

Report of the book launch for Ruth Rikowski's book

'Globalisation, Information and Libraries: the implications of the World Trade Organisation's GATS and TRIPS Agreements'

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Held at London South Bank University, Keyworth Centre, on 26th April 2005

Ruth Rikowski got her first book published with Chandos publishers in February 2005, and had a very successful book launch for it at London South Bank University on 26th April 2005, where some 70 people attended. Her book builds on her many published articles on the topic of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Martha Spiess, who has worked with Indymedia Maine, came over from the States to video the launch, primarily for the purpose of sharing the information and ideas with interested folks in the US and Canada. The speakers at the launch included Dr Lee Rose, Dave Black, Linda Kaucher, Professor Dave Hill, George Bell, Matti Kohonen, Tom Lines and Dr Glenn Rikowski.

The ***Vice-Chancellor at London South Bank University, Professor Deian Hopkin***, introduced the book launch saying it was the longest programme for a launch that he had ever seen, and that it looked very exciting.. He spoke about the wonderful Keyworth Centre building that the launch was held in.

Professor Hopkin said that he first properly met Ruth at a David Gurteen Knowledge Café, on an occasion when there was lots of knowledge but no café! He described Ruth as a distinguished writer with an eclectic range. In the latest elections he noted that often not much consideration was really being given to some of the important issues, such as the issues contained in Ruth's book, and that we are often powerless against overwhelming forces.

He said that Ruth has a lot to say about issues and that her book has lots of data and information but more importantly, powerful arguments. Ruth's book brings an understanding about issues not just about libraries, but about the wider issue of intellectual property rights. He is sure that Ruth's book will do well and is glad of her association with them. He concluded saying that, hopefully, we can discuss these issues at South Bank, even if in the political arena they do not do so.

Ruth Rikowski then spoke, saying that it was all very exciting – getting her first book published. She dedicated her book to her Aunt Olive, because if it had not been for her aunt encouraging and giving her that initial inspiration as a child (her aunt had been a teacher) she would never have gone to university and she would never have written her book.

Ruth joined a group called *Information for Social Change* in 2001, which challenges the dominant paradigms of library and information work. She was then delighted to find that there were some librarians around the world that had investigated the topic of the GATS and TRIPS – the 2 agreements that are being developed at the WTO that could affect libraries, in particular. This included the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) and Canada (particularly the British Columbia Library Association and the Canadian Library Association).

Ruth went on the *You and Yours* programme on Radio 4 and spoke about her fear that public libraries might be turned into private companies at some point, and that the GATS could assist with this process. A lot of people say this is scare-mongering talk, but she has given the example so many times of the private company Instant Library Ltd that ran the library service in the London Borough of Haringey for 3 years. This was the first time that a private company had taken over the running of a whole public library service in England. It has now gone back to the local authority, but once it has happened once it can happen again. It is a slippery slope. She fears that such scenarios might result in poor and disadvantaged people having to pay to go into their local library. Going back to her childhood, she loved her public library and was a passionate reader, and the thought that this might be under threat greatly disturbed her.

Ruth read the TRIPS agreement in some detail. Various intellectual property rights (IPRs) are covered in the TRIPS agreement, including copyright, patents, trademarks, geographical indications, industrial designs and trade secrets. However, what she discovered was that the TRIPS is purely interested in the *trading* of these intellectual property rights, and is not really concerned about anything else much apart from that. It is not interested in other IPR issues such as in endeavouring to maintain the balance in copyright, for example.

It came to Ruth, in a 'flash of inspiration', that services and intellectual property rights were being transformed into international tradable commodities and that these commodities were being sold in the market place for profit. Items that had been outside of the trade agenda that were dear to our heart were being pushed on to the trade agenda. Furthermore, value that was extracted from labour was being embedded in these commodities. In this way, global capitalism was being perpetuated, and Ruth fears about how this will affect ordinary people.

NGOs and various other groups on the left have looked at the implications of these agreements in other areas, but libraries, specifically, have not been examined before. So, Ruth's area is new. Libraries can often be marginalised, but surely they are crucial as part of a civilised society, and that we need to try to preserve them.

Her book proved to be a very large project and very demanding. It also had a very clear political message, that she does not like global capitalism and thinks that we should look for an alternative. She provided lots of references in an endeavour to try to persuade people of her political message, and to show that she had put a lot of thought into it..

Ruth emphasised that there is a need to try to break out of conformist politics, and this can be done by writing and having meetings and discussions. Also, that there is a need for more debate. Traditional politics is more or less dead and that there is nothing to choose between the two main parties in the UK. The Labour Party is now a Tory Mark II party.. She found the recent election campaign very boring – Tony Blair or Michael Howard. It is like choosing between Daz and Persil – it makes no difference.

The book had an international perspective, and Ruth examined a number of different countries in it, including USA, Canada, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, the developing world in general, India, South Africa and the UK. She placed all her findings within an Open Marxist theoretical perspective, arguing that we need to make Marxism applicable for the global capitalist world that we live in today. Marx began his analysis of capitalism with the commodity, in *Capital, Vol. 1*. This is where our analysis must begin. We need to go back to Marx's basic understanding of capitalism, and make it applicable for the global capitalist world that we live in today, she said. The logic of capitalism is the commodification of all that surrounds us. The GATS and TRIPS assists with this commodification process, Ruth said, as services and intellectual property rights are being transformed into international tradable commodities. And this is why we have to try to take hold of the situation and look for an alternative.

Ruth spoke at a conference recently at Cambridge, and George Monbiot was also on the programme. One of the other speakers on the programme was a representative from the WTO. This man seemed quite 'down' that people were not currently negotiating/discussing issues around the GATS, and that they could not move the GATS programme forward. To this extent, the anti-global capitalist movement has been successful, Ruth said. Originally, many thought that our public services were safe from the GATS. The agreement is complex. But today, there are many elements of competition in our public services, and so they become vulnerable to the GATS. It is now generally recognised that our public services fall under the GATS. This threatens our way of life.

Ruth emphasises how the media is forever trying to pull the wool over our eyes and that we need to get beyond the soap, froth and rubbish and that writing a book provides a wonderful vehicle to enable us to do this.

Then, ***Dr Lee Rose, Head of the Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Foundation Studies, London South Bank University*** spoke. He paid tribute to Ruth for her hard work leading up to the culmination of her wonderful book. 4-5 years ago Ruth was looking for work at South Bank. He found himself talking to this "infectious, tenacious, intelligent and bright individual" –

and that, of course, they took her on! She worked with them on the KM masters course and Ruth was instrumental in implementing that course.

He said that Ruth is a wonderful conversationalist. They have discussed a number of issues together, particularly in the area of her Marxist perspective on knowledge management and intellectual capital. He agrees with Ruth that we definitely do need more debate. He hopes that Ruth's book will help to open up that debate, and he is sure that it will.

Lee said that what is also quite exciting is that Ruth is now starting work on her second book – she is editing a book on knowledge management. He said that she is a very energetic person, and that he does not know where she gets the energy from, and that she has co-opted him on to the project. He concluded by saying that he thinks that this is the beginning of great things for her.

Dave Black, Author of Helen MacFarlane and Co-Editor of Hobgoblin introduced a Marxist dimension. He began by pointing out that the latest issue of *Hobgoblin* has 'Marx Reloaded' as its caption. This is slightly referencing the Hollywood movie – 'The Matrix', where one of the characters says that the Matrix is everywhere and is all around us. This is a world that has been pulled over your eyes, in order to blind you to the truth. Capital is a bit like that, Dave says. But humans are not virtual entities of someone else's imagination, but are flesh and blood, whose power to labour is extracted by capital and prevents us from being truly human. Only in capitalism is there a never-ending drive to produce ever more value and more wealth, rather than satisfying human need.

Dave said that when they started the online version of *Hobgoblin* they were delighted to receive an article by Ruth, about globalising intellectual property rights. He points out that in her book, Ruth offers us various explanations for TINA (the There is No Alternative philosophy), including religion, human nature and the death of communism. Ruth goes on to focus on Marx and Postone in her analysis, arguing that services and intellectual property rights are being transformed into international tradable commodities, and that value that is being extracted from labour becomes embedded in these commodities.

Linda Kaucher has given a lot of talks about the trade agenda and has attended many important trade-related meetings. She is also interested in the trade/gender issue. Linda said that Ruth's book is important because it brings the trade agenda to the UK and to the developed world in general. Trade and development are usually put together in the same breath. Trade is seen to be 'over there'.. This might all sound nice and kind but this approach keeps trade off centre stage. This focus runs across many areas such as the EU Services Directive and the Trade Justice Movement. Basically, civil society in general supports the view that trade is a development issue.

MPs are not interested in trade much and there is little debate about it. It is a trick, to keep it as a development issue, and is in the interest of big business to do this. Linda was at the WTO in the last few days. There were quite a few

UK parliamentarians there and they wanted more information about the UK trade agenda and Ruth's book provides them with this information.

Parliamentary scrutiny also keeps trade off the agenda in the developed world. There is a parliamentary committee for each department, but it is only the International Development Committee that looks at the trade agenda. The DTI does not focus on it.

Linda concludes by saying that Ruth's book could be a definitive start on a questioning of the whole neo-liberal agenda.

Professor Dave Hill began his talk by saying that Ruth and Glenn Rikowski have had a real impact on him. He used to be a 'streetfighter', an agitator, a politician and a trade union organiser and then he became an academic.

Then, together with Mike Cole he set up the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators in 1989, and they all used to sit in Tony Benn's front room and discuss and write about radical left issues and that they all learnt from each other. Following on from this, Dave set up the Institute for Education Policy Studies, and then the Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies.

During the time of the Hillcole Group and when Tony Green was teaching at the Institute of Education, University of London, in 1992, Dave found himself sitting next to Glenn Rikowski and Marxist theory was being discussed. Dave knows how to rabble rouse but he did not know much theory. And Glenn pushed him. Through Glenn, he met Ruth. He read Glenn's work and then he read Ruth's work. And all this made him think. Thus, Glenn and Ruth pushed him and he has learnt a lot from them, particularly in regard to Marxist analysis of society.

Dave then said that what Ruth has done for libraries, he has done in the area of education. It is a direct parallel. Dave has been working for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for the last 6 months, looking at the impact of neo-liberalism on schools. He has been looking at the impact on schools, school meals, school access etc. and his work falls under 3 main categories. Firstly, the impact on workers, secondly, the impact on access, particularly in regard to who gets frozen out by race and class and thirdly, issues around democracy – who makes the main decisions in regard to schools? Is it the WTO, is it big business or is it local schools or what?

Dave concludes by highlighting the fact that there are gross inequalities in the world and that:

“This is why I fight. I do the best I can. And what I do has been influenced by the work of Glenn Rikowski and the work of Ruth Rikowski.”

George Bell from London South Bank University said that he had been looking at how education can enhance students for themselves, rather than as

a vehicle for enabling others. There is a need to challenge the existing paradigms and to be constructive participants. He teaches international management which includes looking at transferring knowledge across a borderless world. George is trying to take some of Ruth's ideas, and to place them, in particular, into the areas of international culture. Furthermore, he says that MBAs in themselves are becoming commodities.

Having spoken to Ruth he now feels a depth of responsibility in regard to the way in which students at university are taught. We need to challenge students and to develop a critical pedagogy, he says. George concludes by saying that Ruth has given them an opportunity and they now need to take the debate forward. He thanks Ruth for helping them to refocus in the publication of her book.

Matti Kohonen, one of the Founding members of ATTAC, UK asks – 'Where does radical politics take place these days'? For him, the most interesting political debate recently did not take place in the UK or USA elections, but at Porte Allegro at the World Social Forum (WSF). There were many different groups of people there, such as NGOs, academics, trade unionists and activists. These people are thinking about some of the foremost issues that are happening today and Ruth discusses some of these issues in her book.

He likes to consider what the alternatives are and to look ahead. We do not like the commodification of knowledge, but despite the GATS and TRIPS – what can be done? Matti offers some innovative, creative alternatives.

CopyLeft and the Creative Commons - with CopyLeft and the Creative Commons Institute the author reserves and lists certain rights that they want to protect and say that, apart from that, their work can be used and shared. This is a significant movement and was launched in UK at the beginning of this year.

Free and Open Source Software Movement – this is involved with keeping the source code open, so that it can be improved and there can be a peer-review of how the programme was made. This is knowledge creation in a non-commodified way, Matti says, or at least, it opens up the opportunity for it to be non-commodified.

Another project that interests Matti is the *World Social Library* that is being set up at the World Social Forum. The idea is that people take a book along on a topic that is relevant to the issues that are being discussed, and that a 'Library of Alternatives' is developed, which will also be online. Then, many more people will be able to read the books and benefit.

Matti spoke about ATTAC, which is where Matti and Ruth met. He was one of the founding members of ATTAC, UK, in 2001. ATTAC was a response to a perception within Europe that the market had taken over democracy. That market forces were dominating rather than elected politicians and elected governments. Then, ATTAC took on a number of other issues, including the

GATS. Ruth became involved and said –‘Let’s start a working group on GATS’.. They all thought it was a good idea and Matti said it was a good event. He is really glad that a lot of us are thinking about these issues, and he thinks that the book will contribute in a great way.

Matti concludes by saying that he is glad that Ruth’s book is out and that he congratulates Ruth.

Afterword: ATTAC GATS event at LSE – Ruth spoke briefly about the ATTAC GATS events at LSE, which was held there in November 2002. About 70 people attended and it was a very successful event. There were various workshops, considering the implications of the GATS for different public service sectors, such as libraries, education, health, security and pensions. For more information about this event, see the ejournal *Information for Social Change*, at: <http://www.libr.org/ISC/articles/17-Rikowski-3.html>

Tom Lines, Consultant in Trade and Development started by saying that he had been at an election hustings for the Green Party on the day of the book launch – he left the Labour Party a long time ago. Or rather – it left him.

He explained how he and Ruth got to know each other a few years ago, when they were both concerned about the impact of the GATS on our public services, and that they had both worked together on the area. This was shortly after the World Development Movement began its campaign on the GATS (but it could only focus on the developing world) and the Green Party then took up the issue.

Then, Tom went to work at Oxfam and now he is an independent trade consultant and has been working on the area of trade and policy more broadly. He has been focusing, in particular, on commodity prices and export issues for poor countries. There is a lot of pressure on developing countries to open up their markets, which further impoverishes them.

Tom says that Ruth’s book had made an important contribution. The GATS operates in many different fields and there are many complexities. It is very important for people in their own public service sectors to consider the implications of the GATS for their own sectors and this is what Ruth has done for libraries. He commends her book to everyone.

Afterword: GATS picket outside DTI - Ruth and Tom exchanged thoughts about how they had both been involved in a very effective picket outside the Department of Trade and Industry on the GATS. An A5 leaflet was produced which explained what the GATS was, what it implied, and asked people to write to their MPs about it. They handed it out to people outside the DTI in Victoria Street and civil servants were walking along the street, reading the flyer.

(N.B. Tom, Ruth, Linda and Glenn also spoke at a session on the GATS that was held at Sussex University in May 2002).

Dr Glenn Rikowski, Senior Lecturer in Education Studies, University College Northampton and author of *The Battle in Seattle: its significance for education, 2001*, focused his talk largely around his book on Seattle. At the end of 1999 he suddenly found himself watching the news and seeing that amazing events were happening at the World Trade Organisation in Seattle. It was going out all over the airwaves and it was on various Internet sites etc. There were students, trade unionists, NGOs etc – people from 98 different countries were bringing the WTO Ministerial meeting to a full-stop. Amazing! People were fighting back against the rule of capital and this was happening on an international basis and in a creative way.

What did Seattle have to do with education, Glenn pondered? This question was important given the fact that his job was as an Education Researcher at the University of Birmingham. He also had to find out what the GATS was, and he looked at the actual agreement. He discovered that in 1994 we had signed away our primary, secondary and higher education services (and some aspects of further education, but not all of them) to the WTO and had committed ourselves to the GATS. But after Seattle a poll was undertaken and only 12% of the population had heard of the GATS. This was how little was known about the GATS.

The first part of *The Battle in Seattle* is about the WTO and the GATS and the second half is a Marxist analysis of this – to try to understand what was going on. So, the final product, *The Battle in Seattle*, is a mixture of the personal, political, theoretical and a detailed analysis of events.

After this, he got involved in a lot of activist stuff for a couple of years. This included picketing outside DTI with Ruth and Tom, and giving speeches at various universities and trade unions etc.

Glenn posed the question – ‘What does all this say for an alternative way of life?’ Companies making profit out of services. What does this tell us about society? Do we want to live in a society where companies run schools and libraries for profit?

He ends on a semi-autobiographical note. “I am in Haralambos!”, he says. What is Haralambos, you might well ask. It is the Bible for A’ Level Sociology students. In the 6th edition there is a summary of *The Battle in Seattle*. Glenn’s work. So, what is certain is that A’ level Sociology students will be reading something about what happened in Seattle in late 1999. He concludes by saying that, may be, this will help students to start to think of alternative ways of living and to some kind of realm of human freedom.

Ruth’s concluding comment – Let us, indeed, hope that this will be the start of more debate and then to a deeper, more theoretical understanding and analysis of global capitalism, which can then pave the way for us to look for an alternative.

Ruth Rikowski:

Author of *Globalisation, Information and Libraries: the implications of the*

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