their creators. TRIPS also has serious implications for the library and information profession with regard to free access to information, intellectual freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of information.

Part Four is an Open Marxist theoretical perspective on WTO, GATS and TRIPS. It challenges the widely accepted view that There Is No Alternative (TINA) to capitalism. Marx’s theory of value is central to an understanding of intellectual labour, knowledge management and the knowledge revolution. GATS is about transforming state funded library services into internationally tradable commodities. TRIPS is about transforming intellectual labour into intellectual capital. The objective is to create trade, trade and more trade. But the author ends on a positive note:

“There is only one real solution – to terminate global capitalism, and to replace it with a better, kinder, fairer social, economic, and political system – to replace it with socialism, and eventually with communism...Let humans rejoice, then, in the world that they have developed with their labour – do not let them be dominated by it. Let us look towards a better future and a brighter world.”

The book is well laid out, with clear type, logical headings and an excellent bibliography and index. It is suitable for library practitioners, academics, students and working people who are interested in WTO, GATs and TRIPs. Like Marx himself, Ruth Rikowski seeks not only to understand the world, but to change it as well.