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JAY WALKING

Globalisation: the good, the bad and the McFlurryBy *Jacqui Zurcher*

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I love Oreo McFlurrys. Even if those urban legends about McDonald's ice cream being made out of potato are true, that is damn fine potato ice cream. That said; those golden arches give me the creeps.



The tastiness of a McFlurry cannot dispel the sense that with each mouthful I endorse something umbilically linked with the darker side of global capitalism. Whoah! Hold on now! All that from a take-out ice cream blended with a branded biscuit? A reactionary, extremist attitude perhaps, but I bet McFlurry's were thin on the ground among the anti-globalisation protesters at the G8 summit in Evian, France earlier this week.

The nearby cities of Annemasse and Geneva must have had to stock up on free-range, local Soya and Tofu as the protesters descended to decry the economic policies of the world's seven richest industrialised nations and their poorer, but really big cousin, Russia.

Being partial to vegetarian fare, I was interested to find out what these anti-globalisation protestors were on about. Were they just dirty-haired reprobates intent on urban unrest? Some of them probably were.

Obviously, they are against globalisation, the economic phenomenon where a McDonalds could open up down the road from Thembu's Burger Hut on the Wild Coast, but would possibly prohibit Thembu from moving to New York once his business had collapsed. Well, sort of.

Globalisation is a broad term associated with a number of factors such as increased global trade and the embracing of an international culture promoted by a globally dominant Western media. Barbie dolls in rural KwaZulu Natal, that sort of thing.

I doubt Sven and Jurgen, our hardy anti-globalisation protestors, object to the existence of international trade. What they find problematic is the way it has been

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Leigh Robertson,
Highlife Editor

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implemented to favour the world's powerful and wealthy nations. Being from the wealthy nations themselves, they altruistically claim that a myriad factors such as European and US farming subsidies and restrictive first world trade tariffs are increasing the economic rift between the developed and developing world.

Instead of giving aid to alleviate the consequences of unfair international trade, the protestors argue that developing countries should be enabled, through the adjustment and dismantling of unfair trade instruments, to create their own robust economies.

Now as far as I know, Kofi Annan and Thabo Mbeki are not tie-dyed wearing, tofu-munching flower children, but their demands of the G8 nations echo that of the protestors. They are asking for a holistic approach to the problems of the developing world, with UN Secretary General Annan suggesting that a piecemeal approach to the development challenges of poorer nations, such as isolated aid gifts, would be ineffectual.

Thabo Mbeki did not seem to be distracted by the profusion of French cheese at the buffet when he insisted that any aid would "not make sense" unless poorer nations could export goods more freely to wealthy countries.

The example of Mozambique is often used to illustrate the unfair trade to which African leaders and the protestors are opposed. In spite of decades of war and devastating floods the Mozambiquan sugar industry has emerged, boasting the lowest production costs in the world. In first world nations where sugar costs more to produce, farmers receive government subsidies to artificially boost their sugar production, resulting in production surpluses.

The surpluses are then dumped on developing nations at prices below the cost of their production. The Mozambiquan industry is unable to flourish against this type of unfair competition and is further hindered by unfavourable export tariffs and quotas which increase the price of the sugar when it is exported abroad as well as limit the amount of the product that is able to be exported into a certain trade area, such as the EU.

While these restrictive international trade policies hinder the creation of robust industries in the developing world, the first world hands out aid to struggling nations. Doesn't sound like a comprehensive long-term approach to alleviating poverty to me.

Not being an economist, though, perhaps I am missing the subtleties of the machinations of global trade and investment.

Maybe the seemingly cosmopolitan MTV can help me here. While I cycle at gym, a midriff-revealing cockney lass tells me that by phoning London and pledging 20 pounds to sponsor a starving child in Africa I will be doing my bit to make the world a better place.

Hang on, but I am in Africa and there is a starving African child at my doorstep. That can't be right, surely?

I wonder whether the potatoes they supposedly use to make my moral-conflict-inducing McFlurry are proudly South African?



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