prosperity   
Negative Case by Sydney Travis



People strive to be prosperous. The bettering of oneself is a key motivation behind every action human beings undertake. It is the idea of increasing one’s prosperity that encourages individuals to engage in exchange with other individuals and governments to engage in exchange with other governments.

In this negative case, you will make the argument that prosperity is best achieved (on a personal and a national level) through fair trade and a free market system. The value is prosperity and it is your job to defend the ethical and economic principles that prosperity achieves. This argument is made through two contentions: first, fair trade hinders prosperity and second, free trade promotes prosperity. The first contention explains how fair trade has hurt the prosperity of producers in developing countries. The second contention argues that free trade has led to prosperity of both the producers and consumers of market interactions. The ultimate goal of this case it to prove that free trade does a better job than fair trade at increasing the prosperity of individuals both within developing nations and all across the globe.

In refutation to this case, there are two arguments that can be brought up. First, you can argue that fair trade actually does increase prosperity for producers. In a free market system that is filled with changes in demand and supply, fair trade provides stability to farmers that rely on a certain income to get by. Fair Trade systems both promote higher standards of living and protect farmers from the changes of the free market. Second, you can argue that LD is a philosophical debate and therefore, the actual policies of fair trade and free trade are less important to the round than the principles and ideas surrounding the two philosophies. When the judge makes their decision, they should vote based on which side of the resolution holds more inherent value, not which side makes for better legislation.

Prosperity

“Free Trade works, both in the context of international development and in ensuring greater domestic prosperity. It helps the poor and at the same time helps the working class, the middle class, and the wealthy.”.[[1]](#footnote-1) – Steven Daskal.

It because I agree with Daskal, that free trade is vital in achieving global prosperity, that I stand **Resolved: *when in conflict, governments should not value fair trade above free trade.***

## Definitions

For clarity 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 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 regulation or duties.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

# Value

My value is **Prosperity** – defined as “the condition of being successful or thriving; especially economic well-being.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The Legatum Prosperity Index breaks down prosperity into a few key factors including economics, business, governance, education, health, security, personal freedom, social capital, and natural environment.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Prosperity is the highest value in today’s debate round because it is the end goal that both nations and individuals strive to achieve. Prosperity takes into consideration both the well-being of a nation and the individual citizens within it. Countries engage in exchange to increase the prosperity the economy. Individuals engage in exchange to increase their own personal prosperity. Prosperity is the very reasons we engage in trade. Whichever side of the resolution best achieves the value prosperity should win the ballot.

# Contention One: Fair Trade Hinders Prosperity

Proponents of fair trade philosophy argue that the free market system hurts the producers at the bottom of the production process by taking advantage of them through unfair prices and unethical working conditions. Although working conditions in developing countries can be problematic, fair trade is not the solution to the problem. In fact, fair trade arguably hurts poor workers more than it helps them. According to a study from the University of Hohenheim in Germany,

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 ten years, our analyses shows that organic and organic-fair trade farmers have become poorer relative to conventional producers”.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The system that is supposed to be protecting and empowering producers, ends up trapping them in a system of poverty. Liz Thatcher of the Competitive Enterprise Institute explains that

“Fair trade dealers elevate price for coffee beans, no matter what the market demand is…Any system that incentivizes people to produce a good that isn’t being demanded naturally by the market isn’t actually fair to them. Instead of helping farmers in South America learn how to farm many different crops and respond to what actually gets the most profits for everyone, a few special farmers who partner with the right people are getting the most money, while the farmers that get left out of the system are being hurt by the very system that was trying to help them.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Fair trade seeks to bring prosperity through putting restrictions on trade; however, true prosperity can only take place when producers meet the demands of the market. An article from the Review of Social and Economic issues states,

Fair trade incurs real costs, entails welfare loss, and shrinks the window of opportunities for all countries – especially developing ones.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The moment you allow the government to put regulations on trade in order to “ensure” it’s fair, the moment you trap people in a system of poverty they otherwise could have gotten out of.

# Contention Two: Free Trade Promotes Prosperity

If a government wants to promote prosperity, it should remove regulations and embrace the free market. When governments engage in free trade policy rather than put up trade barriers and restrictions- prosperity skyrockets. Professor of Economics at George Mason University, Donald Boudreax, reports that countries with free trade have the fastest rates of economic growth in addition to higher per-capita incomes.[[10]](#footnote-10) Free Trade allows producers to supply the demands of the market and in turn increase the standards of living for both parties involved in the transactions. According to the Foundation for Economic Education,

“The astonishing enrichment of the world in the past 50 years, when extreme poverty has fallen from more than 50 percent to below 10 percent of the world population, could not have happened without free commerce and the innovation it delivers.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Free trade promotes prosperity that is widespread, rather than focused on specific individuals. Free Trade enables producers to make their own decisions about resources and products. The more simple the exchange, the more beneficial the trade deal. Denise Froning of the The Heritage Foundation writes,

“Free trade policies have created a level of competition in today’s open market that engenders continual innovation and leads to better products, better-paying jobs, new markets, an increased savings and investment.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Free Trade increases living standards and wealth to a both a country’s economy and the individuals living within it. Free Trade fosters a system where the consumer and the producer engage in voluntary exchange that is beneficial to both parties. Free Trade doesn’t just lead to prosperity, it promotes it.

# Conclusion

When the conflict between fair trade and free trade presents itself, governments should side with the philosophy that best promotes the prosperity of their nation and the individuals living within it. Froning states,

“Societies that enact free trade policies create their own economic dynamism – fostering a wellspring of freedom, opportunity, and prosperity that benefits every citizen.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Free Trade fosters the prosperity of producers and consumers all around the globe. In contrast, Fair trade traps people in poverty, and works against the principles of the economic laws of supply and demand. It is because I believe every worker deserves a chance to prosper that I stand **resolved: when in conflict, governments should not value fair trade above free trade.**

Opposing This Case

There are two main arguments that you can bring up in refutation to this case. First, that fair trade leads to the prosperity of producers and second, that the fair-trade philosophy is superior to the free trade philosophy.

First, Fair Trade can lead to prosperity of producers. For those at the bottom of the production process, changes in demand within the free market system have potential to bring damages to farms and families. Fair Trade programs seek to ensure that those who don’t have a voice in the free market are able to receive the benefits and opportunities needed to prosper. According to Scientist at the Natural Resources Institute, Valerie Nelson,

“The fair trade minimum price is of particular value when volatile world commodity prices fall below production costs – providing a stable income and reducing vulnerability and the need for farming families to migrate or mine assets during periods of hardship. Further, the combination of price and fair trade premium has allows many producers to capitalize their organizations and as result, improve the well-being of many farmers in situations where volatile price fluctuations have ruined the livelihoods of farmers who didn’t have the benefit of the fair-trade guaranteed price”.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Fair Trade creates an environment that protects producers from the inconsistency of the free market system while promoting sustainability and ethical labor in fact, Fair Trade minimum prices pay more than the free market. Chief Financial Officer at Transfair USA, Christopher Himes reported,

“The Fair Trade system often pays up to one-third more than farmers would get on the open market.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Workers who rely on a fair trade system rather than engage in unregulated exchange end up with betters incomes. With a higher income, workers can go on to expand their farms and increase the standards of living within their families. The people who make the products we use every-day should be given the opportunity to prosper and work without fear of exploitation. Free Trade harms prosperity for those at the bottom while fair trade allows that prosperity to become a reality.

Second, fair trade is still a fairly new policy that is being refined and improved – because of this we can’t expect perfect results every time it is enforced; however, an affirmative ballot is warranted on principle alone. In Lincoln Douglas debate, we argue over which philosophy holds more inherent value in the context of the resolution, not which policy plan is more effective at solving a problem. Fair trade not only focuses on the wealth and living standards of the farmer, it seeks to promote and enforce those principles in a wide variety of areas. The World Fair Trade Organization lists some of the principles that fair trade seeks to promote. These principles include: economic opportunity, transparency and accountability, social well-being, fair payment, ensuring no child or forced labor, commitment to non-discrimination, good working conditions, increasing development, and environmental sustainability.[[16]](#footnote-16) Government’s should value fair trade because of its basic philosophy and the principles it seeks to promote. When governments work with organizations to ensure mutually beneficial and ethical trade agreements, they are valuing a philosophy that places citizens interest at the forefront of decision making.

In contrast, free trade philosophy is based on increasing wealth and acting to better one’s individual conditions. Under this philosophy, exploitation of workers could be permitted so long as there is some benefit coming from it. When we embrace a philosophy that centers itself around wealth and the economy, it has potential to overlook the ethical and environmental impacts it leaves on those without a voice. When governments are given the choice to value a fair trade or a free trade system, they should value fair trade – placing their citizens wellbeing over the GDP of the country. All policies aside, in a philosophy debate, the philosophy with the best principles and values should be the winning side of the resolution.

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4. Free Trade” *Dictionary.com.* <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/free-trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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