

ZERO CAFFÈ MANIFESTO / 1.0 / PDF PRINT ENGLISH VERSION

THE RIGHT TO HAPPINESS

Collective, shared, humane: these are the attributes of the form of happiness to which we aspire. Our experience of coffee today is often individual and isolated, and the journey this item takes to reach our lips is often a story of exploitation of the farmers that grow the beans, who are impoverished by our consumption. Coffee is, first and foremost, an agricultural product, one typically sold in its raw, unroasted form as green coffee beans. But pressure on farmers to sell their beans at impossibly low prices is making it increasingly hard for them to make a living. Some no longer even cover their production costs and many have either switched to more profitable crops or abandoned farming altogether. We declare that it is no longer acceptable for coffee drinkers in one part of the world to remain blissfully ignorant of the social injustices being committed for their pleasure in another part of the world. And we propose the establishment of a more just and equitable dynamic between growers and coffee drinkers, a reshaping of the deeply unfair system that relies on the exploitation of the former for the pleasure of the latter. We want to create an informed and aware community that removes all the disparities in the coffee value chain, a community in which everyone plays its part. Hence "Zero coffee", which aims to make known, change and finally make equitable the lives of our fellow human beings in the coffee chain that ends with us savouring our morning coffee – starting with those who suffer the heaviest burden of exploitation, farmers. Because true happiness cannot be achieved in isolation from others, cannot be built on the immiseration and unhappiness of others. True happiness comprises a duty towards others, a duty that includes reducing unhappiness in the world. To experience this is to know.

DOWN TO EARTH

We must restart from the beginning of the chain. Coffee is an agricultural product, a fruit of the earth that deserves our respect and reverence. As such, it should only be produced through sustainable farming practices, without encroachment on virgin soil or engagement in deforestation, and without water wastage or pesticides. We have had enough of intensive farming, which erodes the soil and destroys biodiversity, and the indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers, which endanger human health and pollute groundwater. Land should not be exploited beyond its natural capabilities and forced to produce at whatever cost to human health and our ecosystem. Coffee farms should be tended in harmony with nature and the seasons, in the spirit of gratitude for nature's bounty, by people who care for the well-being of all. True, farming is still a means of economic survival, but the economic sustainability of the small-scale coffee producer cannot be pursued at the expense of the environment and human health. Farmers thus have a right to the knowledge of the entire supply chain, to enable them to produce a better, more profitable and truly sustainable product. The Earth is one and respect for it is not negotiable, and it is up to us to enable the farmer to tend to it in a manner that reflects this respect.

YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE

And what if a substantial part of the problem derives from considering coffee only a commodity and not an agricultural product? It is the second most traded in the world (the first - listen, listen - is oil) on two different commodity exchanges - New York for Arabica and London for Robusta - through the so-called "futures", which do not regulate the "physical" buying and selling of green coffee. They control fixed prices at maturity in a game that is often only speculative and downwards towards producers, especially if they are small. There is no meeting of demand and offer between commercial players, no actual market negotiations, no consideration of the supply chain, but only significant, sometimes huge, financial funds playing with numbers. Of course, the system is almost impossible to unhinge. Still, there is a bottom-up solution: to agree directly, country by country, between growers, exporters, importers, and roasters to a mandatory minimum selling price of green coffee for each production country, which will take into consideration also the cost of living, production and processing in order to leave a reasonable profit margin for workers' well-being. They will therefore be able to invest in their farm, perhaps even setting up a small roasting plant and coffee shop, also learning to manage it effectively and sustainably. This is no longer a robbery!

I STUDY; THEREFORE, I AM

It is no longer the time for improvisations. So far, coffee has been treated with approximation and condescension by most players in the supply chain. Above all, the business was built on rampant ignorance. It is no longer acceptable for companies to do their jobs with absolute and sometimes disarming incompetence. Knowledge is the basis of every profession, and coffee certainly makes no exception; training is mandatory for anyone wishing to undertake a business activity. Indeed, a professional qualification is needed for this supply chain as well. From the bean to the cup, every step in coffee is essential. Some are also quite complicated because they require knowledge of machinery engineering, chemical and physical reactions. Cultivating and harvesting the crops, processing the beans before export. Roasting, blending and packaging the coffee. Grinding, extracting, serving an espresso. Tasting, telling, sharing an experience. All the players in the supply chain, from the farmer to the barista, should undergo continuous training, deepen their skills and share them. The final consumer has the right to be informed and educated and the duty to choose ethically and consciously. Coffee is an extraordinarily complex drink, from the chemistry it is made up of to the story it tells, truly capable of changing people's lives. But only if you work seriously.

GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

"What's the use of having clean hands and keeping them in your pockets?" someone very wise once said. Those who work in this industry (traders, roasters, baristas, government institutions) have no more excuses: they have to go to a plantation, see with their eyes, listen with their ears, observe and learn. Only by doing first-hand this experience in those far and poorly industrialized countries will it be possible to realize the actual "price" at which coffee is produced. Intensive monocultures owned by large capitals and managed by seasonal laborers; small family-run plots, their only income source, often rented at a high price and impossible to repay. Only by getting to know the work of those who live on the plantation and getting our hands dirty will it be possible to appreciate the sacrifice. It is time to finally paying a fair price for coffee, thus interrupting the profound injustice that has been taking place for too long. Besides increasing the necessary know-how, we need to travel responsibly, focusing on training and on mutual cultural exchange, to discover the fundamental part: the land where coffee is cultivated. The next step will be to spread everything to consumers to trigger a real cultural revolution: unfair products will finally be rejected until things have changed. Right, let's use our hands!

MINIMUM QUALITY GUARANTEED

No more bad coffees, no more flaws. In addition to being unfair, coffee is often of low quality: selected from defective green beans, badly roasted and usually even worse brewed. But "good" coffee is possible, without necessarily being specialty: by selecting it carefully, avoiding macroscopic visual defects and unpleasant odours. Roast it right, applying the correct and most suitable parameters for that particular coffee type (roasting time, temperature, cooling times, storage). Extract it as espresso, filter or mocha, following some basic rules such as water quality and temperature, the correct quantity of powder and timing. There is no need to be an alchemist or a wizard's apprentice; do your job well, also avoiding health risks. Offering good coffee is a sign of respect. And you consumer? Do you accept what you are served without even realizing or questioning that strange smell of burnt cardboard, earth or mould that comes from the cup? Yes, it's bad coffee, and you don't deserve to drink it! Coffee is not a standardized daily practice but a natural food to be tasted and purchased according to its different characteristics. By making conscious and aware choices, we can give birth to a new coffee market idea. We can do that by raising coffee quality according to its ethical and sensory attributes. We can do better.

FAMILY SAYINGS

The best way to predict the future is to create it. Our vision is based on equity, gender equality, inclusion, social justice, equal opportunities, respect for people and the environment. It is based on food security, access to education, social and health care and adequate wages. We aim to preserve the environment and its biodiversity. Although women are an active part of all coffee value chain links, their contribution, especially in the countries of origin, is often invisible due to cultural, political, economic, social, psychological, patrimonial and organizational barriers. Unfortunately, women still have little access to resources and limited participation in decision-making. At the same time, they bear a heavy burden of substitute welfare. Our task is "to remove the obstacles of an economic and social nature, which, by limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human person ..." (Article 3 of the Italian Constitution).

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US

Il miglior modo per predire il futuro è crearlo. E nel nostro ci sono equità, uguaglianza di genere, inclusione, giustizia sociale, uguali opportunità, rispetto delle persone e dell'ambiente. Sicurezza alimentare, accesso all'educazione e all'assistenza sociale e sanitaria, salari adeguati. Conservazione dell'ambiente e della biodiversità. Nonostante le donne siano parte attiva in tutti gli anelli della catena di valore del caffè, il loro contributo, in particolare modo nei paesi di origine, è spesso invisibile a causa di barriere culturali, politiche, economiche, sociali, psicologiche, patrimoniali e organizzative. Purtroppo, le donne hanno ancora uno scarso accesso a risorse e poca partecipazione in spazi dove si prendono le decisioni, sopportando allo stesso tempo un pesante carico di welfare sostitutivo. Il nostro compito è "rimuovere gli ostacoli di ordine economico e sociale, che, limitando di fatto la libertà e l'uguaglianza dei cittadini, impediscono il pieno sviluppo della persona umana..." (art. 3 della Costituzione Italiana).