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Book Note**FAIR TRADE COFFEE: THE PROSPECTS AND
PITFALLS OF MARKET-DRIVEN SOCIAL JUSTICE,
by Gavin Fridell¹**

CATHERINE NOWAK

THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT to purchase fairly-traded goods has grown significantly throughout recent decades and is now a major component of many international development programs. Supporters celebrate the impact fair trade regimes have had in raising labour and employment standards in the global south. However, Fridell notes that most assessments are primarily focused on poverty alleviation at the local level. He argues that the broader politico-economic structures that frame the issue have been left largely unexamined by analysts. While Fridell acknowledges that local-level assessment is important, a thorough examination of the broader structures is essential when evaluating the long-term sustainability of fair trade regimes.

Fridell concentrates his analysis on the fair-trade coffee movement. He concludes that the regime has changed from an alternative trading network, based on small businesses that exclusively carry fair-trade products, to a niche market, driven by large corporations with only minor commitments to fair trade given their overall size. For instance, most large coffee companies carry a token 'fair-trade blend' that is not distributed nor marketed as widely as the conventional blends.² Fridell argues that the new corporate model leaves little room for interaction between consumers and producers. Since producers and consumers remain separate from each other without any real knowledge about how the other operates, the main catalyst for performance continues to be profit-based. He proposes the local development model as an alternative, as it is

1. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 291 pages.

2. At one major coffee company that markets itself as socially responsible, only 6 per cent of the total coffee beans are certified as fair trade.

more consistent with the early principles of fair trade that emphasize a moral commitment and international solidarity.

Fridell relies on case studies from both Canada and Mexico to examine the movement at both the local and the global levels. The book begins by introducing the reader to the historical and political roots of fair trade theory. It then documents the fair trade successes seen in several cooperatives in Mexico. Later, the book examines the impact of northern institutions and consumers in Canada. The book concludes with an analysis of the prospects and limitations of the fair trade network.