General Welfare   
Affirmative Case by Sydney Travis



Fair Trade is an economic philosophy centered around helping those at the bottom of the production process. These producers are often farmers and factory workers in developing countries who work long hours, for low wages, in poor conditions. Fair trade provides guidelines for conditions and wages that increase the standards of living for workers who make the goods we use every-day. As the affirmative debater, it is your job to argue in favor of the fair trade philosophy.

This affirmative case enables you to argue in favor of fair trade through the value of General Welfare. General welfare recognizes the dignity of a nations citizens and works to ensure just and ethical standards of living. You will argue that fair trade upholds the principles of general welfare and therefore is superior to the conflicting philosophy of free trade. This argument is made through three contentions; one: government has a responsibility to general welfare, two: free trade endangers general welfare, and three: fair trade protects general welfare. Governments have an obligation to act in a way that is best for the general welfare of their citizens. Due to this obligation, good governments will not support policy that can lead to the potential exploitation of their citizens. After making the argument for the importance of your value, go on to argue that free trade works against the principles of general welfare while fair trade works right along-side them.

In order to win the ballot, continuously make connections between lack of general welfare though free trade and efforts to secure general welfare through fair trade. Additionally, it might be helpful to bring up more examples of exploitation through free trade in the first affirmative rebuttle. Make it your goal to convince the judge that free trade is a problem and fair trade provides the solution. Every citizen is entitled to fair and just labor, regardless of their social standing.

To refute this case, you want to prove that the value of general welfare is not best achieved through fair trade. Once you have disconnected the value from the case, it should be fairly easy to deconstruct the rest of it. Make the argument that free trade and limited government intervention lead to the highest living standards. Lastly, you can make the argument that the government as an actor is a bad idea – therefore the resolution should be negated. Fair trade is fine but not when the government is the one enforcing it.

Happy Debating!

General Welfare

As the world develops and modernizes at a rapid pace, with it comes changes in institution and practice. Such changes can be found in the realm of economics and the ever-growing system of international trade. Ecological Economist at the Australian National University, Robert Costanza states, “The world trading system becomes a harsher, more competitive regime, with outright losers as well as winners. In all probability, the strong will get stronger at the expense of the weak”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is because I believe that trade should be a mutually beneficial exchange that I stand ***resolved*: *when in conflict, governments should value fair trade above free trade.***

## Definitions

For clarification in this round I provide the following definitions:

**Conflict** – “A situation in which there are opposing demands or ideas and a choice has to be made between them”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Fair Trade –** “A movement in whose goal is to help producers in developing countries to get a fair price for their product so as to reduce poverty, provide for ethical treatment of workers and farmers, and promote environmentally sustainable practices”.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Free Trade** – “Trade between countries, free from governmental restriction or duties”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

## Value

My Value is **General Welfare** defined as – “The concern of the government for the health, peace, morality, and safety of a nations citizens. Providing for general welfare is a basic goal of government.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

## Resolutional Analysis

Before I dive into the main arguments of my case, it is important to address some key points of resolutional analysis.

There are two points to highlight about the wording of this resolution. First, the resolution specifies conflict. A conflict resolution implies that we are not debating over the inherent value of the two ideologies, but rather which ideology holds more value when a choice must be made between them. Second, the resolution specifies a government actor. Therefore, all examples brought up within this debate round where the actor is not the government, do not fit within the context of the resolution.

With those points in mind, let’s move on to my contentions.

# Contention One: Government has a Responsibility to General Welfare

One of the responsibilities of government is to promote the general welfare of their citizens. As stated in the definition, this involves securing the health, peace, morality, and safety of citizens within one’s nation. When governments act against the general welfare, they are acting against the interests of their own people. What is best for the general welfare should be a key factor in all decisions and policies a government makes. For example, if governments allow trade that involve an exploitation of that countries workers – they are acting against the general welfare of the nation. A just and functional government will only engage in policy that benefits rather than exploits their own citizens.

# Contention Two: Free Trade Endangers General Welfare

Proponents of free trade boast that all market interactions involve voluntary exchange that benefit both parties. While it may be true that trade is voluntary, trade agreements tend to overlook the impact they have on those at the very bottom of the production process. Individuals in developing countries can often be left out of the equation. Robert Costanza reports,

“Yet disparities in wealth and power, both within and between countries, have never been more pronounced. Exploitive working conditions and the expropriation of assets that yield tradeable goods (e.g., land for cash crops) can prevent weaker parties within countries from sharing benefits of trade; and gross inequalities between trading partners can allow the stronger partner to strongly influence the terms of the exchange”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Free trade allows countries to enter into trade agreements which boost the economy at the expense of the welfare of citizens. Costanza continues,

“Growing inequality both within and between countries will increasingly mean the poorest in both categories experience more of the costs than the benefits of trade”.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Free Trade allows the market to determine all factors of a trade agreement. Allowing the market to operate without restriction hurts those at the bottom who don’t have a voice. In order to protect the general welfare of their citizens, governments need to provide standards that the market alone fails to produce. Just and profitable trade can never come at the expense of others.

# Contention Three: Fair Trade Protects General Welfare

In response to the harms of a free trade system, governments need to adopt a philosophy that protects general welfare while still allowing them to engage in trade. This philosophy can be found in Fair Trade. Fairtrade.org explains that,

“Fairtrade sets social, economic, and environmental standards for both companies and the farmers and workers who grow the food we love. For farmers and workers the standards include protection of worker’s rights and environment, for companies they include the payment of the Fairtrade minimum price.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Fair Trade creates an environment where trade can take place in a way that is truly beneficial to both parties. Governments that embrace a fair trade system make sure that all of their citizens are treated with dignity regardless of their social standing. According to an article from the Journal of Economic Perspectives,

“91 percent of Fair Trade workers said in survey results that Fair Trade (and their membership in the joint body) was responsible for improving their living standards. In particular, 95 percent of workers reported that Fair Trade provided help with the education and/or health (and 51 percent reported being helped with both)”.[[9]](#footnote-9)

When governments apply fair trade principles to trade agreements, they are placing the general welfare of their citizens over the overall prosperity of the nation’s economy. Fair Trade seeks to promote and protect the very principles general welfare secures.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that governments have a responsibility to protect the general welfare of their citizens and that responsibility should be factored into every decision a government makes - whether that be domestic policy or international trade agreements. Professor of Economics and Entrepreneurship at Landmark College, Dr. Tamara Stenn writes,

“Fair Trade favors price setting, and requires additional inputs such as extensive training, environmental considerations, long-term contracts, and high wages. It goes completely against the free market ideal of liberalized trade. These restrictions do not exist in free trade agreements”.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The conflict between fair trade and free trade exists in their disagreement on trade restrictions and government interference. When this conflict presents itself, governments should side with fair trade in order to improve living standards and protect the general welfare of their citizens.

It is for these reasons that I stand **Resolved:** **When in conflict, governments should value fair trade above free trade**. Thank you, and I urge an affirmative ballot.

Opposing This Case

There are three main arguments that you can bring up in refutation to this case. First, that the value is not achieved through fair trade, second, that fair trade is not the solution to problems in developing countries, and third, that fair trade is not a government responsibility.

The first strategy is proving that the value of General Welfare is better upheld by the negative side of the resolution. Make sure that you don’t deny that fair trade can improve the general welfare for producers; rather, proceed to explain how free trade promotes the general welfare for more people on a larger level. Professor of Law, the late George Canfield argues,

“The direct object of trade is the production and distribution of wealth and the enrichment of those who are engaged in it. This object is not only consistent with the general welfare, but is, in general, promotive of it, because the public welfare, from the point of view of economics, depends upon the greatest possible production and distribution of wealth”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Free trade fuels prosperity, wealth, and high standards of living. Regulating the market through fair trade philosophies prevents the flourishing a free trade system is capable of bringing about. General Welfare is best achieved with a negative ballot.

Second, you can argue that fair trade doesn’t provide proper solutions to poverty and poor working conditions. The argument can be made that Fair Trade makes producers worse off than they were originally. The Property and Environment Research Center reports,

“That the fair-trade cup of coffee we savor may not only fail to ease the lot of poor farmers, it may actually help to impoverish them, according to a study out recently from Germany’s University of Hohenheim. The study, which followed hundreds of Nicaraguan coffee farmers over a decade, concluded that farmers producing for the “fair-trade” market are more often than not found below the poverty line than conventional producers. “Over a period of 10 years, our analyses shows that organic and organic-fair trade farmers have become poorer relative to conventional producers”.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Fair trade attempts to fix a problem that needs to be addressed with a bigger solution than an organization, price, or label. Philip Booth of the Institute for Economic Affairs in London, argues against fair trade, stating,

“The best way to improve the lives of the poor is to ensure that the necessary preconditions for development exist. These include good governance, a favorable business climate, and free trade. These three conditions are mutually reinforcing. One of the biggest sources of corruption in developing countries is the regulation of trade”.[[13]](#footnote-13)

If we want to increase the living standards of those at the bottom of the production process, we need to fix corruption within developing countries. Releasing regulations on trade will do more to help the economy and living conditions than increasing trade restrictions in developing countries. When free trade is embraced, it opens developing countries up to more trading opportunities and a better GDP.

Third, you can make the argument that fair trade isn’t a government responsibility. As negative, there are multiple ways you can approach the resolution; one of those ways is by rejecting something in the resolutions wording. Make the argument that fair trade is fine –when the government isn’t the institution enforcing it. Essentially, governments should always value free trade and leave the decision to support fair trade up to individual companies and consumers. Fair trade can have its benefits but they shouldn’t come at the cost of market regulations. The freer the market, the freer the people. Fair Trade policies enforced by government shouldn’t hinder individual freedom and prosperity brought through a free market.

If you run these three arguments, you have a solid amount of material to use in refutation. Once you take down the value, the case becomes substantially weak. The second argument allows you to refute case content. The third argument allows you to show support for fair trade as a concept while still negating the resolution (something the affirmative cannot do). If you run these arguments well, the case will fall.

1. Constanza, Robert et al. 1995. “Sustainable Trade: A New Paradigm for World Welfare” *Environment* 37 no. 5. (June). ERIC. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Conflict,” Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/conflict#dataset-business-english> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “ Fair-Trade.” Merriam Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fair-trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Free-Trade” Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/free-trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “General Welfare” Legal Dictionary, <https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/General+Welfare> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Constanza, Robert et al. 1995. “Sustainable Trade: A New Paradigm for World Welfare” *Environment* 37 no. 5. (June). ERIC. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “What Fair Trade Does” Fairtrade Foundation, <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/What-is-Fairtrade/What-Fairtrade-does> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Dragusanu Raluca, Giovannucci Daniele, Nunn Nathan. 2014. “The Economics of Fair Trade” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28 no.3 JSTOR [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Stenn, Tamara. 2013. Comercio Justo and Justice: An Examination of Fair Trade” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 45, No. 4 (December): 489-500. Social Sciences Citation Index [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Canfield, George. 1912. “Competition: The Safeguard and Promoter of General Welfare” *The Annals of the American Academy and Social Science* 42. JSTOR [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Soloman Lawrence. 2011. “Fair Trade Coffee Producers Often End up Poorer” *Property and Environment Research Center*. May 14 2011. www.perc.org/2011/05/14/fair-trade-coffee-producers-often-end-up-poorer/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Glazer, Sarah. 2007. “Fair Trade Labeling” *CQ Press* 17, No.19. (May). CQ Researcher. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)