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Fair Trade, Free Trade and the State

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COMMENTARY

Fair Trade, Free Trade and the State

GAVIN FRIDELL

In autumn 2007, I was contacted by a staff member of a new policy journal on the Americas and asked to submit an article on fair trade for an upcoming issue on corporate social responsibility. I was surprised by this request, given that my own work draws heavily on critical political economy and the journal is jointly run by the Americas Society and the Council of the Americas, the latter being a 'premier international business organization' whose corporate members share an explicit devotion to promoting free trade and 'open markets'.¹ I expressed some hesitation to the staff member, who assured me that fair trade issues were of particular interest to the journal's readership. She then added that the editors wanted me to develop an article that was 'forward-looking' and went beyond the basic issues of fair trade to advance a broader policy point. I replied that this would be an excellent idea, as I could write a piece arguing for the need for national and international bodies to adopt fair trade as a matter of state policy, which would entail developing strong international regulations for commodity prices and social, labour and environmental standards. After a short pause, the staff member replied 'you can't say that, that's ideological'.

This telling anecdote is demonstrative of a growing attitude among corporate actors and pro-corporate advocates who in the last few years have shown increas-



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See the Council of the Americas, <http://coa.counciloftheamericas.org/page.php?k=about> [Accessed 18 November 2008].

These perspectives are emphasised to varying degrees by different authors (see Fridell 2006).

Cecil Ryan (Chairman of SVBGA), Interviews with Author, 9 and 31 July 2008; Lesley Grant (SVBGA Manager), Interview with Author, 9 July 2008.

Grant Interview; Sylvester Vanloo (SVBGA Product Manager), Interview with Author, 9 July 2008.

Reuben Robertson (Chief Agricultural Officer, SVG), Interview with Author, 16 July 2008; Ryan Interview; Grant Interview; Vanloo Interview.

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Arthur Bobb (WINFA Manager), Interview with Author, 25 July 2008.

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Ryan disclosure prices p would be over a lo South.

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