

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

