

Fair Trade as a Movement

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At the present time neo-liberal values, whose beginning some situate in the Bretton Woods conference, are spreading and starting to prevail in the world political economy, in governments' and multilateral agencies' policies.

However this happens mostly around policies and not necessarily in peoples' projects and the so-called civil society. One example is world trade. There is an increasing perception by ordinary people of the widening of the gap between rich and poor and its relation with market liberalisation.

Nowadays there is never a World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting without a parallel contesting forum or demonstration organised by socially-oriented NGOs, political groups, coalitions, peasant organisations, intellectuals and an increasing number of individual people, in a heterogeneous movement that is showing signs of adopting broader focuses and targets, more organisation, professionalisation (e.g. The World Social Forum in Porto Alegre), and hence, whose claims, despite being silenced in many countries by the media, are being heard and taken seriously by larger sectors of the population.

Although world trade is a process best explained in the global arena, its effects are mainly felt in the domestic one.

A common criticism of the current way of economic globalisation is that international trade is now used by the large corporate interests to suit their agendas, setting up or omitting the rules and generally undermining the income of the most disadvantaged groups. For instance, it is stated that 48 of the world's poorest countries account for only 0.4 per cent of world trade. Since 1980 their share has halved.

Five hundred multinational companies now control almost two thirds of world trade, and the world's five largest companies together generate annual sales greater than the combined incomes of the forty-six poorest countries in the world (Curtis, 2001:1, Christian Aid, n/d; Willmore, 2002). IMF/World Bank are heavily criticised for requiring further trade liberalisation as a condition for loans; liberalisation that is not applied by the rich countries to their own import barriers (Oxfam, 2002).

In this context the Fair Trade initiative is relevant, as a parallel mini-system inserted into the larger one, presenting a different kind of values in order to show that a difference can be made in the outcomes of trade. This section aims at looking at the Fair Trade Market from a different perspective. Not by making a critique of its weaknesses, but by trying to understand it as an element of a broader movement, which this paper will call the Fair Trade Movement. The following analysis is not limited to the realm of Alternative Trading Organizations (ATOS) but covers a broader mobilization that, through different actions and common values, is taking place out of concern for the principles of the current dominant framework of world trade. It will examine the way collective action constructs instruments to address the outcomes of implementing values of competition, rather than those of cooperation and solidarity, and the way this effort grows beyond frontiers and is linked at present with directly affected groups and grass-roots movements that share the same cause. This critique is based on a limited definition of the so-called Fair Trade Movement, understood only in its marketing-ATOs side, but disregarding the amount of global citizen creativity, that through symbolic and practical values contests the core of the economic system: its own structure of values.

In this work the Fair Trade Movement will be understood, not merely in terms of economic values for the producer, but in a wider social context and addressing non-economic values^[1]. It will include the Fair Trade market *per se*, with three relevant actors, namely small producers, importers and certification initiatives; it will also include the Social Movements aiming at changing trade rules.

1. The Fair Trade market is known as a movement which entails not only ‘...the marketing of products at greater than free market prices’, (Leclair, 2002:949), but also as a process concerned about the conditions of production such as democratic organisations, access to credits, long term contracts, certainty on prices, support for the learning process and so on. It is also concerned with keeping the consumer informed about these facts (Barrat, 1993: 158; Beekman, 1998: 8). The actors on this level are the producers from the South (as producers and political actors), certified non-commercial importers (importer ATOs) and FT labelling organisations (Labelling ATOs).

2. Secondly the social movements demanding for a change in the world trade rules, include the Trade Justice Movement, defined as a movement integrated by northern NGOs aiming at changing international trade rules within the World Trade Organisation (see section 5); and the peasant movements (see section 4). The common factor is the democratisation of production and world trade based in values such as solidarity, as opposed to free market values and including a broader range of actors from the local and the transnational sectors.

[1] Zadek and Tiffen stress the role of ‘non-economic values and purposes’, and the principle of seeing ‘...people as the ends and not the means of economic activity’ (1998:163-164), a position that differs from the limited notion of paying higher prices to the producers, but doesn’t address the way peasant movements and those in the north aim to change the way world trade rules play in what is defined here as the Fair Trade Movement.