

No Waltzing with TILMA

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OPSEU President, Warren (Smokey) Thomas

“TILMA is everything that business asked for.”

Gary Mar, former Alberta Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations

OPSEU members have worked for generations to ensure public services are extended and improved. This has been challenged by business interests bent on more privatization and undermining the network of regulations that enforce public policy and control corporate behaviour. Lately, a relentless series of trade deals have been promoted by the corporate sector and adopted by Canadian governments. “Instead of benefits we have seen the expansion of privatization, more inequality, more and more precarious part-time jobs and the loss of hundreds of thousands of good jobs,” says OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas. “TILMA is more of the same — and worse.”

The Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) is the latest of these threats.

TILMA was enacted in 2007 by Alberta and British Columbia with no consultations. Ontario could be next. The right of our elected governments to enact public programs in the best interests of communities is at stake.

Alberta and B.C. developed TILMA to bolster a right-wing business and political agenda. Its anti-democratic, privatization-friendly features include:

- TILMA prohibits governments from establishing new standards or regulations to restrict or impair trade, investment or labour mobility.
- A non-government “Dispute Panel” can award \$5 million in damages to a business if any government enacts a regulation, policy, or program deemed to “impair or restrict” business investment, trade or labour mobility.
- All government entities are covered — provinces, municipalities, school boards, health and social services agencies.

Here are some examples of programs and regulations that TILMA puts at risk:

- Restricting the for-profit use of public health facilities
- enacting higher standards for nursing homes

- banning smoking or pesticide use, limits to junk food in elementary schools,
- establishing ecology zones (like Ontario’s Oak Ridges Moraine)
- zoning by-laws.

The language of TILMA is designed to invoke severe restrictions on what government can do in BC and Alberta. “This is a formidable assault on the kind of work that OPSEU members do here in Ontario — it could put us seriously at risk,” Thomas said.

The goal of TILMA is to harmonize provincial public services down to the lowest common denominator.

The Ontario government pledged to consult before any inter-provincial trade agreement is negotiated. However, there have been troubling signals. The province is known to view the Alberta — British Columbia TILMA favourably. Business interests are pressuring more provinces to sign on.

For more information about the trouble with TILMA see:

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA):
<http://www.policyalternatives.ca/>

National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE): www.nupge.ca/

Rabble.ca: www.rabble.ca/