

EDITORIAL

Coffee boycott?

Before you decide to join the coffee boycott, or to applaud the efforts of researchers who are developing coffee substitutes, consider the following facts:

- 1) coffee provides employment for more than twenty million people in fifty producing nations
- 2) coffee accounts for more than a quarter of the export earnings of eleven Latin American and African nations.

Coffee, like other primary commodities produced in the Third World, arrives on the supermarket shelf as a result of "free trade" between countries. The unequal nature of trade relationships between developed and developing nations has been obscured by the myth of fair exchange. In reality, the coffee producers are trapped by the laws of supply and demand: when the harvest is good, prices will fall; when it is poor, prices will rise but there will be less to sell.

Either way, the coffee producing nations are at the mercy of their buyers. The value of the product increases considerably once it has been processed into instant coffee. This takes place mainly in the rich countries, which have erected tariff barriers against finished products in order to discourage developing nations from manufacturing goods prior to export. Brazil has recently managed to develop a processing industry. However, other coffee producers have been unable to break the strangle-hold of the multinational companies, which manufacture instant coffee in the consuming countries.

The dynamics of present world trade systems can be summarized briefly:

- 1) Developed nations have the industrial and agricultural capacity to offer a wide variety of products for sale. Developing nations usually have to depend on one or two primary commodities.
- 2) Developed nations can alter their production of manufactured goods to meet fluctuations in the world market without severe economic repercussions. Developing nations have less flexibility, as a commodity such as coffee takes years from the time seedlings are planted until the trees bear fruit.
- 3) Developed nations receive a rising price for their manufactured goods, and are busy developing synthetic substitutes for raw materials. These factors have contributed to a drop in the purchasing power of the agricultural exports of developing countries.

The coffee market is controlled by eighteen multinationals, and the coffee growing nations compete with each other for a share of that market. Could they follow the example of OPEC and combine to assume control over the supply and price of coffee? In doing so, they would be faced with many difficulties. Oil can be turned off at a tap and left underground, so it is relatively simple to restrict the amount sold. Coffee growing, on the other hand, is a labour-intensive industry, involving millions of small farmers. Coffee beans are also perishable, so stockpiling on a large scale would require the development of a manufacturing industry in producing nations.

Even if the developing countries were to receive a fair price for their coffee, this would not ensure a just system of exchange. In Brazil, which produces a quarter of the world's coffee, much of the crop is harvested on large estates owned by wealthy landlords. By the time the benefits of coffee sales have trickled down to the workers on such estates, they have very little to show for their labour. In Tanzania, on the other hand, coffee is cultivated on small-holdings farmed by a single family, and growers have been organized in a co-operative structure. This has led to a much fairer distribution of revenue.

Given the current terms of trade as described above, who is likely to suffer as the result of a North American coffee boycott? Will the multinational companies be prepared to reduce their profit margins when they are in a position to pass the loss down the line to the producing nations? And will the elites of those nations absorb such a loss when they control the living standards of their peasantry?

Yes, North American families will be adversely affected by a rise in the price of coffee. But it is ultimately the poor families of Latin America and Africa who will be punished by a drop in demand motivated by self-interest in the West.

CBC bias

To the editor:

We wish to draw your attention to what we consider extremely partial reporting of the war of independence in Simbabwe (Rhodesia) by the mass media in Canada. Newspaper articles and newscasts uniformly present events in this country from the perspective of the illegal minority regime.

Just one example of this type of coverage was the lengthy report by Chris Morton on "The World at Six", Monday, December 21, 1976. This quite lengthy account of the killing of twenty-seven black workers in a Simbabwean village reproduced uncritically the version of the white Rhodesian authorities. The main point conveyed by the report was that Simbabwean nationalist soldiers have engaged in the unprovoked, indiscriminate massacre of black civilians. We were asked to believe that the nationalists are slaughtering at random the very people whom they represent and are seeking to liberate.

Our principal objection, however, concerns not so much the implausibility of this type of story as its bias. In this case, as in many others, the main report was based on information provided by the illegal government, and included an interview with one of its officials. The version of the incident given by the Simbabwe People's Army (attributing the

massacre to Rhodesian Security Forces) was appended to the story as a brief, parenthetical two-sentence remark.

Mr. Morton stated that "the massacre represents the largest killing of civilians so far during the war." This assertion contradicts a report made last August by Dr. Hugo Idoyaga, director of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Mozambique. Dr. Idoyaga confirmed that Rhodesian troops massacred 670 Zimbabwean civilians, including many women, children, and elderly persons, at Nyazonia on August 9, 1976.

As noted this type of coverage is not an isolated instance: it is typical of the preferential treatment which regular CBC Radio newscasts give to the illegal, racist, and brutally oppressive regime in Rhodesia. The Southern African Information Group of Nova Scotia wishes to express its profound concern about the effects of presenting a biased view of events in Zimbabwe to the Canadian public, and urges the media to offer more objective and accurate reports in the future.

We would also ask people to carefully examine the source of news reports to determine if they are now the illegal racist regimes. It does make a difference.

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her in the hands of such a master. For it is from her master that she derives her social legitimacy..."

It is in the family sphere that women suffer the most blatant injustices, and it is in this area that advances have been most painfully slow. The Middle East tradition has long fostered segregation by sex, which has essentially meant seclusion of women within the home. The degree of mobility afforded to women today varies from one country to another, with Saudi Arabia providing the model of conservatism. In that country few women are ever seen in the street, and when they do leave the home they are invariably veiled. The thickness of the veil depends on the strictness of the husband. The wives of the wealthy seem to fare little better than their poorer counterparts. They often do not have the run of the house and garden.

The cult of segregation has its roots in the inordinate importance attached to female chastity, especially pre-marital virginity. So-called 'honour murders', in which a girl may be killed by her father or brother if she sins against the strict sex conventions, still occur in the villages of most Arab countries. When the murderer is brought to court he is often treated so leniently as almost to sanction the crime.

The laws of North Yemen still allow for the stoning of a woman for adultery. While in practice the judge "invariably rules that the stones shall be very small and be thrown from such a great distance that they do not reach their target", the very existence of such a law is indicative of prevailing attitudes.

With respect to marriage, divorce, inheritance and property the basic

Islamic provisions are nearly everywhere in force. In marriage the man must make over a dowry to his wife, although in practice the bride's father often takes part for himself. This dowry provides some safeguard for the wife in the event of divorce. In spite of this, her position remains precarious. A man may divorce his wife without giving any reason, merely by telling her of his intention to do so three times before witnesses. In contrast, it is very difficult and in some countries virtually impossible for a wife to institute divorce proceedings. Once she gets to court she has to prove serious misconduct by her husband. Tunisia is one country where women are now given equal rights in asking for a divorce. In most other Arab nations, unilateral divorce rights are still operative.

Polygamy is still legally permitted in most countries, although it is practised little. According to Islamic Law, a man may have up to four wives. The contributor on Saudi Arabia in the *Minority Rights Report* points to close friendship between a man's wives as a sign that such marriages "can be happy in a way quite incomprehensible to western minds". This glosses over the fact that as long as polygamy is sanctioned it debases the status of a wife.

Arab feminists have been campaigning for the rights of women for many years, and their efforts have achieved limited positive results. Pressure must be maintained there, as in the West, if the issue is not to be quietly shelved by governments who consider it to be of relatively minor importance in their grand designs.

*'ARAB WOMEN', revised edition October, 1976 Minority Rights Group, 36 Craven St., London WC2N 5NG, England.

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