by all sorts of people, to charities and other NGOs that work among the poor. And those giving money are getting very clever at getting the money directly to the poor, without going through those who are not-so-poor who can take it and don't let it 'trickle down'.

For instance, a Bangladeshi professor of Economics, called Professor Mohammed Yunus has created a system of giving small amounts of money to very poor women. His system has helped the lives of thousands of poor village families. There he was, lecturing on Economics at Chittagong and, very near the college was a village of poor people and one day, he met a woman who made bamboo stools. Prof. Yunus realized that if a bank lent her enough to buy a larger supply of bamboo for what she needed, she could make a lot more money to support her family and so be able to pay back what she had borrowed. And thus it was that the system of microcredit was created (have you heard about it) and the word 'Grameen' went round the world as an example to all and many people in many countries have benefited from this system - which began in Bangladesh, invented by a Bangladeshi. What is interesting is that about 98% of the very poor people pay back all their debts to the Grameen Bank which is better than the record of many rich people who borrow money from their banks and do not pay it back.

Thus, those who give money to help the poor are finding ways of getting the money directly to the poor and avoiding it going through the hands of others who take their cut because they think that they are poor too and deserve it and do not let the money trickle down. I heard recently of a young man in a very small NGO. He has helped thousands of poor farmers all over Bangladesh simply by printing books showing better farming methods in pictures. This young man was fed up with big projects with offices and managers sitting at desks and lots of expenses. He said, "Just because a farmer cannot read and write, he is not a fool. If you show him how he can improve his farm in good and

simple ways, and show him in a book with pictures, so that he can see what he has to do, then, if it works, he will do it – and his farm will be much more profitable." Some people are cross with him. They want a nice office job with an NGO. But very little of the money given by this NGO is spent on office jobs. The money goes directly to the poor to be a blessing to them. We are learning how to use money very wisely.

God bless you.



THE FAIR TRADE MOVEMENT

Assembly 83 – June 10th 2003

Yesterday, I began to tell you about clever ways of helping the poor so that they can improve their income. I told you about Professor Mohammad Yunus and his scheme of microcredit and the Grameen Bank and how proud Bangladeshis can be about this. Today, I want to tell you that many modern methods of helping the poor are based on the principle that says, "The poor want justice not charity." Professor Yunus said, "The rich can borrow large amounts of money from the bank. Why cannot the poor borrow small amounts of money from the bank?" He asked the banks to do this and they thought that the idea of a bank lending money to the poor was ridiculous. They said that the poor had no security to offer them against the loan. But Yunus said that it was not the poor that were not credit-worthy, it was the banks that were not people-worthy. So he began his own – Grameen - bank to do this and proved that it worked – and he has changed the way the world thinks about this. Some of the poor can now borrow money – at low rates of interest.

Maybe you have seen on the news, marches and protests against 'globalisation' – the way big business can act without

justice to the poor. This is not true of every big company, but it is true of some of them. Nowadays, more and more people want to know how big businesses make their profits. Do they pay the people in their factories wages that are enough to feed and clothe their families? Can they send their children to school on the wages they earn? Do the poor garments' workers work in good and safe conditions? Because of fires in some of the Bangladeshi garments factories, the world knows that sometimes fire doors are locked when they should be left open and there are not proper fire precautions. In the UK we were shocked to hear of the very low wages that Nike pay their workers in Indonesia and some people will not buy Nike trainers because of this.

People all over the world are beginning to act according to a new principle called Fair Trade. In the UK more and more goods in the supermarkets have the Fair Trade sign on them so we know that everything to do with the trading of that thing has been fair – *tik*! We have listened to those who inform us how our nice, cheap tea and coffee comes to us because the profits and wages of those who grow it and pick it can be very low and we are saying, "I do not want to buy things from a business that treats its workers badly. I would rather pay a little more for my Fair Trade tea and coffee and other products that have the Fair Trade sign on it. I want to encourage businesses that treat people properly. I do not want to exploit my brothers and sisters in the poor countries."

This is a revolution in thinking. Most of us are brought up to think, "It is good, and clever, to pay as little as possible for everything." But now, it is the Millenium and we are thinking about other people, on the other side of the world and using our money in the shops so that we are helping fair business practices. All this has happened in my life-time and I welcome this new world where people THINK before they feel clever about paying low prices for everything.. For instance, the farmer in South American who grows coffee beans may be visited by a big business, like Nestle, at harvest time and it probably offers him

very low prices, so low that it does not pay him to grow coffee. So what does he do? He digs up his coffee bushes and plants something else that brings in a lot of money – coca – which makes the drug called cocaine. Many coffee farmers in South America are under pressure to become part of the drug business because they cannot earn enough money growing coffee to feed their families. When the Fair Trade organizations come along and say, "We will guarantee that we will pay you X amount for the next 4 years for your coffee beans," then the world changes for that farmer. He knows how much money will come in. He can budget. He can develop his land, repair his house, send his children to school. He knows that he will not be faced every harvest by ruthless traders who will beat down the price of his coffee beans so much that he can never get out of his poverty. He has justice! I hope that, in your life-time, the Fair Trade idea will come to Bangladesh also. It is sign of true development when you start thinking how the way you spend your money can help someone else. God bless you.

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PROFESSOR YUNUS AND MICROCREDIT

Assembly 84 – June 11th 2003

I want to tell you some more about Professor Muhammad Yunus, the founder of the Grameen Bank and the idea of micro-credit – lending very small sums of money to the poor. He was one of 14 children of whom 9 lived. He was one of the eldest and helped to look after the others and always loved children. Later in his life, when he was researching in the villages, some shy women would talk to him because he picked up their children and loved them.

He was a professor of Economics at Chittagong University. At first, he loved telling his students that every economic problem