

ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

CRITICS PROMOTE AN ALTERNATIVE VISION OF GLOBAL TRADE

In February 2005, three trade specialists toured the Atlantic provinces to challenge the current “one-size-fits-all” thinking on international trade. The Council of Canadians’ Trade Campaigner Jean-Yves Lefort, Brian O’Neill of Oxfam Canada, and Jeff Moore of JustUs! Coffee Roasters Co-op took their message to 11 cities, encouraging people to take action on corporate-dominated trade and promote more equitable alternatives in their communities.

Lefort, O’Neill and Moore, along with Cliff White, the Council’s Atlantic Regional Organizer, sat down with *Canadian Perspectives* Editor Ariel Troster, to discuss ways that Canadians can promote fair trade, both at home and abroad.

AT: As activists in the so-called anti-globalization movement, we often spend our time protesting against corporate trade agreements. As fair trade proponents, what kinds of alternatives do you think we should be promoting?

BO: I think we should mobilize people around specific aspects of agriculture and trade, such as overproduction of agricultural exports in the South. We should also promote the right of small producers in southern countries to establish certain protections for their staples that will enhance food security for the people, but also livelihoods for the producers.

JYL: The World Trade Organization (WTO) promotes a trading model that reflects an ideology. It’s not just about tweaking rules – it’s about giving people the policy space to say that this particular model doesn’t work for them.

CW: One of the most egregious elements of the current trading regime is that many of the regulations and provisions have been put there by corporations. Government people and bureaucrats pick up what’s been crafted by industry lobbyists. A fairer system would be one that is developed with input from all of the people who are going to be affected by it. You really need to have other interests included in the actual drawing up of the rules and regulations.

JM: In a lot of Third World countries, producers are dependent on export products as their only source of cash income. We need to allow people to diversify, so they can produce food for themselves, as well as cash crops.

JYL: Trade-based rules should not be the only rules. A strong alternative is to strengthen and enforce multilateral agreements on culture, public services and the environment.

AT: How do we get people in Canada to understand the importance of these issues?

JM: To encourage participation in these discussions, we really have to go back to basics. Most people still don’t feel confident entering into any sort of dialogue around trade rules. We need to

talk about the agenda of international financial institutions – to promote an unregulated and rather brutal capitalism in the interests of people with money. We have to say that it really is a system where the rich get richer and the poor get screwed. And for small producers, it’s getting worse.

AT: What impacts do our day-to-day purchasing habits have over the global economic picture? Does it really make a difference to buy fair trade coffee?

JM: Fair trade still represents less than one per cent of the coffee market, so it’s not making a huge impact in terms of numbers. It’s more of a model of how things could be done. We like to think of it as an amazing experiment and demonstration project. Historically, coffee has been traded in a very controlled way by large companies, right from the farm to the cup. They have exploited small producers terribly, paying them as little as they could get away with. And the small producers just don’t have the ability to get their coffee to market. Fair trade says we have to create a mechanism for organizing small producers into co-operatives, where they can build up the capacity to process and market their coffee on their own at a fair price, and in a way that is environmentally and socially sustainable. This allows these communities to survive.

To find out how to locate fair trade products in your community, check out www.transfair.ca.



Jean-Yves Lefort, Trade Campaigner for the Council of Canadians

Photo: Bill Moore-Kilgannon

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