Government Responsibility  
Negative Case by Joel Erickson



The resolution explicitly mandates you debate within the confines of a government actor. This case attempts to leverage every implication of that.

First, the vast majority of AFF applications outside protectionism (which is defensibly distinct from fair trade) concern private auditing organizations like Fair Trade International, which ensure that producers in developing countries treat their workers humanely. Shelve the issue that the resolution doesn’t even encompass this because trade and employment law occupy different domains—the government actor point alone is enough to beat it. ***Private*** organizations are products of the free market, which supports your side. Establish this framework in the resolutional analysis, then hammer the point in your second contention that your side accrues all the benefits of your opponent’s.

Second, within the well-established social contract tradition, governments have very particular obligations to their citizens. In the context of a government actor, elevating these moral obligations as the value makes logical sense. With this value framework secured, the AFF position is bankrupt—governments intervening in development countries to stop overseas producers from mistreating their employees does not cohere with the government’s narrowly demarcated responsibility.

Hence, this case relies upon a streamlined, philosophically intuitive premise. Defend that premise and the resolutional analysis and you win the round.

Government Responsibility

Government causes problems, but freedom fixes them. That’s why I negate the resolution and stand with free trade.

Let’s consider two pivotal points of background…

# Resolutional Analysis 1: Government’s Perspective

The resolution frames this debate with three words: “Governments should value.” This means that you make your decision to emphasize fair trade or free trade from the perspective of the government. This isn’t about particular policies, but rather philosophical priorities. You’re deciding what the government should believe about trade.

# Resolutional Analysis 2: Fair Trade Does Not Encompass Private Organizations.

There are two reasons for this.

## Reason 1: Separate Ideas.

A debate requires two separate, non-overlapping sides. Private organizations are a part of the free market, so saying that private fair-trade organizations are better than free trade is like saying that spaghetti is better than pasta—it just doesn’t make sense.

## Reason 2: Government’s Perspective

Like I mentioned earlier, we’re debating from the perspective of the government, not the perspective of private organizations. Defining fair trade as private auditing organizations that promote fair trade does not uphold the resolution’s requirement.

# Value: Governmental Responsibility

Whenever we compare two things, we need a standard by which to compare them. My opponent is using an inferior standard to compare free trade and fair trade. Hence, I propose an alternate standard and some reasons why you should prefer it to my opponent’s standard. That alternate value is **Governmental Responsibility**. Whichever side better upholds the basic responsibility of government ought to win this debate. Here are two reasons to prefer this value of Governmental Responsibility to my opponent’s:

## Reason to Prefer #1: Government’s Perspective.

If we’re debating within the context of government, we must consider the government’s responsibility first and foremost. Whenever a government decides or adopts an idea, it should be within the scope of its responsibility.

## Reason to Prefer #2: Ethical Objective.

Keeping the government focused on its responsibility keeps the government focused on acting ethically.

# Criterion: Citizen’s Rights

You’re likely wondering what the government’s responsibility is. According to John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government*, governments are instituted to do nothing more than protect the life, liberty, and property of the people within their borders. Think of it like a symbiotic relationship—we give the government taxes, and in return, they protect our rights. In other words, *the only legitimate function of our government is protecting our rights*. That’s the responsibility we’re talking about today.

I have two arguments (or contentions) to show how free trade and fair trade interact with this responsibility of government. Let’s start with my first contention...

# Contention 1: Fair Trade Outside Government’s Responsibility

According to my opponent’s definition, fair trade concerns ensuring that producers in developing countries receive fair prices for their services. We already clarified that this requires regulation. Think about our government regulating trade in Indonesia to make sure that everything is “fair.” Does this regulation align with government’s responsibility? Well...

Does this regulation protect the life of American citizens? Nope.

Does this regulation protect the liberty of American citizens? Nope.

Does this regulation protect the property of American citizens? Nope.

Fair trade fails the test of government’s responsibility, which creates unnecessary government regulation. On the other hand...

# Contention 2: Free Trade Aligns with Government’s Responsibility

Free trade involves no governmental regulations on trade. When our government prioritizes free trade, it upholds its basic responsibility because it does not unnecessarily regulate things outside its scope. It’s a pretty simple formula—if regulation in a particular area violates the government’s responsibility, then removing regulation upholds that responsibility. Fair trade falls outside government’s responsibility, like I demonstrated in my first contention. Therefore, free trade, through removing regulations, honors that responsibility.

When the government values freedom, you get freedom and fairness. When the government values fairness, you get neither.  Let’s recap: To make a long story short, fair trade generates unnecessary government regulation. Free trade removes regulations, and as a result, honors government’s basic duty and accrues all the benefits fair trade proponents want. Prioritize free trade, and get both fairness and freedom. Thanks.

Opposing This Case

1) Resolutional Analysis Response: LD is about the “ought,” not the “is.” Although private auditing organizations to promote fair trade are not government institutions, they provide a model for how governments should operate. As AFF, you don’t have to defend fair trade in the status quo, but can observe that those organizations illuminate how government ought to behave, which constitutes the central concern in the debate round. This undercuts the case’s advocacy that free trade gets all the benefits of both AFF and NEG.

2) Once you’ve proven that, note that NEG accrues zero tangible benefits aside from operating within the government’s responsibility.

3) Contest the idea of governments existing solely to protect the rights of their citizens. Social contract theory is callous and dismissive to grave human rights travesties overseas—you can argue that moral duties to humanity suffering transcend national borders and demand a response.