

**Anita Roddick : Trading With Principles**

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We are in Seattle arguing for a world trade system that puts basic human rights and the environment at its core. We have the most powerful corporations of the world ranged against us. They own the media that informs us - or fails to inform us. And they probably own the politicians too.

It's enough to make anybody feel a little edgy.

So here's a question for the world trade negotiators. Who is the system you are lavishing so much attention on supposed to serve?

We can ask the same question of the gleaming towers of Wall Street or the City of London - and the powerful men and women who tinker with the money system which drives world trade. Who is this system for?

Let's look more closely. Every day, the gleaming towers of high finance oversees a global flow of two trillion dollars through their computer screens. And the terrifying thing is that only three per cent of that - that's, three hundredths - has anything to do with trade at all. Let alone free trade between equal communities.

It has everything to do with money. The great global myth being that the current world trade system is for anything but money.

The other 97 per cent of the two trillion is speculation. It is froth - but froth with terrifying power over people's lives. Reducing powerless communities access to basic human rights can make money, but not for them. But then the system isn't designed for them.

It isn't designed for you and me either. We all of us, rich and poor, have to live with the insecurity caused by an out of control global casino with a built-in bias towards instability. Because it is instability that makes money for the money-traders.

"The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie - deliberate, contrived and dishonest," said John F Kennedy, "- but the myth - persistent, persuasive and unrealistic." Asking questions can puncture these powerful myths.

I spend much of every year travelling around the world, talking to people in the front line of globalisation: women, community farmers, children. I know how unrealistic these myths are. Not just in developing countries but right under our noses.

Like the small farmers of the USA, 500 of which go out of business every week.

Half a century ago there were a million black farmers in the US. Now there are 1800. Globalisation means that the subsidies go to the big farms, while the small family farms - the heart of so many American communities - go to the wall.

Or the dark, cramped factories where people work for a pittance for 12 hour days without a day off. "The workers are not allowed to talk to each other and they didn't allow us to go to the bathroom," says one Asian worker in that garment factory. Not in Seoul. Not in Sao Paulo. But in San Francisco.

We have a world trading system that is blind to this kind of injustice. And as the powers of governments shrink this system is, in effect, our new unelected, uncontrollable world government. One that outlaws our attempts to >make things better.

According to the WTO, we don't have the right to discriminate between tuna caught without killing dolphins and tuna caught by those who don't care, don't worry and don't try.

According to the WTO, we have no right to hoard patented seeds from one harvest to plant the following year.

According to the WTO, we have no right to discriminate against beef with growth hormones.

According to the WTO, the livelihoods of the small-scale banana farmers of the Windward Islands are worthless - now facing ruin as the WTO favours the big US exporters

The truth is that the WTO, and the group of unelected trade officials who run it, are now the world's highest court, with the right to overturn local laws and safety regulations wherever they say it 'interferes with trade'.

This is world government by default, but it is a blind government. It looks at the measurements of money, but it can't see anything else. It can recognise profits and losses, but it deliberately turns its face away from human rights, child labour or keeping the environment viable for future generations.

It is government without heart, and without heart you find the creativity of the human spirit starts to dwindle too.

Now there will be commentators and politicians by the truckload over the next week accusing us of wanting to turn the clock back. They will say we are parochial, inward-looking, xenophobic and dangerous.

But we must remind them what free trade really is. The truth is that 'free trade' was originally about the freedom of communities to trade equally with each other. It was never intended to be what it is today. A licence for the big, the powerful and the rich, to ride roughshod over the small, the weak and the poor.

And while we're about it, let's nail another myth.

Nobody could be more in favour of a global outlook than I am. Internationalism means that we can see into the dark corners of the world, and hold those companies to account when they are devastating forests or employing children as bonded labour. Globalisation is the complete opposite, its rules pit country against country and workers against workers in the blinkered pursuit of international competitiveness.

Internationalism means we can link together at local level across the world, and use our power as consumers. Working together, across all sectors, we can turn businesses from private greed to public good.

It means, even more important, that we can start understanding each other in a way that no generation has managed before.

Let's be clear about this. It's not trade we're against, it's exploitation and unchecked power.

I don't pretend for a moment that we're perfect at The Body Shop. Or that every one of our experiments work out - especially when it comes to building trading relationships that actually strengthen poor communities.

We are absolutely committed to increasing our trade with communities around the world, because this is the key - not just for our future, but the planet's. It means that they trade to strengthen their local economy for profit, but not because their very survival depends on it.

Community trade will make us not a multi-national, but a multi-local. I hope we can measure our success in terms of our ability to show just what's possible if a company genuinely opens a dialogue with communities.

Heaven knows, we're not there yet. But this is real life, and all any of us can do is to make sure we are going in the right direction, and never lose our determination to improve.

The trouble is that the current trading system undermines anybody who tries.

Businesses which forego profits to build communities, or keep production local rather than employing semi-slaves in distant sweatshops, risk losing business to cheaper competitors without such commitments, and being targeted for take-over by the slash-and-burn corporate raiders. Reinforced by the weight of the WTO.

It's difficult for all of us. But if we are going to change the world then nobody - not governments, not the media, not individuals - are going to get a free ride. And certainly not business, because business is now faster, more creative and far wealthier than governments ever were.

Business has to be a force for social change. It is not enough to avoid hideous evil - it must, we must, actively do good. If business stays parochial, without moral energy or codes of behaviour, claiming there are no such thing as values, then God help us all. If you think morality is a luxury business can't afford, try living in a world without it.

So what should we do at this critical moment in world history? First, we must make sure this week that we lay the foundations for humanising world trade.

We must learn from our experience of what really works for poor countries, poor communities around the world. The negotiators this week must listen to these communities and allow these countries full participation and contribution to trade negotiations.

The rules have got to change. We need a radical alternative that puts people before profit. And that brings us to my second prescription. We must start measuring our success differently.

If politicians, businesses and analysts only measure the bottom line - the growth in money - then it's not surprising the world is skewed.

It's not surprising that the WTO is half-blind, recognising slash-and-burn corporations but not the people they destroy.

It's not surprising that it values flipping hamburgers or making sweaters at 50 cents an hour as a valuable activity, but takes no account of those other jobs - the caring, educating and loving work that we all know needs doing if we're going to turn the world into a place we

want to live.

Let's measure the success of places and corporations against how much they enhance human well-being. Body Shop was one of the first companies to submit itself to a social audit, and many others are now doing so.

Measuring what really matters can give us the revolution in kindness we so desperately need. That's the real bottom line.

And finally, we must remember we already have power as consumers and as organisations forming strategic and increasingly influential alliances for change. They can insist on open markets as much as they like, but if consumers won't buy, nothing on earth can make them. Just look at how European consumers have forced the biotech industry's back up against the wall.

We have to be political consumers, vigilante consumers. With the barrage of propaganda served up to us every day, we have to be. We must be wise enough so that - whatever they may decide at the trade talks - we know where to put our energy and our money. No matter what we're told or cajoled to do, we must work together to get the truth out in co-operation for the best, not competition for the cheapest.

By putting our money where our heart is, refusing to buy the products which exploit, by forming powerful strategic alliances, we will mould the world into a kinder more loving shape. And we will do so no matter what you decide this week.

Human progress is on our side.