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IN DEFENCE OF GLOBALIZATION

There are three types of “globalization” underway at present: economic globalization (driven by transnational corporations), popular globalization (which is the role of non-governmental organizations or “people power” organizations) and public order globalization (where governments work together to solve common problems). When people criticize “globalization”, they are usually referring to “economic globalization”; they overlook the other two – more positive – forms of globalization.



A World Without Borders

In essence the world is moving from an era when national boundaries were very important, to one where they are not. “Globalisation” for me refers to the declining power of national governments generally. This is more than just economics. It is how the world is being ordered. An entire era is passing away.

National governments are a comparatively new idea. International lawyers date them from 1648: the end of the Thirty Years War in Europe and the Treaty of Westphalia (hence the name of the present world order: “Westphalian System”). Prior to that time people in Europe lived in small tribes, possibly as part of a large empire. There were few countries, as we know them today.

No one suddenly decided in 1648 to create the Westphalian System. It was only with the benefit of hindsight that people could see that a new world order had been created as a result of the breaking up of the Holy Roman Empire. Peoples (“nations”) were now to be governed by “states”, hence the title of nation-states (as distinct from, say, the previous “city-states”). As the Europeans colonised the world, so they took this system with them. The newly-independent colonies based themselves on the nation-state system (such as in Africa, where about 55 nation-states have been imposed on a patchwork quilt of about 200 major tribes). The United Nations currently has 189 nation-state members, with East Timor eventually to become the 190th member.

The nation-state system is now so prevalent that it is seen as the norm in world politics. It has worn well but now it is wearing out. National governments are no longer so relevant to world politics. Instead, national governments are having to share their power in three ways.

✓ Economic Globalisation

Economic globalisation is being driven by transnational corporations, which are now the major player in world economics. They – rather than national governments – set the pace of economic change. The anti-globalisation demonstrators are right to identify the problems that some corporations create, such as the exploitation of labour (including child labour), manipulating national taxation regimes to avoid paying tax and environmental destruction.

But it is worth noting that the corporations are responding to consumer demand. They make available what people want to buy. They may stimulate consumer demand but they did not create it. Many people with money have opted for a consumption-driven lifestyle. They have been exercising their free will.

Additionally, while many people in developing countries do have appalling lives in factories, no country has yet found a smooth way to move from an agricultural society to an industrial one. The British suffered from the industrial revolution in the 19th century; now it is the turn of many Asian countries. Besides, life on a peasant farm is also very harsh and ought not to be romanticised – hence the attraction of the bright lights in the cities.

✓ Popular Globalisation

But the globalisation trend has some positive developments. A second form of globalisation consists of “people power” movements (non-governmental organizations or civil society organizations). These are a way for ordinary people to work together for a better world. Their members are disenchanted with politicians because they have such little power. Therefore the people have decided to set their own agenda. Examples include Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and World Vision.

Ironically, some of the opponents of globalization use the products of globalisation to oppose economic globalisation, such as their use of cyberspace, with an elaborate websites. They also know how to use the international mass media to play to a global audience. They know how to tap into the growing worries that people in many countries have about economic globalisation. All of these events are a feat worthy of a massive advertising budget of a transnational corporation, such as Coca-Cola or McDonalds. But it is all done cheaply by the Internet, e-mail, word of mouth and graffiti.

✓ **Public Order Globalisation**

The final example of globalisation is “public order globalisation”. There are no national solutions to transnational problems. Pollution, diseases, and changes in weather patterns are all examples of a country’s inability to solve its problems on its own. A country may have a fine record in environmental protection, for example, but this will be of little value if it is living downwind of a dirty country. Similarly global diseases are not new (for example, the Plague destroyed about one-third of Europe between 1348 and 1350). But what is new is the speed with which a virus can move around the world. Thanks to aviation, a virus is only 36 hours at most from every other part of the globe.

Therefore governments have to work together, not because they like to do so but because they have little choice. They either work together or perish separately. Until the recent expansion of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, about 80 per cent of the UN’s money went on economic and social co-operation. This work is done by the UN everyday, all day, via its specialized bodies such as the World Health Organization, UN Environmental Programme, International Maritime Organization and the UN Children’s Fund. If the UN disappeared today, it would be necessary to invent it to do these basic tasks that we take for granted.

This is called “functional co-operation”: getting experts to work together out of the public eye. The other type of international cooperation is “political co-operation”. But this is often hampered because politicians like to approach every issue with an open mouth (such as the current negotiations over the Middle East). But technicians can get together via functional co-operation and gradually knit the world together in a system of mutually beneficial arrangements, such as the standardisation of telephone systems and the exchange of information on diseases and weather. This is not exciting work and it is usually ignored by the mass media – but this is what improves the daily life of many people.

✓ **The Globalisation Debate**

To conclude, there are many beneficial aspects to globalisation (as well as the publicised disadvantages). But governments have not done enough to explain to their citizens what globalisation entails. Of course, it could be argued that governments have failed to explain globalisation because it would then reveal just how little power they really have – and so how irrelevant is much of their politicking. It is interesting to note that young people in the US (where voting is not compulsory) are already very cynical of the political process and so may have already recognized that their politicians have fewer options in office than their political rhetoric suggests. The younger a US person is, the less likely they are to vote.

Politicians are rarely leaders nowadays. They are more concerned with office than with ideas. The focus is on personalities and not policies. By contrast, Winston Churchill put himself in

the political wilderness in the 1930s for his opposition to Indian independence, support for the Duke of Windsor's right to marry Mrs Simpson and his concern about Germany's rearming. Dame Kathleen Courtney, a major figure in the League of Nations Union (forerunner of the UN Association) told me about the problem she had with her LNU colleagues in trying to have Churchill involved in the LNU's campaign. Churchill supported the League of Nations taking a stronger stand against Germany (as did the LNU in London). But Dame Kathleen's colleagues thought that Churchill was too outspoken to be a good ally in the cause. In retrospect, Churchill was wrong on two of his three campaigns. But at least people knew where he stood.

Nowadays politicians tell people what they want to hear – not what they need to know. What they have needed to know, has been far more information about the process of globalization. If people knew as much as globalization as they did about the composition of their local sporting team, then the globalization debate would now be of a much higher quality.

Meanwhile, into this information vacuum have come the nationalistic extremists such as Jean Le Pen in France, Jorge Haider in Austria, Patrick Buchanan in the US, and Pauline Hanson in Australia. They have tapped into the politics of anger of many people (especially the unemployed) and argued that the loss of jobs is due to such factors as migration, cheap labour and the greed of transnational corporations. Meanwhile, at the other end of the political spectrum, there have been the anti-globalization demonstrators, who are not racist but who are equally anti-big business.

Since the Seattle violence in late 1999, some commentators have claimed that the anti-globalisation demonstrations are the biggest since the Vietnam era. That may be true. But opposing the Vietnam was much easier than opposing globalisation. First, people who opposed the war had a clear objective: ending the war and bringing the troops home. The opponents of globalisation are not united in what they want. It is clear what they oppose but their alternatives are not clear. Indeed, even the definition of "globalisation" used in this article (economic, popular and public order) is not accepted by some of the people behind the anti-globalization demonstrations.

Second, while there is still some debate among scholars as when the US involvement began in the Vietnam War, there was no mistaking its escalation in 1965. But the process of globalisation has been underway for some decades (there is not even a firm agreement on when it began). It has crept up on governments and citizens. It was not done in secret. It is simply that the attention of most people, politicians and academics was focused elsewhere (such as on the Cold War). It is now probably too deeply entrenched to be reversed.

Finally, is there really a political will at the grass roots to reverse it? There are periodic nationalistic outbursts against globalisation (such as the French person's recent fire attack on a McDonald's outlet, which made him a national hero but resulted in a three-month prison sentence). But most people – thanks to their consumption-dominated lifestyle – are implicit supporters of globalisation. They would oppose any serious move against economic globalisation



in which they would be obliged to forego much of their “global” tastes in fast food, entertainment, holidays overseas and fashion. Economic nationalism sounds fine (“creating jobs for our kids” by “buying Australian” etc) until people think through the consequences of closing their country off from foreign trade. That is too drastic a step.

Therefore, the challenge for popular globalisation is to find ways of changing economic globalisation to make it benefit more people. The champions of economic globalisation have ensured that their form of globalisation is the main driving force in world politics. But they need to pay more attention to creating a just world order because the practitioners of popular globalisation are not going away. The battle of Seattle has gone global.

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