

Local and Global Notions of Trade Justice: The Case Studies of UCIRI and the Trade Justice Movement

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"Until everyone has enough, nowadays, we cannot demand more than the necessary". UCIRI^[i].

The context of coffee in Mexico

For many years, coffee prices were controlled by the intervention of the Coffee International Organization (CIO), which regulated prices at a relatively stable level above those that would have existed in a non-regulated market. An unmeasured increase in coffee reserves generated a crisis where the economic consensus of the CIO was broken down, and the regulating institutions were dismantled. The prices plummeted in 1989-1993, and after a short stabilization, the crisis was repeated in 1998 (Bartra, Cobo, Meza and Paz, 2002:1).

Historically, the ups and downs of the coffee prices were a product of offer fluctuations because of climatic factors. Since 1988, they have also been associated with stock exchange speculation, the control over the market exerted by a handful of transnational roasters and the action of international organisations that financed the production of rapid-ripening, high-revenue, but low-quality coffee. The forecast is not favourable due to the continuation of a disordered relationship between the producer countries and the fact that climate has less effect on the bigger harvesters (Bartra, Cobo, Meza and Paz, 2002: 1).

Mexico is the fifth largest world coffee producer. Coffee is grown over 690 thousand hectares in 12 states, 400 municipalities and more than 3500 communities, in addition to corn, beans, and sorgum. In good years the earnings in foreign currency generated by coffee exports are about 800 million dollars, second only to oil exports. Coffee is also a crop grown by smallholders; about 280 thousand producers, of whom 92% farm less than 5 hectares and almost 200 thousand use 2 hectares or less; 65% of these small coffee producers are members of an ethnic group (Bartra, Cobo, Meza and Paz, 2002: 2).

In 1973, some decisions on coffee policy were introduced by President Luis Echeverria to dynamize agricultural production, such as the organization of collective ejidos, an increase in guaranteed prices, and creation and support of institutions to control intermediarism, such as Tabamex, Inmecafe and Proquivemex (Flores, Pare and Sarmiento, 1988: 42). Inmecafe was established in 1958 to protect and improve the cultivation, processing, industrialization, and marketing of Mexican coffee, and was a key element of Echeverria's plan to 'modernize small-scale coffee production and increase Mexico's presence in foreign markets', to support small coffee producers. Among others, its role was to organize the financing of coffee, guarantee its

purchase and export, and to channel credit and technical assistance to small producers.

Inmecafe's reputation was seriously undermined by 1982; it was considered highly bureaucratic and inefficient in providing the support for which it was created. There was no serious disagreement from autonomous producers' organizations when in 1989, during the Salinas government, Inmecafe's role was limited to '...assist marginalized producers, and put parastatal coffee-roasting companies up for sale' (Hernandez and Celis, 1994: 219-220). This move was part of the neo-liberal policy of dismantling socially oriented state-run institutions and removing subsidies, leaving coffee producers who had relied on the state to buy their coffee, as B. Mace points out, 'at the mercy of the market' (1998: 18). The CNC continued to serve as an instrument for the state, taking advantage of the farmer's needs for assistance and gathering support for the PRI. At the same time, some of the functions carried out by Inmecafe were taken over by other governmental programs such as Pronasol, which continued its clientelist practice of linking assistance and credits with electoral outcomes. Producers mobilized against Inmecafe in the first half of 1980s, demanding to be paid more from coffee.

Coffee producers form a significant part of the peasant movements in Mexico. Their struggle around conditions of production is exemplified by that of the indigenous wage earners in coffee production on private land in Chiapas. Their claims are similar to those of the main independent peasant organizations: land tenancy, rights to be guaranteed by federal labour law, freedom to organize in trade unions, and the protection of natural resources. They began a struggle for the official recognition of their trade union 'Miguel de la Cruz' in 1980, which had its most important achievements up to 1983 (Mejia and Sarmiento, 1987: 215-220).

Coffee producers have also carried out strikes, that have had a consensus of support from a wide range of organizations, including second level coffee organizations (e.g. National Coordination Committee for Coffee-Producer's Organizations, or CNOC), broader independent organizations (like CIOAC), and even corporate institutions like CNC. They joined in deploying a series of strikes from February to August 1992 to demand that the government introduce changes in coffee support, for instance: a return to the quota system in the international market; the implementation of a plan to support coffee production; a renegotiation of overdue loans; the creation of an institution to direct national production with the participation of all involved in the chain of production, and the creation of a program to promote Mexican coffee. Eight months after the struggle started, most of the main demands had been met, even the support of the quota system, which previously was regarded by the state as not compatible with its free market policies (Hernandez and Celis, 1994: 228-229).

A year earlier, in 1991, the Union of Coffee Producers of the Southern Border (UNCAFESUR) was formed at the regional level, as an alliance with local affiliates of the independent and corporate movement like CIOAC, the CNC, and the Teacher-Peasant Solidarity Movement (SOCAMA). According to Harvey, this convergence of independent and official organizations around economic concerns '...represented the new type of peasant movement promoted by

reformers within the state and UNORCA' (1998: 194).

The southern Mexican state of Oaxaca is inhabited by one of the most diverse populations of indigenous people in the country, with 16 different ethnic groups representing forty four percent of the total (Blauert and Guidi, 1992: 190). Oaxaca has been the site of a dynamic and assertive indigenous movement. A range of organizations such as the already mentioned COCEI, the Trique Unified Movement for Struggle (MULT), and Union of Indigenous Communities of the North Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI) aim to reassert ethnic identity as a means to achieve their claims (Norget, 1997: 14).

[\[i\]](#) Vanderhoff and Galvan (1998: 133).