

## **The Trade Justice Movement**

by **Horacio Almanza-Alcalde** - martes, mayo 31, 2005

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The Trade Justice Movement is a young coalition founded at the end of the year 2000 and based in London, most of whose members are British organisations.

The TJM ‘...campaigns for a fundamental change in the unjust trade rules and institutions governing international trade, so that trade is made to work for all’ (TJM, 2002). It considers that the current international trade rules are causing a negative impact on the poorest people of the world, the environment and democracy. Its 40 organisations address a range of issues such as aid, environment and human rights campaigns, fair trade, faith and consumer matters.

Together they have a membership of over 2 million members (TJM, 2002). Among the most influential are the World Development Movement, a London-based lobbying and research organisation that campaigns against the root causes of poverty; Christian Aid, a UK and Ireland-based agency of churches and charity that funds projects in some of the world’s poorest countries; Oxfam, an Oxford-based charity and one of the largest European NGOs; Friends of the Earth, the largest international network of environmental groups in the world, represented in 68 countries and one of the leading environmental pressure groups in the UK; CAFOD, the English and Welsh arm of Caritas Internationalis, a worldwide network of Catholic relief and development organisations; and a range of British ATOs such as the Fair Trade Foundation, Banana Link, Traidcraft and IFAT. (TJM, 2002).

The roots of the TJM are in the Jubilee 2000 movement, which was launched in the early to mid-1990s, as a ‘worldwide campaign to cancel the unpayable debts of the world’s most impoverished countries by the dawn of the new millenium’ (Collins, Gariyo and Burdon, 2001: 135). The Jubilee 2000 was a call from development NGOs, church, and labour groups, in a global mobilization of 60 national Jubilee campaigns, including 17 in Central America and Latin America, 15 in Africa, and 10 in Asia. Awareness of this issue has its origins in the first major developing country debt crisis in Mexico in 1982, and is associated with the undermining of the social sector by structural adjustment programs.

Sectors like the Church and development and economic justice NGO’s began to raise the issue within their particular agendas, which provided the foundations for a common transnational effort, echoing the biblical call for a “Jubilee”, ‘the wiping away of all debts every 50 years’ (Collins, Gariyo and Burdon, 2001: 136).

The Jubilee 2000 campaign focused its claims on the causes and effects of debts, including, among others, politically-driven irresponsible lending by banks and countries, borrowing by unelected and repressive regimes, and responsible borrowing by countries that could not sustain their debts repayments due to economic and politic instability in the local and the global arenas. It argued that ordinary people in poor countries bear the greatest burden of debts, by paying higher taxes, and being denied essential public services, so that their government can repay foreign creditors. On the other hand, ‘...it is the creditors who dictated the terms of debt renegotiation and repayment, without any neutral arbiters’ (Collins, Gariyo and Burdon, 2001: 136-137).

The participation of organizations from the South in the campaign has been of fundamental importance for redefining goals and strategies in the light of their experiences in national campaigns. For example, they carried out South-South meetings in 1999, where they stressed the importance of ‘...strengthening local and national efforts on the ground as well as of South-South exchanges’, in addition to the need to contribute more leadership from the

South to the global campaign. They criticise inequalities within the movement, where Northern campaigners' share of the global movement resources was significantly higher than Southern activists' share in terms of access to funding, equipment, technical skills, global policy makers, and international meetings among others, mirroring the '...historic inequalities between North and South'. The main actors in the movement were '...a small number of capital-city based NGOs and religious groups, some of whom lack strong links with grassroots constituencies' (Collins, Gariyo and Burdon, 2001: 143).

Even though the movement was not homogeneous, and had to deal with internal differences among its participants, the Jubilee 2000 achieved levels of debt cancellation far beyond their supporters' initial expectations. Among the main successes were, in April and September 1999 respectively, Canada's and United States' commitment to cancel 100 per cent of their bilateral debts, and creditors' offer to make further cancellations of over U.S. \$100 billion afterward. In addition, '...the IMF and the World Bank agreed late in 1998 to defer debt service payments for at least a year for the four Central American countries affected by Hurricane Mitch', and Mozambique was added to these in early 2000 (Collins, Gariyo and Burdon, 2001: 140).

Near the year 2000 deadline for the achievement of the movement's goals, some campaigners looked toward the next step: the challenge of really involving the grassroots in a authentic transnational movement. They considered the key linkage between debt and trade issues, given the high costs to developing countries of trade barriers, opening the field to focus on such an issue in the future campaign. Although there were some differences of opinion among the campaigners about whether or not to widen the scope of the movement, the Jubilee 2000 finally established foundations for the Trade Justice Movement in the year 2000 (Collins, Gariyo and Burdon, 2001: 148).

Currently, the TJM bases its campaign on the belief that 'the performance and legitimacy of the international trade system must be judged in relation to its ability to meet poverty, social injustice and environmental degradation' (TJM, 2002). They consider that the international trade system can and should address politically difficult and complex choices concerning equity, sustainability and poverty eradication which could make the trade system work with equity, and enable it to be measured in social and environmental terms, rather than merely pursuing trade liberalisation as an end in itself (TJM, 2002).

A direct critique is being developed of the growing importance of competitiveness and trade in national economic decision-making, which undermines the development of environmental and social policy in some countries. TJM points out that the ideological pursue of competition for its own sake, can encourage a race to the bottom. It appeals to governments to prioritise cooperation through international processes to manage trade in the public interest (TJM, 2002).

The TJM clearly states that it doesn't simply assume a position against trade and the system of rules around it. Instead, it suggests that trade has the potential to offer important social and environmental benefits, as well as liberalisation and regulation; but that it should be oriented towards the achievement of such goals by reflecting the interests of the civil society, rather than those of corporate actors. In this sense, trade is a 'means to an end', rather than an 'end' in itself (TJM, 2002). Likewise, the TJM points out:

We support having international agreements on trade. International rules are required to regulate the actions of governments and companies. They must also reflect the different levels of development of WTO member countries and provide greater policy flexibility to the poorest. However, international trade rules must not prevent national regulation in the public interest. Nor should they force 'equal' trade relations between unequals. Instead the principle of special and differentiated treatment for developing countries should be fully incorporated into trade agreements. Governments must also develop binding international regulations for companies (TJM, 2002).

Among the strategies adopted by the Trade Justice Movement has been the Trade Justice Parade on 3rd November 2001, when 8000 people, according with the WDM, marched alongside floats with live samba music and a giant

12-metre-long monster symbolising the WTO's General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) terrorising water, education, health, electricity and transport services represented by costumed participants. The carnival procession along the streets of London demanded that the UK Government 'Make World Trade Work for the Whole World' (WDM, 2002). On 19<sup>th</sup> June of 2002, the largest mass lobby of Parliament to date in Westminster was carried out by around 12000 campaigners, according to Christian Aid (n/d) and the newspaper The Guardian, when 320 MPs were lobbied by their constituents in order to '...build public awareness of social justice issues raised by the Jubilee 2000'. The campaigners were congratulated by MPs in a special debate at the House of the Commons, and were invited to meet Prime Minister Tony Blair, and give him the message of the lobby: that 'poor countries need special treatment to be able to protect their most vulnerable traders and build up new industries'. President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa phoned to thank the members of the Trade Justice Movement, and the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishops of the Church in Wales, also were given (Christian Aid, n/d; Denny, 2002).