

# Globalisation

## *A Threat to Equitable Social Provision?*<sup>1</sup>

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### **1 Global Social Policy Discourses: Towards a Socially Responsible Globalisation?**

In an earlier publication (Deacon 1997) I argued that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarded welfare expenditure as a burden on the economy which enabled it to oversee the cutting of public spending on social provision, and that the World Bank's focus on poverty alleviation led it to favour a safety net approach within which the role of the state should be limited to that of providing a minimum level of provision primarily for the poor. Within the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and some other UN agencies, on the other hand, were to be found supporters of the view that social expenditures were a means of securing social cohesion. The ILO in particular supported a conservative-corporatist Bismarckian type of social protection system within which Pay-As-You-Go financed social security systems should play a large role. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) favoured the notion that certain state welfare expenditures should be regarded as a necessary investment. No international organisation, save possibly UNICEF, could be said to defend the redistributive approach to social policy characteristic of the Scandinavian countries. In that study it was concluded that the

opportunity created by the 'collapse of communism' for the global actors to shape the future of social policy has been grasped enthusiastically by the dominant (social liberal) tendency in the World Bank. In alliance with social development NGOs ... a social safety net future is being constructed. This NGO support combined with the political support of many southern and some East European governments is challenging powerfully those defenders of universalist and social security based welfare states to be found in the EU, the ILO and ... in smaller numbers in the Bank. (Deacon 1997: 197)

While these conclusions still broadly stand, there continue to be interesting shifts in the position of particular players within this debate. The IMF has taken the social dimension of globalisation more seriously, considering whether some degree of equity is beneficial to economic growth (IMF

1998). At the same time, however, the director of the fiscal affairs department of the IMF has argued that globalisation threatens the revenue raising capacity of governments, concluding that 'the world must prepare itself for what could prove to be significant falls in tax levels' (Tanzi 1999: 14). The World Bank has more clearly articulated a risk management approach to social protection, arguing that individualised defined-contribution private insurance accounts should play a large part in the portfolio of social protection systems (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). This position had been challenged with some force by the then Chief Economist of the Bank (Orsag and Stiglitz 1999), but his premature resignation from the organisation suggests that the old guard is still in charge. The OECD (1999) now warns that globalisation may lead to the need for more, not less, social expenditure in order to compensate some of the losers from globalisation. The ILO is showing signs of making concessions to the Bank's views on privatising some parts of social security (Gillion *et al.* 2000), while other moves within the ILO (Standing 2000) suggest an interest in a new universalism emerging from bottom-up movements in several countries. More recently, the view of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the desirability of a global market in health and social service provision has assumed a new prominence (Koivusalo 1999). International NGOs are now more clearly divided into those which substitute for government, and those which advocate greater government responsibility for welfare (Fowler 2000). These developments are reviewed elsewhere (Deacon 2000b), but the developments as far as the WTO are concerned are elaborated below because of the importance of these to the thread of argument in this article.

The thrust of the WTO agenda is to facilitate increases in the volume of world trade by negotiating reduced trade barriers. These are often tariff barriers, but may take the form of restrictions on the right of foreign private enterprises to compete 'fairly' in other countries. Although the Seattle talks collapsed because of a reluctance on the part of the USA, in particular, to meet the demands of some southern governments on, for example, labour standards, other controversial issues lurked in the background. One such was the pressure to increase trade in services, including in health and education. The issue will continue to resurface because of the

in-built WTO agenda to review trade in agriculture and services (see Price *et al.* 1999; Koivusalo 1999). A WTO document notes that the forthcoming round 'offers members [of the WTO] the opportunity to reconsider the breadth and depth of their commitments on health and social services, which are currently trailing behind other large sectors' (WTO 1998a: 1). It notes with approval signs of an increased global trade in health care from developing to developed countries 'with better-off people seeking rapid access to high-quality services abroad', but is exercised by the fact that under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), services being provided in the exercise of governmental authority on non-commercial and non-competitive bases are excluded from free trade obligations. It goes on to note that 'the coexistence of private and public hospitals may raise questions, however, concerning their competitive relationship and the applicability of the GATS', arguing that where internal competition already exists between a public and a private health service, foreign private health service providers should be allowed unrestricted rights to compete with national ones.

The parallel paper on education is more restrained in its ambitions for increased trade, limiting its comments to the tertiary sector. It does not explicitly question the view that basic education (both primary and secondary education) falls within the domain of services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority and therefore supplied neither on a commercial basis nor in competition. In relation to the tertiary sector, however, the paper reviews all the possible non-tariff barriers to trade through the four modes of cross-border supply, consumption abroad, foreign commercial presence and the presence of 'natural' persons (i.e. foreign professionals) and invites trade ministers to consider how these barriers might be reduced (WTO 1998b).

Developments within the global social policy discourse have, then, been moving in different directions. The IMF, OECD and World Bank appear more concerned than before about the negative social impact of globalisation, and are revising their remedies accordingly. Some in the ILO, however, appear to be retreating from earlier commitments to universal public pension provision, while the secretariat of the WTO seems uncritically

**Table 1: Shifts in global policy and possible criticisms**

Shifts in policy thinking	Possible criticisms
The move from human rights to social rights and from declaration to implementation	But moralising about rights without resource transfers is counterproductive
The trend in international development co-operation towards setting goals and monitoring progress	But attainable development targets may be a legitimisation of residual social policy
The move to secure global minimum labour, social and health standards	But core labour standards are a lowering of standards for some
The move to establish codes of practice for socially responsible investment and business	But they may lead to dis-investment in the South
The calls for global economic regulation and taxation	But are the Principles of Good Practice in Social policy being ignored by the IMF?
The moves to extend constructive regionalism with a social dimension	But regions are also social protectionist blocks?

committed to a global market in private welfare. I have argued elsewhere that within this discordant discourse can be discerned elements of what appear to be a new politics of global social responsibility (Deacon 1999a). Fundamentalist economic liberalism and inhumane structural adjustment appears to be giving way to concern about the social consequences of globalisation on the part of the Bank and the IMF. International development assistance is focused on social development, and UN agencies are increasingly exercised by the negative social consequences of globalisation. Shifts in policy thinking and concrete steps that are being taken which could herald a more socially responsible globalisation, and the possible criticisms of each, are listed in Table 1.

Not all of these steps are given emphasis by the Bretton Woods organisations. The Bank is reluctant to embrace the language of labour or social rights, and the WTO still seems headed in an unreconstructed neo-liberal direction. Each of these steps is problematic in some ways, but taken together they do seem to suggest a shift away from a global politics of liberalism to a global politics of social concern. In the next sections we subject two of these developments to closer scrutiny.

## 2 Globalising Social Rights?

This section examines one of the steps towards a socially responsible globalisation that appears to be afforded priority attention within the international dialogue. First, some of the controversy surrounding the West's concern with human rights is reviewed. Then the most recent contribution to this debate, which focuses on social rights, is summarised.

### 2.1 Moralising about rights is counterproductive

The opposition of some southern governments to global labour standards in the context of free trade is reflected in an increasingly articulate opposition to the claims by the West that they are upholding universal human rights. International human rights activists seeking to implement the universal declaration of human rights are seen not as 'guardian angels' (Wheeler 1996), but as supporters of 'global (imperialist) gangsters' who use ethical claims to assert a new global hegemony.

The view that the West is often hypocritical on these questions and does not address human rights abuse in its own backyard has been given prominence recently by Amnesty International, and by the Malaysian Prime Minister's comment that the West

does not have a monopoly on human rights. Cultural diversity has been used to justify different moral and social policy agendas in Islamic societies (Dean and Khan 1997), and to argue that in the Chinese context, European-like social policy reforms are likely to founder on the rock of Confucian indifference to the concept of rights granted by states to its citizens (Wong 1998; Tao and Driver 1997).

The most powerful criticism of the human rights stance of western donors has been by Katarina Tomasevski. She argues that the audience for the strand of human rights conditionality in aid policy is primarily domestic, as is the encouragement of democratic electoralism. The key problematic from the standpoint of western donor governments is that the call for political liberalism has gone hand in hand with economic liberalism, which undermines the capacity of recipient country governments to provide the social policies that could underpin the rhetoric of human rights with substantive social rights:

The assumption underlying donor's policy that economic and political liberalisation go hand in hand undermined human rights by combining political empowerment with economic disempowerment, which was reflected in disempowering (and impoverishing) the government, thus ultimately precluding it from implementing human rights obligations. The very notion of human rights entails corollary government obligations. If a government is unable to raise revenue so as to be able to comply with its human rights obligations, human rights guarantees become illusory (Tomasevski 1997: 240).

This attempt by the 'international community' to foster universal human rights, while at the same time refusing to redistribute adequate resources from governments that have to those that do not, forces northern and western social democrats to defend their ideals against being conflated with free market imperialism wearing a new moral garb of social rights. Conversely, the defence of cultural diversity by some in the South and East leads to the abandonment of a reasoned search for an agreed global form of social progress.

## 2.2 Principles and good practice in social policy

Notwithstanding these powerful arguments, and perhaps emboldened by moves to back up the West's concerns about rights with more resources (such as debt relief), there is now a renewed assertion of: (a) the universalism of human rights; (b) their social dimension; and (c) the means for effectively realising global social rights. The backcloth to this move was the intervention by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, to link discussion of the need to regulate global capital flows with a perceived need to attend to or prevent the damaging social consequences of speculative capital movements. He argued for a code 'of global best practice in social policy which will apply for every country, will set minimum standards and will ensure that when IMF and World Bank help a country in trouble the agreed programme of reform will preserve investments in the social, education, and employment programmes which are essential for growth', and suggested this should be agreed at the spring 1999 meeting of the World Bank (Brown 1999).

The question then became one of responsibility for devising the code. The UK's Department for International Development provided some initial thinking, suggesting that best practice involved: (a) equitable access to basic social services; (b) social protection to reduce vulnerability to shocks; and (c) core labour standards. Controversy developed around which international organisation should have the mandate to devise the code – the Bank with its concern to claim global expertise on these issues, or the UN with its social policy mandate. The Bank first claimed the right to set the standards, but objections led to their referral to the UN, with the Bank agreeing to help implement them.

This referral to the UN had more to do with concern on the part of some southern governments that the IMF and the Bank would use the new principles as social conditionality on loans or debt relief, than with any desire to empower the UN. While some in the UN have welcomed this move, others suggest that it let the Bank and IMF off the hook of global social responsibility that the principles were designed to facilitate (Howard 2000). The danger is that the new global financial architecture will be shaped without reference to the

social policy principles. It is now up to the United Nations, and in particular the Preparatory Committee for the Geneva 2000 meeting, to do the technical work. The Bank has produced a first draft which suggests that the principles should be based upon: (a) universal and equitable access to basic social services; (b) enabling men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods and decent working conditions; (c) promoting social protection systems, and d) fostering social inclusion. The core labour standards element suggested by the UK Government was dropped. The Social Policy and Social Development secretariat of the UN is concerned that the principles are taken forward in a way which encompasses both the 'soft' aspects of social policy and the 'hard' aspects of economic policy. If this were to be an outcome of the 'Copenhagen plus 5' process, it might empower the UN in the management of global economic and social policy. The issue was not considered further at the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and IMF in September 1999, even though Gordon Brown chaired the IMF's International Monetary and Financial Committee. It seems that a social code will not, after all, be among those that the IMF is asked to monitor.

In early 2000 these principles may be firmed up for adoption at the Geneva 2000 meeting. It is to be hoped that the final code for best practice in social policy should not slant too far in the direction of targeting and privatisation. It would have to explain what the alternative poles of universalism and public responsibility might mean for countries at different levels of development. It is to be hoped, too, that it avoids the view that the code should be restricted to *basic* education and health services. The danger of limiting the new concern with global social rights to only basic level provision will be returned to below.

### **3 Moving Social Policy up the Development Agenda?**

While aid flows from north to south have been reduced in the past decade (Development Information Update 1999), there have also been concerted efforts to use it more effectively. More of it is focused on the social aspects of development (including health and education), and efforts are being made to win developing country co-operation

by, for example, the 20:20 initiative to ensure that 20 per cent of aid is for social purposes, and 20 per cent of developing country public expenditure matches this. The major donors have set targets which are believed to be attainable. There is also the prospect of significant debt relief in the first year of the new century. This section reviews some of the controversies around these developments.

#### **3.1 Attainable development targets: global social progress or legitimating residual social policy?**

International development co-operation appears to have moved a long way from the days of structural adjustment programmes overseen by the Bank and the IMF with no concern for their short-term negative social consequences. There is a 'new consensus that aid ought to go to poor countries based on assessments of performance in areas of macroeconomic policy, poverty reduction, and the exercise of good governance' (Gwin 1999: 2). Responding to the criticisms of global civil society and UN agencies, the Bank first articulated a concern for poverty alleviation in this context in 1990. At that point, the dominant aid paradigm became one of broad-based growth, basic social services and safety nets. Many argued that while this marked some progress it also represented the institutionalisation globally of a residual approach to social policy and provision.

It remains to be seen whether, in the wake of the argument by Stiglitz (1998) that there is a need to rethink the Washington Consensus, Bank policy on social development issues and social policy issues moves further from liberalism with safety nets. There are mixed messages. The first draft of the World Bank's WDR-2001 on poverty (World Bank 2000) proposed a four-pronged approach involving empowerment, security, opportunity and international structural issues. In the section dealing with unemployment insurance, however, the obsession with targeting the poor remains. The current draft reads 'the key issue ... is to design [these schemes] so that they maintain their function of providing insurance for the very poor and are not captured by the not so poor'. At the same time, Wolfensohn's proposal for a Comprehensive Development Framework (Wolfensohn 1999a), mentioned but not elaborated in the 1999-2000 World Development Report, covers good governance, an

effective legal system, and supervised financial systems, but the social dimension is still discussed in terms of safety nets, universal primary education and communal and local level health services. On the positive side, the draft does not come down firmly in favour of private provision of higher levels of education and health care.

In the work of the Social Protection section of the Bank's Human Development Network the main thrust of the emerging policy paper is towards enabling individuals and families to protect themselves from risk through a risk management strategy (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). The conclusions on income maintenance policy are in keeping with the market orientation of the Bank which, the draft paper argues, 'fosters the importance of ... multi-pillar pension systems, individual social accounts to handle multiple risks (unemployment, sickness, disability, survivorship, old age)' and 'puts the role of government in perspective: governments have an important role for the establishing and functioning of informal and market-based arrangements; governments and public administration also have their own agenda, exposing such arrangements to political risk'. Hardly a rallying cry for universal, publicly-provided services financed out of redistributive taxation!

It should not be taken for granted, then, that the new fashion for setting achievable development targets constitutes unalloyed global social progress. Many European social policy ministries would be worried if the logic behind these moves in southern social development policy were to be applied in the North. The OECD/Development Assistance Committee (DAC) set a number of targets for development policy which focus on the poorest of the poor in poor countries, including halving the number of people in extreme poverty, making basic education available to all girls and boys, enabling access for all to reproductive health services, with concomitant reductions in maternal and infant mortality rates and gender inequality (OECD/DAC 1997). The two positives in this approach are: (a) the inclusion in the agreed measures of poverty of one indicator of inequality (the poorest fifth's share of national consumption), suggesting that redistribution policies are not entirely forgotten; and (b) the fact that measurable and attainable targets and monitoring systems are in place. The other side of

the coin remains the limited nature of the goals for public service provision. This leaves ample scope for the privatisation of the rest of social provision while international attention is focused only on basic service delivery.

As debt relief gets underway, and the search for ways of ensuring that the liberated funds are spent on social welfare becomes more urgent, these issues take on more importance. At stake is whether the world lines up behind a set of best practices for social policy fashioned out of the immediate contingencies of a South made poor by the North and reflecting a residualist orientation, or whether it applies to the task of social development the lessons of the European struggle for social welfare – that only universalistic and inclusive approaches to social provision ensure stability, peace, security and social well-being for all.

#### **4 Undermining the Preconditions for Equitable Social Development: the New Challenge**

This article has argued that at the level of global discourse there has been a shift in recent years from the politics of global social irresponsibility to the politics of global social concern. The emerging dominant intellectual strand within and around the World Bank and international development community agrees that:

- global macroeconomic management needs to address the social consequences of globalisation
- a set of social rights and entitlements to which global citizens might aspire can be fashioned
- international development co-operation will focus on meeting basic social needs
- debt relief should be speeded up so long as the funds are used to alleviate poverty
- the globalisation of trade generates the need for the globalisation of labour and social standards
- good governments are an essential ingredient in encouraging socially responsible development.

This is a long way from the situation over a decade ago, which prompted the writing of *Adjustment with a Human Face* (Cornia *et al.* 1987); one could almost be tempted to label the new era 'globalisation with a human face'. There are, however, disagreements as to how to proceed with this new orientation:

- much of the South is suspicious of even progressive social conditionality
- how both world trade and world labour standards can coexist without the standards being reduced to minimal core standards or being used for protectionist purposes is far from clear
- initiatives to empower the UN with global revenue raising powers are firmly resisted.

The argument running through this article has focused on a different concern. In sum, we argue that even if disagreements over how the new global social agenda were to be implemented and funded could be overcome, this would generate a situation which would pose a threat to equitable social policy and development. The history of the struggle to build welfare states teaches us that social equity and high levels of universal social provision have only been secured and retained when those services are available to and used by the middle class. It is the sharp elbow of the middle class every bit as much as working class pressure and/or concern for the poor that has ensured good quality social provision. The better-off will only be taxed if they also benefit.

The coexistence of four tendencies within the new global paradigm, if pursued, will undermine this essential precondition for equitable social progress just as the world enters a new millennium with the resources to fund such equitable development. These are:

- the World Bank's belief that governments should only provide minimal levels of social protection
- the OECD/DAC's concern to fund only basic education and health care
- the International NGOs' self-interest in substituting for government services
- the moves being made within the WTO to speed up the global market in private health care, social care, education and insurance services.

Within the context of withering state provision, the middle classes of developing and transition economies will be enticed into the purchase of private social security schemes, secondary and tertiary education, and medical care. The providers of such private services will be American or European enterprises. The potential to build on cross-class social contracts from the colonial era to build new welfare states will be undermined by the pre-

existence of the global market in private social provision. The conditions facing the emerging middle class of many countries in the context of globalisation will be fundamentally different from the conditions that had faced earlier middle classes who helped fashion earlier welfare states. The result is predictable: we know that services for the poor are poor services, and that developed countries that do not have universal public health provision and public education provision are not only more unequal but also more unsafe and crime-ridden.

While the global social development lobby congratulate themselves on shifting the global agenda so that debt relief to reduce poverty and universal access to basic education are the new orthodoxy, they are mostly blind to the threats to social equity in both North and South posed by the pincer movement of the Bank and the WTO fashioning a private welfare future for the global middle class. To put it differently, 'globalisation is unravelling the social bond' that ensured social justice within countries in the twentieth century (Devetak and Higgott 1999). This bond will have to be recreated at supranational level in the twenty-first century.

## **5 Counteracting the Dominant Tendency: Re-establishing Equity in the Global Social Policy and Social Development Discourse**

Counteracting this tendency will not be easy. Re-establishing the case for equity in social policy and social development would require major analytical and policy changes. Development analysis needs to shift from a focus on the global poor and their condition to the global rich and their private privileges. The mapping of emerging global markets in social welfare is an urgent necessity.

It would also require the UN organisations to be funded out of global taxes, and empowered to work with the new G-10 group of countries, the IMF, World Bank, WTO and Global Regional Groupings to *plan* in an accountable way for equitable global development. Such planning would also begin to rationalise the chaos of subcontracted governance, which has arisen over the past decade with the proliferation of international NGOs and private aid agencies competing for tenders (Biekart 1999).

Planning may be unfashionable and ideologically suspect, but this is in effect what James Wolfensohn called for when he wrote 'What is needed is a global partnership to harmonise programmes, policies and practices ... there must be common standards for procurement (and) operations ... the time is ripe for a co-ordinated attack on the inefficiencies of the development system' (Wolfensohn 1999b: 8).

It would require a policy of major intra- and inter-regional public and private resource transfers to finance public provision at all levels, and a wave of global regulation to ensure standards and accessibility of globally-provided private health, education and social services, where these existed in lieu of public provision. Who is likely to support such a change to ensure globalisation with a human face – globalisation with equity in social policy within and between countries?

For those (such as Martin *et al.* 1997) who have faith that the European Union (EU) can and should act to counter destructive global neo-liberalism with socially responsible globalisation, the results of two recent evaluations of the EU make depressing reading (Deacon 1999b; Van Reisen 1999). The move to fashion a global set of social rights, which might be embodied in the emerging global guidelines of best practice in social policy, owes little to the EU. Although the EU contributes a large proportion of international aid, its development policy lags behind that of other actors in terms of a focused concern with global inequality, which means it has been unable to enter the debate about whether targeting the poor abroad contradicts the more universalistic social policies operating within Europe. Little is being contributed by the EU Commission to debates about global taxation policy, or moves to socially regulate transnational corporations. The welcome given by the EU to further discuss trade liberalisation in the service field seems uninformed by the potential negative impacts on governmental responsibility for health and social services.

These evaluations of just how far even the EU needs to go is a reminder of the messy state of the global politics of welfare. The WTO steals the clothes of global health policy from the WHO and turns them inside out. Health for all becomes health markets for all. The Chief Economist of the Bank

– a key defender of equity as a global goal – resigns prematurely. The ILO squabbles internally about how to argue for the future of human security. The inspired global principles of social policy are sidelined just when they are needed in the context of debt relief. The IMF warns of termites eating away at the foundations of state budgets.

As far as global social policy and social development are concerned, the problem is the fragmentation and functional separation of international and regional agencies, and conflict within and between them for the right to shape global social policy. Could the Geneva 2000 and the subsequent UN meeting on Finance for Development in 2001 reverse this slide into global social policy anarchy, and establish a responsible, accountable and funded global system by means of which intra- and inter-country equity could be worked towards? Much will depend not only on the EU improving on present practice, but also on the emergence of progressive southern voices who are concerned to improve the structure of global governance.

At the time of writing (February 2000) it is too early to judge whether the Geneva 2000 meeting will advance global politics in this direction. The secretariat of the Social Policy and Social Development Division of the UN has tabled a set of further initiatives to ensure better implementation of the Copenhagen Summit's commitments, including proposals for additional global resources for social development (UN 1999). How the EU and G7 caucuses amend these proposals in the April 2000 Preparatory Committee and at Geneva remains to be seen. The new EU Commission appears to want to be a more effective voice for global social responsibility (Commission of the European Union 2000). In the run up to the Geneva meeting, it was argued by the President of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) that success in June 2000 should be measured by whether it effectively established an international anti-poverty alliance, whether (following on from the Gordon Brown initiative) it strengthened international principles and standards for social development, and whether it strengthened the UN's Economic and Social Council as a counterweight to the Bank/IMF/WTO alliance (Disney 1999). Voices from the South, however, continue to show little interest in the attempts by northern global reformists to establish



a set of socially responsible ground rules. Walden Bello of Focus on the Global South has argued that change 'means not wasting time trying to enlarge areas of reform within the World Bank, IMF and WTO' (Bello 1999: 13). Moreover 'the project of making the UN agencies the pillars of an alternative global order is not going to result in success for a long, long time'. He goes on to argue against attempts to mend the rules of the current global order as rules can only benefit the North: 'the fewer structures and the less clear the rules, the better for the south'. Both the globalists whose safety-net-for-the-poor strategy I have critiqued, and those such as myself who argue for improved global governance structures to plan for equitable social policy, are faced with severe intellectual and political challenges by such southern voices.

## Note

1. This is a shortened version of a article of the same title to be published in the 2000 edition of *Social Policy Review*. A longer exposition of these ideas is in Deacon 2000a. The article is based on policy analysis undertaken by the Globalism and Social Policy Programme (GASPP), more details of which are available at [www.stakes.fi/gaspp](http://www.stakes.fi/gaspp). The article was first delivered as a paper at the IDS Global Social Policy conference in October 1999.

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