

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 9 September 2008

Session 3

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EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

14th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
*Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD)
Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
*Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP)
Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con)
Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Malcolm Brown (Scottish Midland Co-operative Society)
Thomas Hastie (Edinburgh Fair Trade City Initiative)
Betsy Reed (Scottish Fair Trade Forum)
Duncan Rees (Wales Fair Trade Forum)
Martin Rhodes (Glasgow Fair Trade Steering Group)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Dr Jim Johnston

ASSISTANT CLERKS

Lewis McNaughton
Lucy Scharbert

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

European and External Relations Committee

Tuesday 9 September 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:01*]

Interests

The Convener (Malcolm Chisholm): Good morning, everybody, and welcome to the 14th meeting this calendar year of the European and External Relations Committee. Before we start this morning's business, I have some bad news: this is the last meeting for Jim Johnston, our esteemed clerk, who is going on secondment to—wait for it—the House of Lords. I am sure that you would all like to join me in thanking Jim for all his hard and incredibly efficient work over two years and in wishing him well in his new position. I think that he will be working with the European Union Select Committee of the House of Lords—perhaps we can develop good relations with the Lords on European issues. We have two new clerks who will share the position, Simon Watkins and Lynn Tullis, who are here in the room. They will be taking over at the next meeting. I also welcome our new assistant clerk, Lewis McNaughton, who is already sitting at the table.

We have received apologies from Patricia Ferguson, Jim Hume and Gil Paterson. We welcome Keith Brown, who will be attending as Gil's substitute.

Item 1 is a declaration of interests, which arises because we are welcoming a new member to the committee. We are very glad to see Jamie Hepburn here and, as is customary, I invite him to declare any relevant interests.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, convener. I have nothing to declare beyond what is publicly available in my entry in the register of members' interests.

The Convener: Thank you, Jamie. I should have added Irene Oldfather to the list of apologies for today's meeting.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:03

The Convener: Item 2 is to decide whether to take item 8 in private, as is normal practice when we are discussing our approach to inquiries. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Scotland as a Fair Trade Nation

10:03

The Convener: The main item on our agenda is to take evidence on Scotland as a fair trade nation. As members will recall, we agreed on 24 June to invite key partners and stakeholders to a round-table discussion.

I welcome Betsy Reed from the Scottish Fair Trade Forum; Martin Rhodes from the Glasgow fair trade steering group; Malcolm Brown from the Scottish Midland Co-operative Society; Duncan Rees from the Wales Fair Trade Forum; and Thomas Hastie from the Edinburgh fair trade city initiative. Thank you all very much for coming. There has been considerable interest in the matter in the Scottish Parliament for some time, and we had a debate on the subject earlier this year, as well as having discussions in the committee.

I will start with a general question; I am sure that there will be specific questions later about the role of the Scottish Government. What would you like the role of the Scottish Government to be in Scotland becoming a fair trade nation? I invite Betsy Reed to kick us off on that.

Betsy Reed (Scottish Fair Trade Forum): The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government have two separate roles. Opportunities such as this help to raise public awareness. The people who keep track of what is going on in Parliament might be different from those who keep track of what is going on in fair trade, so thank you for the opportunity.

I note that Scottish Business in the Community has submitted written evidence to the committee. One of our aims in the Scottish Fair Trade Forum and in the fair trade community in general is to work more closely with the business community. Seeing business underlining its support for fair trade marks a step forward for us and gives us something to follow up on.

To answer more specifically on the involvement of the Government and the Parliament, our core funding comes entirely from the Scottish Government. We look forward to continuing that involvement in the future. Duncan Rees will have some interesting things to say about the involvement of the Welsh Assembly Government in funding.

I would like now to leave the discussion to others and hear what they have to say, and I could perhaps tie it up at the end.

The Convener: I invite Duncan Rees to give the Welsh perspective and tell us about the role of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Duncan Rees (Wales Fair Trade Forum):

Thank you for inviting us to be present here today. It is a great pleasure to meet you all. We have been pleased to work with our colleagues in Scotland for some years now in developing a joint approach towards achieving fair trade nation status in Wales and Scotland. I strongly emphasise that we have received terrific backing from the Welsh Assembly Government. There is no doubt that we could not have achieved the fair trade nation status that we announced in June within the timescale if it had not been for that backing from the Welsh Assembly Government, which provided financial support, resourcing a full-time worker. We received substantial cross-party political support from Welsh Assembly Government ministers and Assembly members.

The only thing that I wish to add at this stage, in advance of questions from committee members, is that the Welsh Assembly Government has been clear all along that the declaration of Wales as a fair trade nation is not thought of as meaning "job done". Similarly, for Edinburgh, say, to achieve fair trade city status is not the end of the story. It is a journey, not a destination. If we are going to achieve what we want to achieve with fair trade, we must keep on working at it. The Welsh Assembly Government is very much aware of that and of the need to take sustainable steps on fair trade, progressing into the future rather than focusing on short-term targets.

The Convener: We have Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Co-op—the Co-op can go first.

Malcolm Brown (Scottish Midland Co-operative Society): It is clear from your introduction that you have started to recognise the importance of Scottish Government help to ensuring that Scotland becoming a fair trade nation is not viewed as a tick-box exercise. That is vital. As far as Scotmid and the Co-op are concerned, if it is a tick-box exercise, it has taken 16 years to make that tick. It is important that fair trade never becomes a little add-on to make people pleased with themselves. Over the years, we have been trying to introduce as many fair trade products as possible, so that it does not become just a tick-box and so that we can all be satisfied. The Scottish Government recognises that, which is good for all of us.

The Convener: I could not possibly choose between Edinburgh and Glasgow, so we will just hear from whoever speaks first.

Martin Rhodes (Glasgow Fair Trade Steering Group): I endorse what has just been said about ensuring that fair trade is part of a wider trade justice agenda. Government can take a central role in that. The Scottish Government's role is as a key partner in the fair trade movement here. A lot of activity takes place in Scottish towns and cities,

with various fair trade initiatives and groups. One key role for Government, along with local authorities, is to support the activity that is taking place and to allow it to develop.

Thomas Hastie (Edinburgh Fair Trade City Initiative): One of my big jobs is putting in renewal forms. We worked hard to get fair trade city status, but that is not the end of the story. We look for shops, cafes and employers in the city to support fair trade. I work for the Scottish Government; when people order tea and coffee in Scottish Government buildings, it is all fair trade—they do not have a choice. It is important that, as an employer, the Scottish Government is seen to support fair trade.

It is also great to publicise fair trade at events. Two years ago, we had an evening wine reception in the Parliament at which we invited some farmers from Ghana to talk about their experiences of fair trade. Obviously, we invited MSPs, and Sarah Boyack came to the reception to support fair trade, which was great. It is important that MSPs from throughout Scotland support fair trade locally and encourage people.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Do we know what fair trade is worth in Scotland, either as a value or as a percentage? Can we put a value on it and measure it so that we know whether the situation is improving, static, or getting worse? Is there any information from the Office for National Statistics or elsewhere about the level of fair trade in Scotland or the United Kingdom as a whole? I wonder how we are doing compared with the rest of the UK. Is there any way in which we can get a handle on how successful the various initiatives are?

Thomas Hastie: Other witnesses may know more, but the only figures that I know of are UK-wide ones. I have never seen figures that are broken down for Scotland. The UK figures show huge increases in fair trade. I think that there has been an increase of some 40 per cent in the past few years.

Locally, as part of our renewal, we identified an increase in the number of shops that sell fair trade products. Two years ago, we identified 90 such shops, but we now have 181 shops that sell at least one fair trade product.

Alex Neil: Can you put a value on that in terms of sales?

Thomas Hastie: No. We are not asked to do that by the Fairtrade Foundation, which simply asks us for figures.

Alex Neil: You said that fair trade in the UK has increased by 40 per cent. From what figure did sales increase? Was it £100 million, £50 million or £200 million? What is the value for the UK?

Duncan Rees: I can give you the figure for the UK. This year, the Fairtrade Foundation expects total fair trade sales to top £500 million. We need to put that in the context that, a mere 10 years ago, the figure was almost zero. There has been a huge increase, but we always ask people to be cautious about the figure because we must compare it with the total market value of sales of goods that can be bought in fair trade versions, such as chocolate. The chocolate market in the UK is worth nearly £4 billion—that is how much we spend on chocolate every year. The £500 million figure includes all fair trade goods—chocolate, coffee, tea, wine, fruit, and so on. We have come a long way, but there is still a long way to go.

Alex Neil: Do we know how the £500 million is made up by the sales of different products? Is there a heavy preponderance of certain products? Also, do we have information on which countries and continents the products come from? Is there a pattern? Are we doing better with, say, southern Africa than with northern Africa or other parts of the world?

Duncan Rees: As well as chairing the Wales Fair Trade Forum, I work for the Co-operative Group. From internal research and general market research that we have done, it turns out that just over 80 per cent of all fair trade purchases are concentrated in five product categories—tea, coffee, chocolate, bananas and wine. In promoting fair trade and trying to get a bigger share of the grocery market, we need to concentrate on those major product categories.

Certain countries particularly benefit from fair trade, notably west African countries such as Ghana, which produce chocolate and cocoa products; South Africa and certain South American countries, which produce wine; and the Caribbean and some South American countries, which produce bananas.

10:15

Malcolm Brown: I will back that up and talk about what is happening in Scotland. Scotmid has 130 stores throughout Scotland. Over the years, not all our stores have carried fair trade products—that depended on their uptake and on what people wanted in the communities in which we operate. However, just a few years back, we decided that all 130 stores would stock fair trade products, such as bananas, chocolate and wine. No matter what the area is, the Scotmid or Morning Noon & Night store there will always have some fair trade products. Some stores have up to 100 fair trade products, whereas others have just 10, 15 or 20—that depends on the area.

Without giving away trade secrets, I can say that what the business is worth to us is in the low

millions of pounds. We like to make a profit, but we are part of the Co-op, which has since 1992 given an absolute commitment to fair trade.

At the local level, all 130 stores stock fair trade products. We support initiatives such as fair trade towns and we also sponsored the Scottish Government event two years ago. It is important to know that every Scotmid store stocks fair trade products.

Betsy Reed: We have to work with the Scottish Government to establish figures. As part of our criteria, we need to establish our starting point, because we must increase year on year the number of people in Scotland who recognise the main fair trade marks and who buy fair trade products. We will work with the Scottish Government on that.

The Convener: Is it a reasonable working assumption that our share of consumption equates to our share of the total UK population, or do we have evidence that we are doing better or worse than other parts of the UK?

Betsy Reed: It is tough to say.

The Convener: We do not know.

Betsy Reed: We do not know, but the figures are increasing year on year. I have spoken to people at the University of Edinburgh, which became the first fair trade university in Scotland in 2004. Just the university switching its coffee supply to fair trade increased the UK's consumption of fair trade coffee by 3 per cent, because the UK's consumption was low. That made Scotland look very good.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am sure that we can bandy about lots of statistics and percentages. I ask panel members to comment on one or two figures that are in a briefing from the World Development Movement Scotland. It claims that

"Fair trade currently counts for less than 1% of Scottish groceries",

which means that we have a long way to go. Do you recognise that figure?

Malcolm Brown: I do not necessarily recognise that figure, but it is certainly true to say that we have a long way to go. Every time we hold events, survey our membership or examine what people buy in our stores, we realise that fair trade uptake in stores in some areas is small. However, that does not discourage us.

We have sold fair trade products since 1992 and sales have grown year on year. The Scottish Government is taking an interest in fair trade and is supporting us. The figure that you quoted is disappointing, but it does not discourage us, because it will be worked on. If growth dipped, we

would be concerned, but that is not happening. More and more people coming together gives us hope that the figure will continue to increase, but you are right to say that we have a long way to go.

Ted Brocklebank: What I and the briefing are trying to say is that, although emphasising fair trade is a tremendous way to draw attention to the problem, perhaps it is more important for Scotland to bring pressure to bear on the European Union, which is doing deals, as you know, that

"threaten to lock more than a billion people already living on less than £1 a day into sustained poverty."

Should we not try to bring more pressure to bear on such developments? I do not suggest for a minute that we should give up our attempts to promote fair trade through stores, but the real job is stopping Europe making such bad deals with developing countries.

Malcolm Brown: That is a fair point, but I return to the fact that we are customer driven. If we do not get back to basics and get it right at the grass roots, we will have a major problem getting people through our doors. That is the type of thing that the Co-op Group as a whole looks at all the time. Although Europe is important to the committee, our main concern at our level is publicity and getting people through the door. Without that, all the other efforts that you are talking about would be worthless.

Duncan Rees: There have been detractors of the fair trade movement, a notable example of which is the Adam Smith Institute, with which I have had the pleasure of debating once or twice in the past few months. The Adam Smith Institute suggests that fair trade is not necessarily the most effective way of addressing problems of third-world poverty and the plight of producers there.

We have never argued that fair trade is the only answer; rather it is part of a series of answers to address poverty in the third world and the position of some producers. Other measures are needed to tackle problems, as people have said, such as the injustice in international trade, tariff barriers and all kinds of other international trade issues that affect developing countries. Although those issues need to be addressed as part of a broader agenda on trade justice, fair trade remains a specific way of tackling a specific issue relating to specific producers in the third world. Fair trade is part of the answer, but it is not the whole answer.

Martin Rhodes: It is true that there is a broader issue to do with trade justice, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, but that does not negate the argument for the fair trade campaign. One of the key elements of that campaign is that it allows ordinary citizens to be involved in fair trade issues. Many ordinary citizens in Scotland and elsewhere will feel that they have little control over some of

the broader issues of trade law and what goes on in the debating chambers of the European Commission, but people can get involved with the fair trade movement at a grass-roots level right down to the simple level of choosing which brand of coffee to buy when they go to the supermarket. One of the key elements of the fair trade campaign is the involvement of citizens as consumers making choices. One of the great successes of the campaign is that it has allowed individual citizens to feel empowered and involved in complex issues.

Ted Brocklebank: One of you mentioned in your introduction that it should not be a case of simply ticking the boxes. Do you think that we in the Scottish Parliament and all its offices pay enough attention to procuring goods and services on a fair trade basis, or is there an element in this place of simply ticking the boxes and being aspirational rather than actually doing anything?

Martin Rhodes: I would not want to say that the Scottish Parliament is not aspirational, but I do not know about the Parliament's procurement policy. All organisations can look regularly at their procurement policy and at how best to use their purchasing power. There is always a concern about falling into a tick-box attitude and saying, "We now have fair trade coffee; that's fine, we've done it." We need to look constantly at new ways of making fair trade choices.

Government at all levels needs to engage with the procurement rules for public bodies, which should involve the fair trade principle. That is a much broader issue to do with policy making at every level of government. There is a need for constant review of fair trade in any organisation, which needs to ask, "Where can we go next?" One of my colleagues said earlier that fair trade is not a destination; it is a process, which can be re-evaluated and developed constantly.

Malcolm Brown: If tick-boxes go along with other initiatives, they are a good start to the journey, as Duncan Rees said. The danger arises when an organisation, such as a retailer, pays lip-service to fair trade but does not move the policy on. The Scottish Government probably has ticked a box, but there are other on-going initiatives. That must be good, but the danger is that lip-service is paid to fair trade and people say, "Well, we do that," and nothing else happens.

Ted Brocklebank: Maybe Duncan Rees could give us examples from the National Assembly for Wales. Do you examine procurement of fair trade products and measure that against procurement of Welsh products, for example? There is always the argument about whether to go for local or fair trade products—that raises problems. Do you have a way of monitoring procurement in the Welsh Assembly?

Duncan Rees: The Welsh Assembly Government has taken several concrete steps to underline its commitment to supporting fair trade, one of which is on procurement. Members of staff have been assigned direct responsibility for examining how fair trade can be advanced through procurement. We realise that the inability or lack of willingness among procurement agencies to procure fair trade produce is one of the big handicaps to moving fair trade on a further big step. The Welsh Assembly Government has taken that on board.

Another significant issue is fair trade in businesses. The Government supports the Wales Co-operative Centre by funding a member of staff whose role it is to raise more awareness and increase the use of fair trade in businesses in Wales. The Government has certainly done a lot in that area.

The Convener: We have moved on to procurement, which involves potentially enormous amounts of money. In that regard, the European dimension is cited frequently. Advice to Governments here is that the issues are problematic under European legislation, and I presume that the same applies elsewhere. I used to be in the Government and I do not think that the situation is different now. Do you have any views about the European dimension? People mention other European countries that seem to be able to build fair trade into contracts without falling foul of European legislation.

Betsy Reed: That is a tricky issue for Scotland—we talked about it when I was at the committee previously. Everything to do with Europe goes through London. Scotland could push on the procurement issue a bit, but it is down to member states to interpret how they implement directives. The UK Government could be pressured to interpret the directives in a way that is closer to how other European countries interpret them. I will stick my neck out and say that procurement directives seem to be interpreted in a very risk-averse way here, which is problematic for fair trade and for ethical purchasing in general.

The Convener: I ask Duncan Rees whether the Welsh Assembly Government has taken a view on the European dimension.

Duncan Rees: I am not aware of a Welsh Assembly Government view on that aspect. However, the Government has taken an active approach and considers the issue to be important to Wales. It is estimated that

"Procurement expenditure by the public sector in Wales represents 11 per cent of national GDP"

and that

"The supply of food and catering services alone accounts for 60 million per annum."

Those are significant figures. The Government's ability to progress the agenda is one of the key ways in which fair trade will grow in the country.

Jamie Hepburn: I want to ask about the challenge of promoting fair trade in the current economic climate. It cannot have escaped anyone's attention that there is real pressure on the cost of living for families. I saw a report on the television the other day that people are moving away from buying organic produce and returning to, for want of a better term, traditional produce. Has that effect been noticed with fair trade produce and, if so, how do we respond to the challenge?

10:30

Martin Rhodes: One of the changes that have taken place in recent years with regard to fair trade products is that not only is a much wider range of products available but there is a wider range within each category. For instance, the involvement of the Co-op and other supermarket chains that sell fair trade own-branded goods means that there is a range of fair trade coffee—to take one example—that goes from budget-priced instant coffee right the way up to the premium-rated ground coffee. That is the case in all the more developed product areas. Therefore, although issues relating to the cost of living might have some impact on the premium end, it might well be that fair trade products are in a better position than they were a few years ago to deal with the situation. Not all fair trade products are the premium products at the top end of the market.

Malcolm Brown: That is a good point. We are lucky in that the co-op movement has had fair trade products in stores for many years, which means that those products have become the products of choice for many people, because they like the taste. That is certainly the case with chocolate, orange juice and some wines. Although everybody is looking after their pennies, they will still buy the products that they prefer.

When we are introducing fair trade products to a new market, word of mouth is important, as are events such as the ethical Christmas fayre that is held every year in Edinburgh. It is not enough for people simply to feel that they are pleased to be buying fair trade products; we have to ensure that the product that we are giving people is one that they enjoy. Some fair trade chocolate might be at the more expensive end of the range, but we will always have another brand that is that wee bit cheaper.

We have found that sales of fair trade products are growing every year. We are not seeing a slowing down of that trend yet, but who knows what is around the corner?

Jamie Hepburn: Do you believe that fair trade produce is competitively enough priced and that the brand is well enough established that it can meet any of the challenges that might arise?

Malcolm Brown: Absolutely. If people get it into their mind that they are paying a fortune for fair trade products, that will be harmful. Publicity around fair trade products must try not only to get people to buy the products but to get into people's psyches the fact that the products do good in the world, are tasty and enjoyable, and are not necessarily extortionate or expensive. People have to be told that they can go into any store and find a range of all sorts of products, some expensive and some not so expensive.

It is a new market and, as we found with the fair trade chocolate at the ethical Christmas fayre in Edinburgh, once people taste products and enjoy them they want to know where they can buy them locally. They might be willing to pay a little bit extra for them, but we need to get people to understand that fair trade products are not necessarily expensive.

Jamie Hepburn: Obviously, the cost of living is part of the context, as is local produce, which Ted Brocklebank touched on—I thought that he was going to develop that point.

The Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, which I was a member of, has touched on the need to source more produce locally for environmental reasons. We all accept that there is an environmental need to reduce carbon output, therefore we want to source more produce locally, so that we do not have to transport it from further afield. However, we also want to raise the living standards and incomes of the world's poorest citizens. To me, that sounds like the proverbial squaring of a circle. How might we do that?

Betsy Reed: I was at a meeting in Inverness last week. The fair trade group up there has always made a concerted effort to include local produce. At every meeting, local cheese, local oatcakes and so on are included along with the fair trade produce. We are fortunate that we live in a country that does not grow bananas or coffee.

The question that you ask comes up more and more often, and is not going to go away. We work with NFU Scotland, because it needs to be underlined that fair trade and local produce are not in conflict. However, I should say that, by now, most of us have seen that the air miles argument is a bit simplistic. It takes a bit more in-depth thinking to work out the exact environmental impact of, say, bringing produce here from Africa.

You have hit on the main point, which is that fair trade is a good thing and local is a good thing. The two are not in conflict. The Welsh co-ordinator once said that he follows the local, organic and fair

trade—LOFT—principle. We should emphasise to the public that you do not need to choose one over the other. Few fair trade products are in conflict with local products. The problem is, therefore, pretty easy to solve.

Alex Neil: Growing tomatoes, for example, in Scotland produces more carbon than does importing them from elsewhere.

Thomas Hastie: Some people say that we should not import flowers from Kenya, but the ones that we import from Holland are grown under heated glass roofs, which uses more energy than simply growing them under the sun in Africa and shipping them over here. People can get carried away when they read newspaper headlines.

Malcolm Brown: I was up in Inverness to speak to schoolchildren—there must be something about Inverness, Betsy—and we showed them fair trade products and got them to guess where they came from. When we showed them a packet of chocolate shortbread biscuits, their guesses were all over the place. The simple answer was that the chocolate came from west Africa and the shortbread came from Scotland—I think the company was Walkers. Fair trade does not only involve bringing products here; you can work locally and also have a big fair trade input.

Jamie Hepburn: Is it quite common for the two streams—local produce and fair trade produce—to come together in that way?

Malcolm Brown: It is not very common. It depends on the product. Obviously, it is difficult with coffee, but if a Scottish product can be produced in such a way that it will benefit fair trade as well, we will consider it.

Betsy Reed: At a local level there is quite an awareness of that. There are a lot of farmers in Scotland, and I have never met one who was opposed to fair trade. I think that that is because, in general terms, they understand the life of the person at the other end of the fair trade product.

The Convener: Alex Neil asked about statistical information. As you know, certain criteria have to be met before Scotland can become a fair trade nation. You will be aware that 100 per cent of local authorities have to have active fair trade groups and 55 per cent of local authority areas should have fair trade status. Do any of you have any information about whether and how such criteria are being measured?

Betsy Reed: We have just finished our local authority mapping exercise and we will publish a report on it next month.

The fair trade status that local authorities go for is called the fair trade zone, the criteria for which are the same as the criteria for a fair trade city or town. The status is on-going and has to be

renewed every year. At this point, seven local authorities in Scotland have achieved fair trade zone status, seven local authorities are working on it—which means that they have established a fair trade group and passed a resolution—nine local authorities are in the very early stages of working towards the criteria, and a couple still need us to work on them a little before they get interested. The result of the mapping exercise was quite encouraging, as we are further along than I thought we would be. It is quite good to see more and more local authorities getting on board. Indeed, Midlothian Council and Fife Council have just announced the establishment of fair trade groups and have passed resolutions to work towards fair trade status.

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): On the fairness of fair trade, I wonder whether the panel has any views on the collapse of the World Trade Organization talks.

On a related matter, one of the panel mentioned bananas, coffee and other products from the Caribbean. How does the embargo on Cuba affect fair trade? Does it undermine it or does it have no effect at all?

The Convener: Does anyone want to respond?

Keith Brown: Don't all rush.

Martin Rhodes: As far as the WTO talks are concerned, fair trade is, as we have already said, only one element of a much broader trade justice issue.

As for your other question, I do not know the details about the situation in Cuba. However, the important principle behind fair trade is that it is about working and trading with producers, not with Governments or countries, and that will be the basis of any fair trade relationship in Cuba.

Keith Brown: But would the perceived fairness of fair trade be undermined if the international embargo meant that banana, sugar and coffee producers in Cuba—who, after all, suffer from great poverty—were excluded from such activities? I am asking the question simply because I do not know.

Betsy Reed: I am not aware of any fair trade producers in Cuba, but that might just be me. Is anyone else aware of any fair trade activity in Cuba?

Witnesses: No.

Betsy Reed: Part of the reason might be that the system is strictly audited and Cuba's current political status might simply make it too difficult for fair trade to operate there. Cuban producers might not necessarily be excluded from the system; it is just that the political situation might make any such activity very difficult.

The Convener: Betsy Reed gave some figures for local authorities that she said were quite encouraging. However, they also show that we are still a long way from meeting the criteria for fair trade nation status, which suggests that it will be quite a long time before we achieve it. Has Wales, for example, met the same criteria of 100 per cent of local authorities with fair trade groups, 55 per cent of local authorities with fair trade status and so on?

Duncan Rees: Yes.

The Convener: So is it right to say that there is a bit of a gap between Wales and Scotland?

Betsy Reed: We must focus on getting all local authorities to work on the issue. We are definitely getting towards that; indeed, we aim over the next 18 months to double the number of local authorities with fair trade status. To be honest, 55 per cent is not a terribly high number; it represents only 17 or 18 local authorities, depending on how you work it out. We are well on our way to achieving fair trade status, and I believe that we will succeed over the next couple of years.

The Convener: That is encouraging.

Ted Brocklebank: I would like to tease out some more information about where we are heading with procurement. On 13 May 2008, representatives of the Scottish Fair Trade Forum told the committee:

“£8 billion ... is spent every year by the Scottish public sector”

and asked

“whether anyone has ever carried out an ethical audit of where the national health service”,

for example,

“procures its goods.”

The forum spokesman went on to say:

“I have never come across such an audit or been aware of anyone finding out where we source the cotton for uniforms, for example.”—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 12 May 2008; c 663.]

Do we have any more up-to-date information on that? How much of that money goes on fair trade?

Betsy Reed: We have spoken to the procurement people at the national health service and they still have no idea where the cotton comes from. I have to say that we could use some help in that respect; for example, a request could be made or a little light pressure applied. However, with any public body, the question is whether its procurement officials feel able to request fair trade in their procurement criteria. Some creative way might be found to get around that. In any case, we have not at this point spoken to them any further about an ethical audit. Obviously, though, we should revisit the issue.

10:45

Thomas Hastie: The University of Edinburgh is part of the Edinburgh fair trade city initiative. It has fair trade status and, like us, has to submit renewal forms every couple of years. It hopes to source fair trade cotton clothing for its workers to wear. That is an example of what is happening on a small scale, and other places are interested in it.

Ted Brocklebank: It seems that progress could be made if we got the figures and worked out the audit. You talked about the criteria—I presume that you mean the European guidelines and what is allowed in a European context. However, the Department for International Development has stated that

“there are no legal reasons why public authorities should not include fair and ethical trade criteria in their procurement practices”.

That is fairly definitive. The DFID appears to be saying that the Scottish Parliament is being a bit too conservative in not pressing ahead on the fair trade front.

Betsy Reed: I nominate you to go speak to the procurement officials at the Scottish Government. We have spoken to them and they are aware of that, but their interpretation is still that it is not in their interests to push the boat out. Because Scotland is not a member state, there is an element of pressure from down south for them to interpret things more conservatively than we would like them to. We raise such issues with them regularly, but they seem unwilling to budge.

Ted Brocklebank: Perhaps that is something that we can look into, convener.

The Convener: I have used that quote from the DFID, too. Is it any different from what happens in practice regarding the UK Government's procurement? Is the DFID's view widespread throughout Whitehall? I very much doubt it, but I do not know. Are we reading too much into that quote from the DFID? I used it once at First Minister's question time, but I am not convinced that it states the UK Government's official position across government.

Betsy Reed: I cannot speak for the procurement officials at the UK level.

The Convener: No, but is there any difference in procurement practice between the UK Government and the Scottish Government?

Betsy Reed: I do not think that their procurement practices are hugely different. Perhaps Wales could help to put some pressure on the UK Government. It would be beneficial to have a couple of officials look into the possibility of incorporating fair trade and ethical criteria into procurement policy, as is happening in Wales. It might be useful to cite what is happening in Wales as an example of good practice.

Duncan Rees: The Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned and produced a guide for public sector procurement professionals. It points out, however, that the provisions in the guide are recommendations only—they cannot be enforced. Nevertheless, the committee could consider the work that the Welsh Assembly is doing with public sector organisations to construct sustainable procurement assessment frameworks, with the aim of making them mandatory. That would introduce a degree of compulsion to consider fair trade as part of standard procurement policies and is probably the route that we should go down.

The Convener: I point out that we will discuss the matter as a future item. When we raised it in our recent report, the Scottish Government responded:

“The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Scottish Fair Trade Forum to explore issues around Fair Trade procurement and will continue to do as much as possible within the limits of EU legislation.”

The last bit of that statement obviously is contentious.

Alex Neil: The figure of £8 billion gets bandied about, but we need to look at the profile of what the Scottish Government procures. For example, a fair chunk of it relates to road building and the construction sector, and it would be extremely difficult to apply fair trade principles to those. The top fair trade products are bananas, coffee, tea, wine and so on. I am sure that all those things added together do not constitute a particularly large proportion of the £8 billion.

Has anyone profiled the £8 billion and tried to show the potential of applying fair trade principles in the Scottish Government's procurement? In an industry such as the construction industry, frankly, that is not going to happen. I do not see how fair trade principles could be applied in the construction industry. They might be applied in the procurement of some building materials, but I expect that there would be very little scope for that.

The global figure of £8 billion is bandied about, which makes it sound as if there is a huge opportunity, but I suspect that if that £8 billion were profiled, it would be found that the opportunity for fair trade was quite limited. Has such profiling been done?

Betsy Reed: No, it has not. You have just given me my task for the next few months. That is a good suggestion. We could break the figure down and present the Scottish Government with some options that it had not thought of. I will probably be in touch with your office about that.

Alex Neil: Good.

The Convener: Another of the criteria for achieving fair trade status is an increase of 5 per cent per year in the proportion of the Scottish population who know about fair trade. That seems a commendable objective, but two questions arise. The first is how we will know that such an increase has taken place. The more fundamental question is about what the most effective ways are of raising people's consciousness of fair trade and changing their behaviour when they buy products. Do you have any good practice examples or suggestions about how we can help to make progress on that objective?

Malcolm Brown: Education, first and foremost, should be used to inform youngsters about fair trade products—although, obviously, we do not want to brainwash them. I am talking about Scotmid, other members of the co-op movement or colleagues around the table going into schools. We also do freshers fairs for universities, when we give away free fair trade coffee or chocolate. Another example is the ethical Christmas fayre in Princes Street, which 10,000 people attended last year and which it is hoped that between 10,000 and 15,000 people will go to this year.

When we go round the schools, we leave fair trade education packs with the teachers so that they can develop the conversations that we have had with the youngsters and can do lesson plans with them. As well as letting the youngsters taste fair trade products, we tell them the story of fair trade, so that they realise that the chocolate is not just a lovely bit of chocolate but a lovely bit of chocolate that helps families to get an education. We do that in hundreds of schools throughout the year, and we will not move away from such work. We hope that the youngsters will take on board what we tell them and talk about it with their parents. We leave things for their parents as well. There is a mercenary aspect to what we do, in that today's youngsters are tomorrow's customers.

The education process is the big thing for Scotmid and the co-op movement. Fair trade products are not nameless, faceless products that you just pick off the shelf. They have a history that children can learn about. They learn about geography and how people's lives are being improved. That is the line that we go down. The amount of publicity that we are getting in the local press is astonishing. There is a whole new marketplace. As Betsy Reed said, more local authorities will be involved in two or three years' time. We want more schoolchildren to learn about fair trade early on. That is the great piece of publicising that we are doing.

Thomas Hastie: I like the fact that people are sometimes not given a choice. Someone who goes to Marks and Spencer, Debenhams or a variety of cafes and shops around Edinburgh will

get fair trade tea and coffee. They might always drink it and always like it, even though they have not asked specifically for a fair trade product. The fact that they are given a fair trade product without asking for one helps to raise awareness. As long as the product is good, they will continue to come back and buy it.

Duncan Rees: There is a possible problem connected with our efforts to bring fair trade into what we call the main stream, which I am sure that Malcolm Brown will be aware of. A curious by-product of the fact that fair trade products are no longer found only in niche retailers or Oxfam shops, as was the case 10 years ago, but are available in all the major supermarkets is that people sometimes buy them without realising it. As Thomas Hastie said, people who go into shops such as the Co-op or Marks and Spencer will get fair trade tea and coffee because all the own-brand tea and coffee in those shops is fair trade.

On fair trade going mainstream, to some extent people just automatically pick up the fair trade product without necessarily thinking very much about fair trade when they are buying it. That is why what Malcolm Brown said about education is so important—we have to raise awareness, too. From the polling that we have been doing in Wales, we have found that there has been a problem with raising awareness and with increasing the percentage of people who buy fair trade products regularly—the figure that we have is 40 per cent. The data come from polling evidence. Sometimes when people are polled, because of their uncertainty about fair trade, their responses are not as exact as we would like. In bringing fair trade into the mainstream and raising the bottom line of the value of fair trade goods that we are selling, we can be in danger of not fulfilling the educational part of the work, unless we do all the things that Malcolm Brown mentioned.

Ted Brocklebank: One of the quirky bits of research that I saw in my papers this morning was that, apparently, primary school children in Wales are all provided with free fair trade bananas. Is that true?

Duncan Rees: Yes. That is in progress.

Ted Brocklebank: That initiative draws fair trade to children's attention at a young age and it seems to be a good thing. We have the Commonwealth games in 2014. Could we build similar initiatives into Scottish schools? Could we use the Welsh example and pursue such a healthy eating initiative in the lead-up to the games?

Martin Rhodes: The fair trade group in Glasgow met the lord provost recently to discuss fair trade's involvement in the Commonwealth games and we got a positive response. We are at the early stages of discussing how to build fair trade into the

games, but I am confident that fair trade will be integral to them.

Malcolm Brown: On Ted Brocklebank's point about introducing healthy eating or fair trade products in schools, we are certainly not opposed to the Welsh initiative of providing free bananas to all primary kids, but we already run fruit waves. We pick certain areas and ensure that, over a period of six to eight weeks, children are introduced to free bananas, oranges and juices. We try to give them a taste for fruit, so that when they go to buy something they might choose a banana rather than a Mars bar. We help out with the breakfast clubs that some local authorities and schools run for children. We try to ensure that fair trade orange juice and bananas are served as part of the breakfast. However, we just do not have the resources to run fruit waves for everybody. We try to work area by area.

Martin Rhodes: We have done quite a bit of work with children in schools in Glasgow. However, in many cases, students and school pupils have pushed us and have led the way. It is not just a case of our going into schools and telling children what they should be doing: students and young people have come to us to tell us what they think we should be doing. On education more generally, the involvement of young people in the fair trade movement is a great strength, and will certainly make it easier for us to develop the movement in the future.

Ted Brocklebank: Could the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament become involved in supporting such initiatives?

Martin Rhodes: Certainly.

Betsy Reed: There is already quite a bit about fair trade in the curriculum for excellence. The fair trade schools scheme was launched officially last autumn, and well over 200 schools have already registered as officially working towards becoming fair trade schools.

Because of the healthy eating initiative that is under way in schools, fair trade chocolate will be a bit less popular or allowable, so moving towards products such as fruit is definitely the way forward in promoting fair trade eating among schoolchildren. I know of a project that the Government is working on with a fair trade retailer to provide fair trade rice for school meals. We will keep an eye on that and let you know what happens.

11:00

The Convener: It is 11 o'clock. Witnesses have indicated that they have said what they wanted to say and that we have covered all aspects of the topic that they wished to discuss. We will return to

the issue when we consider our response to the Scottish Government's response to the report on our inquiry into international development, which included fair trade. Fair trade might be raised in the debate on international development that will take place in the Parliament next week. Thank you for coming along. Your evidence has been useful for that purpose and many others.

I suspend the meeting for five minutes.

11:01

Meeting suspended.

11:05

On resuming—

International Development Inquiry

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of the Scottish Government's response to the committee's report on its international development inquiry. The item is timely, as there will be a debate on the topic next Wednesday. We will not produce an official response to the Government's report, but if we wish to raise particular issues with the Scottish Government we can do so now as well as during the debate. During a previous evidence-taking session, I said that we might want to pursue issues such as procurement. I read out the Scottish Government's response on the issue, which was positive about working with the Scottish Fair Trade Forum. One option is for us to pick up some of the witnesses' points about procurement. However, the Government has also responded to many other aspects of the report. If members would like to comment on the response, this is the time for them to do so.

Alex Neil: There is not much that we can do besides noting the response. By and large, we are all travelling in the same direction. I see no great difference between what the Government is saying and what our report said. There is broad cross-party agreement on the issue.

Ted Brocklebank: Alex Neil is right, but the evidence-taking session left me with the impression that not much has happened since we discussed the matter previously. We are still asking whether there should be an audit and how much we know about where the £8 billion that is allocated to public sector procurement is spent. There seems to be a lack of urgency in the Government's response, which states that the Government will seek to

"continue to promote Fairtrade Fortnight"

and to do this, that and the next thing. I am not sure that there is a great deal of action.

Keith Brown: The issue of the UK's apparent gold plating of procurement legislation was raised. From what was said, it appears that Scotland is doing the same thing. Perhaps we should pursue the issue more specifically, in relation both to fair trade and to environmental imperatives. That would allow local authorities and others to feel freer to source products more locally and to favour local produce over products from elsewhere that may be cheaper but cost a lot in environmental terms. For example, much of the produce for our school meals comes from Wales. Different views

on the issue are bandied around, but we do not seem to make much progress on establishing what scope for local procurement exists. It would be nice if we could ensure that the matter was pursued. My view is similar to that of Ted Brocklebank. If we can get a definitive position and identify what wriggle room exists, it is likely that more will be done.

Alex Neil: As Keith Brown suggested in his questions, what we are discussing is very much at the margins of the issue. If the Doha round had been successful, it would have had a fantastically substantial impact on the countries that we are trying to help. The impact on those countries of reform of the common agricultural policy and of American agricultural policy would be a million times greater than all the overseas aid that countries give. I think that I am right in saying that a 1 per cent improvement in the terms of trade between third-world countries and the European Union would far outweigh all the money that European countries give to those countries. We should be under no illusions.

Ted Brocklebank: The member is right.

The Convener: We can pursue some issues in next week's debate, but it sounds as if we should pursue the big issue of procurement separately. Do members agree that we should write back to the Government about that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: In general, are members content to note the response? I am concerned about some areas, including awareness raising, although I am not sure whether the weakness is in the strategy or in the way in which it has been laid out. Perhaps the commitment to awareness raising is implicit rather than explicit. However, we can make such points in the debate next week, in so far as they are contained in the committee's report. I will stick closely to what the committee recommended and will not stray into my personal views, not that there is any great gap between the committee's views and mine. I presume that I will go through the committee's recommendations in my opening speech.

Alex Neil: Am I closing for the committee?

The Convener: I think so. Has anybody asked you about that?

Alex Neil: I do not think so, but it is no problem. As usual, I will not stray from the committee's point of view.

Ted Brocklebank: You can give the same speech that you gave last year, Alex.

The Convener: I am sure that the world looks forward to our saying exactly the same things, Alex.

As that is all that members want to say for now, we will pursue the procurement issue and leave the rest until next week's debate.

COSAC Subsidiarity Pilot

11:11

The Convener: The next item is consideration of a paper by the clerk on the pilot subsidiarity check that is being conducted by the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union, or COSAC.

I ask for comments in the first instance, before we consider the recommendation, which does not commit us to much. The committee is invited to agree

“To supply the Scottish Government’s response to the UK Parliament”

and

“To review its own inquiry into the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on Scotland following the meeting of the European Council in October.”

Do members have any comments?

Jamie Hepburn: I have a comment on the timing. Because of the way things worked out, the committee had no opportunity to respond before the deadline for submissions. Why was that? Was it because the European Union works to a timescale that does not fit in with our recess?

The Convener: Which paragraph is that?

Jamie Hepburn: That is covered in paragraphs 4 to 6. The fact that we had no opportunity to respond is unfortunate and is somewhat against the principles of subsidiarity. It means that this devolved Parliament, through the committee that is responsible for the area, had no opportunity to participate.

The Convener: Was the recess the problem?

Dr Johnston: Essentially, the timescale is eight weeks from the publication of the proposals. What we are discussing is just a pilot, but the EU rules that would be introduced under the Lisbon treaty would allow eight weeks for national Parliaments to respond. We fell outwith the deadline because of the recess.

Jamie Hepburn: I do not suppose that there is much to say about that, except that it is unfortunate.

Dr Johnston: The committee might want to consider the matter when we return to the issue of subsidiarity.

Alex Neil: The committee is conducting an inquiry into the impact of the Lisbon treaty, but more and more it looks as though the treaty is dead. The chance that the EU will get the Irish to hold another referendum is practically zilch. The attitude of the Poles, fortunately, and some other

folk with some common sense suggests that we should question whether it is a useful employment of our time to inquire into something that is not going to happen.

The Convener: The recommendation is that we see what happens at the European Council in October.

Alex Neil: But if the Tories win, they will kill it off anyway.

Ted Brocklebank: We can defer a decision, not until the next Tory Government comes in, but just until October.

The Convener: Are members content to wait for another month? It would be premature to make a decision before then.

Members indicated agreement.

“Brussels Bulletin”

11:15

The Convener: The next item is the most recent issue of the *Brussels Bulletin*. Members will note that the covering paper proposes the introduction of a quarterly themed bulletin. We also have a briefing note from the European officer on the social agenda package.

Do members have comments on any of that?

Alex Neil: Can I raise two issues? First, as you know, the next presidency will be held by the Czechs, whose country is roughly similar to Scotland and became independent fairly recently. In previous discussions, we agreed to consider the issue of influence and trying to get an inside track. I understood that we would talk to the Czechs, in conjunction with the Scottish Government, about what they are planning for the presidency and what impact that would potentially have on Scotland. Are we going to set that in motion?

The Convener: Where have we got to on the Czech presidency?

Dr Johnston: A delegation from the committee will go to Brussels on 29 September. As part of that visit, we will meet officials from the Czech presidency. We also agreed to the possibility of a meeting at a political level. The idea is to meet the officials initially and then see whether there is a need for follow-up at a political level.

Alex Neil: The second issue that I want to raise is the issue of the European Parliament voting to include aviation within the ambit of the emissions trading scheme. I wonder whether we should do anything about that or whether we should simply draw it to the attention of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. At the moment, aviation is exempt from fuel duty and the like. There would be a lot of ramifications to aviation coming into the ambit of the emissions trading scheme.

The Convener: That issue is relevant to those committees and to the discussions on the proposed climate change bill. The committees will have received a copy of the bulletin, but we can draw the matter to their attention.

Ted Brocklebank: Joe Borg's health check on the common fisheries policy was launched on 19 July and was supposed to report in the first week of September. Do we know whether that report has been issued?

Dr Johnston: I am not sure, but we can get the European officer to provide that information.

Ted Brocklebank: The health check might reveal that the common fisheries policy is dead—who knows? However, I fear not.

Jamie Hepburn: I was interested to read about the directive relating to cross-border health care. It strikes me as a radical alteration to the health care to which people throughout the EU will be entitled. Has the Health and Sport Committee considered the matter?

The Convener: I think that it has taken an interest in it. However, I do not know whether the directive will be agreed anytime soon, as it seems pretty controversial.

Dr Johnston: The Parliament's European officer gave a presentation to the Health and Sport Committee at its away day, so that committee is well apprised of the details.

The Convener: How specialised would the proposed special editions of the bulletin be? How big an area would they cover? Would they go into issues such as the health and aviation issues that members have just mentioned, or would they cover just the big, headline themes?

Dr Johnston: As paragraph 6 of the committee's paper states, the idea is that they will focus on the four key themes that have been identified by the committee, the first of which is energy and climate change. The fourth key theme is economic and social issues, which would include the health issue.

The Convener: Could a special edition specialise in a certain health issue, or is the idea that each special edition will cover all of those themes?

Dr Johnston: The initial idea is for each special edition to cover all four key themes, although there will be different strands within that.

The Convener: Okay. Are members content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

United Kingdom Parliament Scottish Affairs Committee Inquiry (Submission of Evidence)

11:19

The Convener: Since we last met, the Scottish Affairs Committee has agreed to conduct an inquiry into Scotland and the European Union. We have a paper from the clerks that outlines the timetable for that, including the deadline for written submissions, which is 13 October. The four bullet points in the paper flag up what the inquiry will focus on. The most important of those points is the representation of Scotland's interests in EU policy making. There has been a kind of overlap in some of our discussions, although many of our concerns were about the relationship between the Parliament and the Government here in Scotland. However, there are issues to be discussed. The first is whether the committee wishes to make a submission. If we do, what would be the key issues for us to raise? Alternatively, do members just want to note the issue and leave it to the Westminster Parliament?

Alex Neil: The first two items are definitely within the remit of this Parliament. Why the Scottish Affairs Committee is bothering with this, I do not know. I suppose they have got nothing else to do all day at Westminster. We have already covered all this.

Keith Brown: What about the representation of Scotland's interests in EU policy making, in so far as they are filtered through Westminster and its departments? The problem in the past has been that, when a UK department has acted on a European interest, the Scottish Government's views have not been taken into account. Do we not want to raise that issue?

Alex Neil: We have already raised that with the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee. It is more an issue for that committee than for the Scottish Affairs Committee, which would just be raking over old coals.

The Convener: That is not to say that they are not important coals. As Keith Brown said, we have discussed whether Scotland's interests are being fully represented, but the issues that we came across last session were the transparency of that representation, the status of the memorandum of understanding and to what extent the Scottish Government or anybody else is able to state openly what position it has argued for and how that may differ from the UK Government's position.

Another possibility for us, apart from making a written submission, is to have an informal session with the Scottish Affairs Committee to discuss some of these matters.

Alex Neil: Why do we not send the committee a copy of the work that we have done, including an update on the discussions that we have had with Michael Connarty and the European Scrutiny Committee? He is chairman of that committee. We could then have an informal session with the Scottish Affairs Committee and ascertain whether it needed clarification on anything.

The Convener: Are you suggesting that we make a formal written submission?

Alex Neil: I would just send the committee information about what we have done, with a covering note, rather than make a special submission.

The Convener: You mean send copies of the *Official Report* and so on.

Alex Neil: Aye.

Dr Johnston: I have already spoken to the clerk of the Scottish Affairs Committee and have done what members have suggested in that I have sent copies of our two reports on the transposition and the scrutiny of European legislation, which means that they are aware of that work. We can perhaps offer to have an informal follow-up meeting.

The Convener: So we can have an informal meeting as a follow-up to the reports that we have already sent. Are people happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

11:22

Meeting continued in private until 11:26.

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