The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations between the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), launched in 2013, have faced unprecedented and increasing public opposition in the EU, largely coming from European civil society groups. While the main arguments in favour of TTIP emphasise the economic benefits to consumers and businesses as well as some geostrategic advantages, its critics focus on its alleged negative impact on product safety and public policies. Carlos Taibó’s manuscript aims at contributing to this debate by offering some anarchist, anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist viewpoints.

Two main ideas predominate throughout the book. First, TTIP is argued to be an instrument at the service of US and EU multinationals and, second, public institutions fail to protect civil society interests taking the role of a so-called “transmission belt of globalisation and its deadly effects” (p. 85; own translation). TTIP is presented here as “capitalism at its rawest and most arrogant version (...). None of the issues that should worry us – inequality, speculation, ecological crisis, the patriarchal society or authoritarian and military projects – look and appear to be part of the concerns of those that negotiate an agreement such as TTIP” (p. 87; own translation). According to the author, labour unions and left-wing political parties cannot be expected to help fight multinational preferences because they have made the mistake of believing in myths such as economic growth, development, productivity, competitiveness, technology and industrialisation. Public institutions, both at the EU and national level, are argued to be at the service of multinationals’ preferences, that is, of capitalism. Thus, refuting TTIP would be a first step towards contesting the capitalist system based on the exploitation of workers, militarism, imperialism and ecological crisis.

Communicating complex economic developments such as trade agreements to ordinary citizens is challenging and, thus, *simplification* becomes essential to either garner public support or generate public opposition. I have come to understand, however, that the author’s account of the TTIP is based on a rather *simplistic* world of good and bad guys – the bad guys being multinationals and public institutions (since they both promote the capitalist system) – the good guys being civil society
organisations and the public in general (since they need to mobilise to protest against abuses from the bad guys). Moreover, it is assumed that the economic benefits of such an agreement can only be obtained by sustained losses to others. Contrary to most economic literature trade is considered here as a zero-sum game (p. 90).

The book is structured in eight chapters. Taibó starts by explaining the origins of the TTIP negotiations. This partnership is indicated to be the way the US and the EU have found to continue pushing for globalisation due to the lack of agreement in the Doha Development Round of the World Trade Organization. TTIP is linked to globalisation and globalisation is presented as the source of most world problems. Any benefit globalisation may have had is offset by its alleged costs: inequalities, irrational growth of cities, an ecological crisis, a decline in working conditions and a stimulus to the militarists’ spasms that are in the line of traditional imperialism (p. 24). Briefly, since TTIP plays along the same logic as globalisation (reduction of trade barriers), it is expected to have unacceptable costs, too.

In the second chapter, Taibó blames TTIP supporters for cheap propaganda insofar as they exaggerate the economic benefits of the agreement and the capacity of such benefits to solve EU problems. This is evidence that pro-capitalists’ customary exaggerations can ‘obviously’ be found in the cases of the European Single Market and of NAFTA since neither has lived up to their expectations. Moreover, it is argued that the estimates put forward by TTIP supporters do not take into account the negative effects of the agreement or the possibility of another financial crisis. The only winners are pointed out to be the big corporations, particularly those coming from the US since the US federal authorities will manipulate the dollar exchange rate to their own benefit. The author argues that TTIP’s true objective is not the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade but the strengthening of multinationals’ dominance by means of generating more advantageous political, economic, social and environmental scenarios. This is claimed to come as a result of a general lowering of standards and rules in both the EU and the US. Later in the chapter two additional ideas come forth: first, business lobbies have far more economic power than civil society organisations and therefore exert control over public institutions. Second, TTIP is imperialist in nature since it is the trade brother of NATO and imperialism and capitalism lead to conflict. The link between the last sections in the chapter and the cheap propaganda allegation is not really explained.

In the third chapter, the longest chapter in the book, the author asserts the TTIP will have a negative impact on different areas: agriculture, chemical products, energy and ecology, services, financial services, working conditions, women and intellectual property norms. In agriculture, for example, since US farmers are more competitive than their European counterparts, TTIP would force a reduction of costs in the EU that would only be accomplished through job and environmental losses. Further, the US would be able to impose its less exigent rules and standards in food. Similarly, the EU would also be forced to accept less stringent rules of the US in chemical products, labour regulation or discrimination against women. Unfortunately, the author does not explain why or how those alleged consequences are to become real facts; he seems to take for granted that there would be a race to the bottom. In energy matters, the author’s argument is that the EU will be able to import gas and oil from the US and this will have a negative impact on EU environmental goals. The author is convinced that access to US energy will lead to an increase in non-renewable energy sources, perhaps inferring that the present EU dependence on Russian oil and
gas is preferable. In terms of services, similar arguments are used. The ‘surprised’ reader finds out that TISA (Trade in Services Agreement) plurilateral negotiations are some proof of the perverse objectives of TTIP since, as claimed, any lowering of barriers to market access for services goes against public policies. Evidence of the ‘nasty’ TISA negotiations is offered by the fact that emerging economies have not yet shown any willingness to participate in those negotiations. Further convoluting is the claim that TTIP is to avoid or stop rather more ‘positive’ policies in the US such as Buy American or more strict banking rules. Up until that point, the author was expecting the US to impose its preferences leading to a lowering of EU rules and standards, yet it seems that in areas where the US has stronger barriers it is the EU that is going to prevail. In brief, readers would have welcomed and benefitted from rather more convincing evidence on many of the author’s statements, and perhaps a more balanced account of the impact of trade agreements, too.

In the fourth chapter Taibó argues against the inclusion of any investment arbitration system in the TTIP since it would result in US multinationals controlling EU public policies. The author believes in this respect that such a system could, for example, lead the EU to import less stringent US regulations (p. 65). The inclusion of such an arbitration system would respond to national and EU public institutions’ determination to favour multinational interests. Countries such as Venezuela, South Africa, Bolivia, India or Brazil are presented here as heroes since they have rejected such systems in their bilateral agreements. There is no review of the literature on the impact of such systems or any reference to the proposals of the Commission to improve the arbitration system procedures. The author takes for granted that any such arbitration system responds to a willingness of the EU institutions to privatise health and education (and other public policies) because this is what multinationals want (and public institutions are at the service of those companies).

In the fifth chapter, the author criticises the lack of transparency in the negotiations, in the ratification process and in the fact that the TTIP is to be a ‘living agreement’ allowing the parties to move towards greater regulatory convergence once in place. Regarding the first two issues, the author makes use of the TTIP to criticise the general procedure of trade negotiations of the EU. TTIP is presented as unprecedented in terms of secrecy and ratification even if this is not the case. As to the ‘living agreement’, the author considers this to be the way to overcome the sovereignty of parliaments; a step towards further control by the private sector. Through such a mechanism of regulatory convergence (which is not explained), multinationals would be able to reduce standards in all those aspects not included in the TTIP agreement at the time of signing, such as fracking or transgenic food.

Chapter six deals with TTIP geopolitical concerns. The author first blames both the EU and the US for having imperialist objectives but then focuses its arguments on the US. TTIP together with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would help the US to control the world and contain China (both in commercial and security terms), prevent a good relation between Russia and the EU, and continue exploiting the South. The objective of the TTIP is to “increase the commercial confrontation between economic blocs” (p. 83; own translation).

The last two chapters include a recollection of thoughts on what can and should be done to prevent the TTIP. Chapter seven is a straightforward view on how left-wing parties and labour unions have been seized by the capitalist system and its institutions and therefore cannot be trusted to protect the public interest against the
TTIP. In chapter eight, the author calls for public mobilisation against the TTIP before it is too late.

This book is clearly not targeted at scholars. It eschews the frames and insights of International Political Economy, avoids engaging in academic debates and does not try to ponder the different arguments in favour and against the TTIP on the bases of evidence. Those familiar with the topic are unlikely to learn much new. The book’s shallow and biased analysis also renders it unreliable as a synthesis. While also presenting a critical outlook of the TTIP, a much more nuanced and complete picture is drawn, for instance, in the recent book by De Ville and Siles-Brügge, *The Truth about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016).