

The Future of Fairtrade

11th – 13th June 2008

A residential conference organised jointly by Cumberland Lodge and the St Paul's Institute

Summary Report

Conference Introduction: *An aspect of economic life that has changed drastically in recent years is the role of ethics. The raising of public moral consciousness on issues such as global poverty and climate change has coincided with an unprecedented phase of economic stability and growth in many western countries, which in turn has led to high levels of prosperity. These factors have combined (or some might say conspired) to create 'ethical consumerism' - a desire to purchase goods with good ethical credentials. The most notable example has been the almost exponential growth in sales of Fairtrade products. Ethical consumerism is becoming increasingly sophisticated. As well as the growing range of Fairtrade goods available, the Fairtrade movement has gone mainstream, involving high street chains and supermarkets. Ethical consumerism is also impacting on the service sector, including ethical financial products and tourism. The aim of this conference is to explore the future for Fairtrade, and is open to all with an interest in it.*

Questions to be considered include: How should Fairtrade develop now? Is there a limit to the scale of Fairtrade, or can consumer power continue to be harnessed? How far can Fairtrade address issues of economic justice and development? What answers can be given to criticisms of it on economic grounds? What role should big business and government play in supporting and promoting Fairtrade?

Summary Report: Some 85 people gathered at Cumberland Lodge between June 11th and 13th in order to address precisely these questions. Participants represented local fairtrade groups of various sizes, world development advisers from dioceses in the Church of England, local authority officials, university academics (lecturers and students) and representatives of business, either completely organised according to fairtrade principles or with a significant "arm" seeking to develop further prospects. The commercial groups represented were, amongst others, as diverse as a winery in Argentina, the fairtrade arm of Cadburys (**Green and Blacks**) and the online auction house E-Bay.

The Conference benefited from its ability to invite as speakers some of the leading individuals and organizations within the movement. Over the course of its three days, therefore, it heard from Brad Hill, the Fairtrade Strategy Manager for the Co-op; Matt Anderson from Birmingham University, with new research on the rise of consumer power in the development of the movement; Harriet Lamb, the Executive Director of the Fairtrade Foundation; Rob Cameron, the CEO of FLO (Fairtrade Labelling Organisations); Paul Chandler, the Chief Executive of Traidcraft; Sophie Tranchell, the Managing Director of **Divine Chocolate** and Safia Minney, the Founder of **People Tree**. Smaller organizations on the field were represented by Chris Beales from **Afghan Action** (who gave an entertaining evening presentation on the difficulties of trading in a war zone) and Patricio Angonoa from **La Riojana Winery** who, with Louise Nicholls from **Marks and Spencer**, contributed to two very fine workshops on how fairtrade has resulted in new structures within two very different businesses. Alongside these leaders in the commercial fairtrade "field" were significant politicians and civil servants indirectly concerned with the issues; in this instance Malcolm Bruce MP, the current Chair of the House of Commons International Development Select Committee, and Claire Durkin, Head of Trade Policy at the Department of Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform.

Two sessions stand out for very different reasons. On the first evening the Conference heard from two critics of the movement, the first of whom, Philip Booth, is the Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs and the second, Marc Sidwell, the author of a much publicized and critical report on fairtrade for the Adam Smith Institute. Robust contrary views were met with equally robust questions and counter arguments from the floor. It made for a very fine session, even if there were few, if any, present in the room prepared to modify their stance on the basis of what they heard. The second such session, the final meeting of the Conference, took place on Friday morning and involved a presentation from three pupils from Cheney School in Oxford on the subject of their own fairtrade adventure, recorded as a documentary for Channel Four. The presentation centred on their attempts to find a fairtrade supplier in India for a range of new

school shirts for their classmates. Their maturity, enthusiasm and humour made for both a moving and fitting penultimate session to what many agreed had been one of the most beneficial and enjoyable Cumberland Lodge Conferences in recent memory. It was left to Ed Newell, Director of the St Paul's Institute at the Cathedral that bears its name (and with whom the Conference was jointly organised) to summarise some of the key themes that had emerged in the preceding days, and to reflect upon where the movement might go from here.

Andrew Taylor

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