

## Press Release

# New Paper Exposes Big Tech's Plans for New WTO Rules over Data Access and Control

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## New Rules Proposed under the Guise of "E-Commerce"

8 July 2020, Washington, DC — A new paper new paper written by Deborah James of the Center for Economic and Policy Research and published by Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung examines how "big tech" corporations work to use "trade" rules to rig the rules of the global digital economy to collect more data, exercise more control over people's lives and over their workers, and amass ever more profit. It looks at what the potential impacts of these rules would be on workers, citizens, communities, developing countries, public services, safety and security, and democracy itself, and considers alternatives.

The paper, "Digital Trade Rules: A Disastrous New Constitution for the Global Economy, By and for Big Tech," by Deborah James, provides a detailed look at the efforts of companies like Amazon, Facebook, Google, Apple, and Microsoft to secure new accords at the World Trade Organization (WTO) that would allow them greater access to, and ownership of, data with minimal restrictions.

"These proposed rules are a grave threat to development, human rights, labor, and shared prosperity around the world," James said. "They are the very antithesis of the type of policies we need to rein in the cancerous and untrammled growth of the power of Big Tech."

"When it was founded in 1995," James writes, "new agreements within the WTO gave rights to the dominant industries at that time, such as agriculture, finance, services, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing. The technology industries lack such an agreement in the WTO and are seeking similar rules to these to liberalise the digitalisation that is currently transforming the global economy, particularly the governance of today's most valuable resource, which is data."

The paper details how the world's biggest tech companies seek to implement the new rules under the guise of "e-commerce" at the WTO, and in bilateral and regional trade agreements as well. These rules include:

- gaining rights to access markets globally;
- extracting and controlling personal, social, and business data around the world;
- locking in deregulation and evading future regulation;
- accessing an unlimited supply of labor that has been stripped of its rights;
- expanding power through monopolies;
- avoiding the payment of taxes.

The report comes as a group of some 76 countries has launched talks aimed at a binding agreement on digital trade at the next WTO ministerial conference. Currently, it is unclear when that will be. The planned 12th Ministerial Conference, which would have been held in Nur Sultan (Kazakhstan) last month, was postponed because of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The WTO is hoping to convene the ministerial next year.

“Some of the world’s biggest tech companies are trying to rig the market, via the WTO, to ensure that they have more ‘rights’ than developing countries and consumers all over the world,” James said. “Policymakers should take a close look at this threat to democracy, economic development, and privacy, and act to put the rights of people before mega-corporations.”

**Publication:** [www.rosalux.eu/digital-trade-rules](http://www.rosalux.eu/digital-trade-rules)

### **Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung**

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung is an internationally operating non-profit organisation for civic education. It strives to develop alternative concepts and approaches for a comprehensive process of social transformation enabling the creation of a more united and just society. The Brussels Office operates as a think tank reflecting on European and international issues of today’s society.

### **Deborah James**

Deborah James is Director of International Programs at the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC, and coordinates the global Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) network. She writes widely on issues of trade, corporate power, and development, speaks regularly with the media, and has inspired audiences through speeches in over 40 countries on these issues, including (in Spanish) throughout Latin America.

### **Center for Economic and Policy Research**

The Center for Economic and Policy Research was established in 1999 to promote democratic debate on the most important economic and social issues that affect people’s lives. In order for citizens to effectively exercise their voices in a democracy, they should be informed about the problems and choices that they face. CEPR is committed to presenting issues in an accurate and understandable manner, so that the public is better prepared to choose among the various policy options.

