

THREE

BEYOND THE PARISH PUMP: INTERNATIONALISM TODAY

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Three: Beyond the Parish Pump: Internationalism Today

Paper presented by Philip O'Connor

What is "internationalism"?

'Internationalism' is an idea in confusion. But it is an idea which must be revived because it is the basis of socialist international policy and hence ultimately of our political perspectives at home. While the central concept has become somewhat confused, many ideas which have derived from it remain live. These include issues such as 'solidarity with national struggles', 'social justice in the world' and 'world peace'. As derivative offshoots, however, these are inadequate on their own as a basis of coherent political action.

Typical in this regard has been the inability of western socialists to form a coherent position on issues such as the Islamic revolution in Iran and the potential one in Algeria. Similarly, on the issue of peace, pacifism is certainly an inadequate response to the many crises in the world which involve an element of war.

So, what is 'Internationalism'?

In the early days of socialism, Marx and Engels were adamant that it was the cornerstone of socialist politics, and their main energy in the wake of the defeat of the democratic revolutions of 1848 in Europe went into organising the First International.

The idea behind this early Marxist internationalism was a very coherent one. At that time, capitalism as a way of economic organisation and as politics was a young phenomenon, restricted to limited areas of Europe and North America. In Europe, the growth of capitalist forces was breaking up the pre-capitalist, feudal empires of Russia, Austria-Hungary and elsewhere. Around the world - at that time primarily through the British Empire - it was tearing down ways of life that had endured for millennia.

India had been cudgelled into the British-controlled world market, China was being 'opened up' to the market by the rapacious and cynical Opium Wars. The young United States was smashing the feudal society of the southern Confederacy and setting out with exterminationist zeal to 'settle' the vast and fertile lands of the west, and to grab chunks of Mexico and other remnants of Spanish America. It declared its 'Monroe Doctrine', under which the entire American continent, North and South, had to acquiesce to its will.

To Marx and Engels, capitalism was a revolutionary force, tearing down every "Chinese Wall" in its path and ruthlessly smashing ancient economic formations and bloodily replacing them with market forces. Their answer to this was not a moral crusade to stop this rape of the world, but rather, while exposing the dynamics at work, to encourage that brief stage of capitalism - to get it 'over with', so to speak. They saw the role of socialists as organising the new working class which capitalism was creating in its wake internationally. Their policy was that the working class must organise internationally to prepare to challenge, then inherit and finally civilise the world revolutionised by capitalism.

The first real Peace Movement arose in this context: through the Second International of socialist parties. Marxists saw the 'contradictions' of capitalism leading to its own destruction. Not only would capitalism revolutionise the world, but it would unfortunately destroy itself.

From the 1890s onwards, socialist were convinced that 'world war' had become inevitable, and believed that if the 'internationally' organised labour movement succeeded in stopping it - by mass strikes or whatever - capitalism would be thrown into crisis and would crumble, and that the organised working class would inherit the crisis-ridden states it left. The anti-war movement was thus not a pacifist force, but a revolutionary one, aiming to exploit the crisis of war to force a development which would bring "socialism", i.e. Labour, to power.

Was Marx wrong?

Just because things didn't turn out that way doesn't mean that the basic dynamics weren't as defined by the Marxists. The capitalist revolution has continued and, with the exception of a sluggish period in the 1960s and 1970s, continues to be dynamic and revolutionise the world in ever new ways. Its main characteristic is that it doesn't stop. Its success now threatens the environment of the planet and it can't stop itself doing so. Its answer to the destruction of world water supplies - which will certainly form a key element in future 'resource wars' and already plays a role in the present Iraq crisis - has not been to clean up its act but to search the moon for water sources! And in this dynamic, everything becomes 'commoditised', ie, a tradeable value.

Today even the remotest village has been drawn into the world market or 'globalised': and no area of life remains which has not been turned into a marketable commodity, from labour to historical heritage to sex and now - most radically through the ideology of the Scientologists - even personal relationships of the most subtle and deep variety. You can now patent - and lucratively trade in - human knowledge, human affection and even DNA strings.

Capitalism, communism and social democracy

From the socialist point of view, there has only been one major change of relevance in capitalism since World War One forcing the socialist movement to change its tactics: the emergence of the reformable state. The socialist anti-war movement collapsed in 1914 not due to 'betrayal' by its leaders; but because the German labour movement - the backbone of the International - decided that if its choice was between the destruction of its advanced welfare state in favour of the primeval Russian Empire and of the British aim of dividing, weakening and hence dominating Europe - it would defend its state.

British labour, on the other hand, had always boycotted the International and had long settled for a role within the British Empire. At its most radical - in 1945 - it used its power to transform Britain into a welfare state along the lines that had existed in pre-Nazi Germany and to set the Empire on the road to transformation into the British Commonwealth.

The major result of the Armageddon of 1914-18 was the smashing of the multinational empires of Europe and the emergence of a multitude of small nation states which tortuously evolved in the shadow and under the influence of a local power. The British in particular ruthlessly enforced the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, grabbing much of the latter as 'protectorates' which later conveniently evolved into colonies.

Iraq was one of the states created in this process, and Churchill put it in its place at the time by having the RAF gas thousands of Iraqis from the air. Following its war 'for small nations', Britain ended the war with the largest Empire it was ever to have. A world of 'nation states' primitively coalesced in a League of Nations dominated by the victor powers of 1918 and replaced the old massive multi-national empires.

The other major result of the First World War was the emergence of Leninism, which promoted the notion of revolutionary willpower to short-circuit history and force the pace of development. The fact is that huge underdeveloped areas of the world were unable to enter a phase of development after World War One except as economic vassals of predatory western states. Where capitalism did develop in such areas (eg Russia and China), it was an extremely crude instrument.

Democrats, has ensured that this has been a fairly even development, one shared by the states of western Europe. The fact of Eastern Communism propelled this development, by encouraging western socialists to develop a western response and by frightening the bejaysus out of European capitalism and making it willing to compromise.

Finally even western communists - led by the likes of Gramsci - abandoned insurrectionism and became socialists while maintaining a strategic perspective on the essential conflict underlying the welfare state and why it can never be let stagnate. The outcome of the European civil war of 1914-1945 at the capitalist level was to create an integrated economy and market while simultaneously establishing a European civil and political society as its framework, in other words, a 'social state' at European level.

The social state that has developed in Europe is thus not a static entity, but a continually evolving and changing one, and one still underpinned by a basic dialectic of conflict and co-operation between capitalism and society. It is essential to keep this underlying conflict in mind, and also to remember that Europe is not the world but only one small corner of it.

The aim of socialists must be to help spread similar models throughout the world, both organically at the base of emerging industrial societies, and at the "top" through international institutions.

You will have noticed that I have not mentioned the UN. The UN is a vaguely useful forum, and it is worth constantly trying to reform it and its instruments. It is certainly not 'the international community' and is a parody of 'world government'. Too much should not be expected of it. Remember that it was created not to maintain peace but to subject world development to the total control of the small group of empires and powers which had "won" the Second World War.

In the Cold War, the USSR and the US cancelled each other out to a certain degree, leaving space for emergent nations to exploit the differences between the two to be able to emerge in the first place. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the USA as the single global power, the UN is now little more than an agent of US globalisation. We should certainly not regard UN Resolutions as anything worthy of particular respect, and should judge individual cases purely on their merits.

Some basic principles

If we can see the dynamics of world development in the way I have outlined above, we can deduce any number of principles of our internationalist stance from it. If

there is a basic principle, it is that we aim for a world welfare state and, as in our own country, to the progressive civilisation and socialisation of that state.

Our long-term aim must remain focused on the ultimate replacement of capitalism by the society that develops through and out of it, and this focus will provide coherence in our present activities. We want to see capitalism developed to its ultimate conclusion, not to stop its development. And this is a fundamental principle. It means we are constantly engaged in a game of chess with capitalism and are not part of, or supporters per se of, anti-capitalist rebellions and positions, which can be truly reactionary in nature.

Simply reacting to capitalism by trying to stop its development is not a policy going anywhere, and leaves you like Don Quixote tilting uselessly at one windmill after another. I would certainly regard some Green policies as being in this category (though a lot of Green policies are not). I would also regard a nationalist reaction to the further development of the EU as a pointless and reactionary 'anti-capitalist' politics. The same applies to privatisation - Ryanair is a great public service which should not be destroyed but civilised.

The EU is a (potential) supra-national welfare state and the politics at its centre (created by Social and Christian Democrats) are based on the principles of the 'Social State'. In world politics, this is a superior model to the much less fettered and barbarous Anglo-American capitalism model. In any disputes between these two blocs, the socialist choice must always be in favour of the Eurocentrics (just as Marx and the First International supported the industrial American North over the Confederates).

This simple principle (a world welfare-state) also sets our sights correctly when we consider issues of war and peace, European integration, Third World development, Northern Ireland, the question of Cuba and so on.

The world is not a simple place, and there are numerous complexities in its development. To the extent that we are Marxists we know that peoples and states develop linearly, and from one stage to the next, like individuals. Nationalism only becomes redundant, for example, when national questions are resolved and peoples can continue to develop through their culture in a dignified manner.

Culturally, for peoples to progress they must first be able to come to terms with and know their past, their history - just like individuals, if they suppress their childhood they will become dysfunctional and destructive. For these reasons, socialists do not support the suppression of nationalism or the avoidance of national questions, but rather their solution.

Socialists also oppose imperialism because it robs peoples of the right and freedom to develop through their chosen route, and therefore we oppose the imposition of "progress" on peoples - we thus reject paternalistic 'aid' in favour of assistance in self-development and empowerment.

Our model in this respect can be our own Area Partnerships and the community sector in general and how they work. The globalisation of capitalism should not be opposed, but countered in the eternal chess game by moves towards global welfare state provision. We support the resolution of national conflicts, respect cultural difference and support development. We are old-fashioned believers in "progress", and this marks us off from many others. It is through the free development of peoples, aided by the creation of fair international welfare-state and economic structures, and solidarity in supporting the development of welfare state institutions within states, that our role comes to the fore in international relations.

Some examples applying these principles

It is by applying these principles, always conscious of the dynamic relationship of conflict and co-operation between capitalism and socialisation, that we can navigate the waters of world affairs. Here are some examples:

The EU - support for:

- development of the full potential of EU civil society and EU social structures
- development of EU foreign policy on the basis of these.
- Integration of the EU economically and politically in step with development at the national level (eg maintenance of Council of Ministers as the proto-EU government with the involvement of all states, and a gradual realistic growth of European Parliament powers).
- Erosion of NATO veto over EU development (e.g. by opting for the 'Eurocentric' forces over the 'Atlanticists' where they conflict, and EU foreign policy over NATO).
- On principle, any enlargement of the EU, except where this is a strategy for weakening integration (a la Thatcher).

An immediate consequence of this would be strong support for the Amsterdam Treaty as a development of European social structures and a European 'social state', and also unequivocal support for EMU against the rising force of Anglophile Irish Euroscepticism noisily led by The Sunday Times, The Sunday Independent and Today FM. This EU position should also define our attitude to the proposed 'Council of the Isles', which might draw Ireland back from its European involvement and closer into the Eurosceptic Anglo-American club, which still espouses

international free-for-all capitalism, or on the other hand may enable us become a pro-Europe sect in this company, possibly in alliance with the Welsh and especially the Scots.

Human Rights – support for:

- European citizenship rights, including open borders and free movement throughout the EU.
- An effective refugee policy and promotion of the rights of migrants and asylum seekers.
- The development of civil society and social structures in emergent states at the request of and in alliance with local forces to create the basis for real social development – this must reject any bullying of weak states.
- The non-imposition of ‘human rights’ criteria, but support for groups within countries seeking specific rights.

Imposed ‘human rights’ has emerged as a further control mechanism of the so-called ‘international community’. At its worst is the GOAL approach of calling for bombers to move in ‘to make the world safe for development workers’. Blanket human rights do not exist, though they are a worthy aspiration. The issue of child labour is a classic case in point and should be approached on a case-by-case basis. A similar situation is that of China and its attempt to modernise without facing the chaos that is destroying Russia.

Third World development – support for:

- Development ‘aid’ directed at the development of an autonomous civil society and social structures (public administration, trade unions, research institutes and policy units, community organisation) rather than at ‘aid organisations’.
- The fundamental right, in the 20th-century context, of nations to self-determine their future including where that might not be to our cultural taste (this right is now under sustained attack).
- The creation of international welfare state mechanisms in terms of economic and monetary mechanisms and developmental structures and reform of the existing ones.
- Defence of the right to development (against globalisers, Green campaigners etc).
- Rejection of the politics of maintaining the international political/military ‘status quo’, and therefore no rush to support UN efforts to maintain it.

This would entail establishing contacts with autonomous forces in the developing world and working with them. Promotion of social development and of social structures runs against the present 'charity' syndrome and marks out a political policy from a charity policy. In current disputes it has clear connotations for policy in the IMF etc. and also, more immediately, respecting the outcome of revolutions (as in Iran) and elections (as in Algeria). It would also reject the tying of 'aid' to 'human rights criteria', which have (predictably) now been broadened to include economic 'liberalisation' of a purely exploitative variety.

War – some principles:

- War should probably be avoided wherever possible, but not for pacifist reasons.
- CND was established by communists to counter the power nuclear arms gave to a small number of states to impose their political agendas on the world.
- Wars are invariably the complex products of politics, and need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. For example, the war to overthrow Mbutu was probably a 'good thing', though we know little of those who have replaced him, and our judgement of them will be solely on the basis of the type of state they develop in Zaire.

There is no general principle of opposing wars. Past imperial cock-ups have left numerous intractable political problems, not least in unrealistic African state frontiers. Europe only finally aligned its state boundaries in the bloody mess of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath.

The socialist interest is the realistic settlement of disputes so that societies can move forward. These issues cannot be settled on the basis of which side allegedly commits more 'atrocities' a la Rwanda, and least of all on the basis of maintaining the status quo. In 1914, Great Britain wanted to maintain the 'status quo', not only in relation to 'containing' and therefore strangling Germany, but also, and not least, in relation to Ireland!

The USA – principles in judging the role of the USA:

The USA, as the vanguard of modern capitalism, is the most complex and fascinating of societies. Its political structure has produced a centralised state at Federal level that is subject to little social control and which operates on behalf of the interests of economic groups.

The USA is the sole global power, dominating the UN, the World Bank, NATO etc.

The challenge for socialists is to interact with the USA in a developmental partnership while constantly seeking to integrate the US into a world welfare-state structure.

Socialists should support the promotion of world welfare state structures and encourage US involvement in them. This will usually be possible where the needs of capital demand order and regulation (eg patent disputes through the WTO). Where US activity disrupts the development of fair trading structures, regional dispute resolution or the development of an integrated social market in Europe., its proposed solutions must be vigorously opposed.

On the question of Cuba: the US treats the entire continent of North and South America as a single extended state (and hence its extreme line on the bit that refuses to join - Cuba). Though it is difficult to be enthusiastic about the Cuban state, as it now seems stagnant, it is hard to argue that liberalisation will not lead ultimately to its subversion. Nevertheless, stagnancy is the worst option (not least for the population of Cuba). We should therefore simultaneously support internally-driven Cuban liberalisation and equally its right to independence.

Ireland and the world

Ireland has resolved its national conflict and will effectively resolve its 'Northern problem' through a type of joint sovereignty (North-South bodies). The chronic underdevelopment and dependence on Britain of the economy was identified as the major issue by Lemass in the 1950s. Since then, Ireland has re-orientated the basis of its development in a progressive direction towards involvement in the mainland European centre (the Franco-German-led EU). This decision led to joining the EEC in 1973, the break with Sterling in the 1979, the creation of the beginnings of a European-style 'social state' based on social partnership and now the radical possibility of joining EMU without the UK. Weak leadership in Ireland threatens to see a fallback into the 'Atlanticist' cultural world, and socialists should oppose any such development.

Neutrality is a policy based and developed on national self-interest. Interestingly, the same elements which oppose EMU and support an Anglophile foreign policy also urge the abandonment of neutrality in favour of integration into the Atlanticist military block NATO or its satellite structure PFP (especially the PDs and FG). This is not a policy with anything to offer. Neutrality is also being eroded by gradual integration into European structures, but this is an erosion of sovereignty which should generally be supported. Irish neutrality is a useful irritant in disrupting the strategy of making NATO the dominant political body in Europe over the EU. The Irish socialist position has therefore supported the development of common European foreign policy in step with the evolution of the structures of the EU while avoiding entanglement in NATO.

Response to Philip O'Connor's paper by Mary Van Lieshout

While I support and will not debate much of Philip O'Connor's analysis, I would contend that the single greatest crisis facing "internationalism" hasn't been mentioned: the crisis of global poverty. No combination of war or natural disaster inflicts suffering or destroys human potential on the scale of the 'silent emergency' of poverty. Today, one-in-four of the world's people live in a state of absolute want, unable to meet their basic needs. millions more live on the very margins of survival. In a world where technological frontiers are being pushed back at a breathtaking rate, 35,000 children die every day from preventable diseases.

I believe there are three main weaknesses in Philip's paper. Firstly, as I mentioned, there is the absence of an appreciation of the scale of the crisis of poverty which grips the world today. Secondly, I believe Philip grossly underestimates the damage wreaked by conflict and does not deal adequately with its causes or prevention. Finally, I have difficulty with Philip's promotion of "cultural relativism" on the issue of human rights. With regard to the latter, Philip simplifies the role of the United Nations and argues for "the non-imposition" of universally agreed "human rights criteria". I hope to challenge these weaknesses.

Behind poverty and conflict and the massive abuse of human rights which is occurring today is simply a vacuum of leadership in today's world. Philip boldly states that "the USA is the sole global power". I believe the problems we face today, racism, inequality, poverty, massive injustice, are the direct result of the absence of any global leader and the answer is clear leadership from socialists, committed to fighting poverty and injustice, through a strong Europe, strengthened by the unity provided in the Amsterdam Treaty.

A Europe which will encourage and promote global partnerships, and together with countries and communities North and South, create value driven policies in today's elite clubs of capitalism: the Paris Club, the G8, the IMF, the WTO, the list goes on. Indeed a strong socialist movement running through these organisations would

inevitably transform their procedures so that many of their policies would be unrecognisable, others redundant.

Finally, I believe we need a Europe which plays a leading role in the strengthening the United Nations, and its affiliated members, so that the aspirations which underpin the Universal Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights become reality.

Poverty

Even stated in cold figures, the scale of global poverty retains the power to shock. But facts and words alone can never capture the suffering inflicted by poverty. They cannot, for example, convey the tragedy of the one-in-six African children who will not live to see their fifth birthday, or of the half a million women who die each year from causes related to pregnancy and inadequate health care. Nor can they hope to capture the vast wastage of potential represented by the 130 million children who do not attend primary school.

Fifty years ago, the post-war settlement sought to establish a framework for shared peace and prosperity. Markets were to play a central role in expanding that prosperity. But the extremes of poverty, inequality and instability associated with uncontrolled markets were to be avoided through state regulation, in the public interest, at both national and global level. Today, however, most governments and the international financial institutions created at Bretton Woods to oversee the new order, place far too much faith in laissez faire economic policies.

Foreign investment and international trade flows are creating a world of increasingly porous borders, in which governments are being superseded by formidable powerful transnational companies (TNCs). The deregulation of markets and the growing power of international financial institutions have contributed to this trend. Poverty reduction is supposed to emerge principally as a by product of market deregulation, with the benefits of growth gradually trickling down to the lowest stratus of societies. In reality, the divergence in living standards between rich and poor is growing ever more stark every day.

Economic growth is imperative if poverty is to be reduced. But the distribution of wealth is as important as its creation. At an international level there is a gross maldistribution, with the structures of world trade and finance supporting an increasing concentration of wealth in the industrialised world.

The tendency towards increased poverty and inequality is not confined to developing countries, of course. In the US an additional four million children fell into poverty during the 1980s, even though wealth generated by the country's

economy expanded by one-fifth. By 1992, 22% of all American children were living in poverty.

Writing about the US, economist J K Galbraith has described a 'culture of contentment', in which governments representing a prosperous majority are willing to maintain an economic system which disenfranchises a large 'underclass'. According to Galbraith, the State is taking on a role similar to that of a security company, containing social tensions within urban ghettos at minimal cost. Underpinning the global culture of contentment is a presumption on the part of Northern governments that the social problems associated with international deprivation can be 'ring fenced', or contained within discrete boundaries; this, of course, is not possible.

Conflict

The architects of the UN system recognised that real security could never be built upon poverty. Without peace, according to the UN Charter, there could be no lasting social progress; but without social progress there could be no lasting peace. Deepening poverty is one of the main driving forces behind civil conflicts which are creating unprecedented numbers of refugees and displaced people.

Today violent conflict is predominantly an intrastate affair. Of the major armed conflicts which took place between 1989 and 1992, all but three occurred within states. These conflicts, often between 'non-traditional' forces under dubious political control, have left more than 40 million people as refugees or internally displaced in their own countries, double the number of a decade ago. As many as 43 countries (one in four of UN member states) are now caught up in major refugee crisis - each one involving more than 100,000 people.

Throughout the world, the level of human rights violations resulting from current conflicts and rising violence is unprecedented. The costs can be measured in deaths, broken lives, the destruction of livelihoods, loss of homes, and increased vulnerability.

Both poverty and conflict are presently the main challenges to human rights protection. Philip has stated that the socialist interest is the realistic settlement of disputes so that societies can move forward. I would suggest that the prevention and urgent settlement of disputes is the primary interests of socialists, if only because of the toll on civilian lives in each war. UN estimates put the proportion of civilian casualties globally since the end of the second World War at 95%, compared to 5% in the first world war and 50% in the second. Warfare used to be waged between professional armies of big powers, in formal battlefield settings. In contrast, most of the 150 or so wars that have taken place since the Second World War have been internal conflicts in third world countries.

Human Rights Protection

As the human suffering mounts, the international community's response appears ever more inadequate. And yet our human rights to freedom from fear, and freedom from want are recognised in international law and endorsed by just about every government in existence. The international covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which came into force in 1976, enshrines most of the social and economic rights contained in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration, including the rights to adequate nutrition, basic education and health care, shelter, and non-discrimination. Most of the world's governments have signed this Covenant. Unfortunately they have done so without any serious intention of implementing it. This reflects a wider debasement of the currency of social and economic rights. I believe Philip has condoned this trend with his comments in his section on Asian development and human rights that "we can only judge each situation on its own basis" and that "we should avoid trendy issues and agendas driven by the media".

To those who question the validity of the Universal Declaration which was conceived of 50 years ago, the world's governments again adopted a communiqué at the Vienna Conference on Human Rights in 1993 confirming that all rights, social and economic, as well as civil and political, were 'indivisible, inter-dependent and universal'.

It goes without saying that not all countries can immediately provide universal health care, education and secure employment for their citizens from out of their own resources. But the purpose of the UN's social and economic rights provisions is to secure the progressive achievement of rights through international co-operation. There is collective obligation on governments to adopt policies aimed at enhancing, within the limits of the resources available, the most basic rights of the world's citizens.

It is from the grass roots of the world's poorest communities that we hear the greatest pleas for the respect for the Universal Declaration - from the community groups in Africa demanding their rights to free education, to the community groups in Asia demanding safe working conditions, fair wages and protection from the exploitation of transnational companies. These are the groups demanding that the UN Declaration be respected and implemented coherently; and in solidarity with these friends, socialists should join the call, not distract from it.

I believe that in this year, the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration, socialists throughout the world should be uniting in defence of the indivisibility and universality of Human Rights, and not - as we've heard today - joining forces

with those who undermine the integrity of human rights by calling for their selective application.

A Stronger Europe on the International Stage

People are desperate today for alternatives which offer hope, instead of a world scared by deepening poverty, inequality and insecurity. Yet the institutions created 50 years ago to win the peace are failing, with governments, to offer alternatives. In large measures, this can be traced to a vacuum of political leadership. Indeed, at no stage in post-war history have the challenges facing humanity been so great and the political vision of world leaders so myopic.

The challenge to the EU and its member states is not to follow the US into isolation, not to allow the UN and other global institutions to wither, but to make Europe a leading, united and positive player in international relations.

I do not suggest that this process of revitalising the United Nations will be easy. The UN failed in Somalia, dithered in Bosnia, and for over a decade consciously contributed to ongoing political instability in Cambodia by recognising exiled factions on the border who held almost no territory, and by giving the UN seat to those factions rather than to the government which held power in Phnom Penh. It also acquiesced in the aid embargoes and trade sanctions which did so much to undermine the economy and stability of Cambodia, not to mention the arming of the exiled factions.

The dominance of the UN by more powerful Western nations makes it a fundamentally flawed instrument for facilitating peace processes or supervising fair elections. And the dominance of the Security Council by the Permanent Five makes it a highly suspect instrument for authorising military interventions.

However, the appointment of Kofi Annan, and his commitment to reform, provides real opportunity to invigorate the UN, which remains the single most significant body to help prevent conflict and enhance respect for basic rights around the world. After the disappointment of the UN's fiftieth anniversary year during 1995, in which very few real reforms were achieved, it will be in no small part up to the EU and its members to determine whether they continue to decline, or develop their effectiveness in addressing the global challenges of the twenty-first century. Though an EU seat per se may be neither a short-term prospect, nor something which would increase the EU's total representation, the influence of EU member states on the Security Council when acting together is very considerable. A common EU voice has already been a feature of EU involvement in other UN fora, where the country holding the EU Presidency has spoken for all, for several years.

Reforming Financial Institutions

We need to use the United Nations system to reform the international financial institutions which today wield enormous influence globally. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade were created in the postwar conference in Bretton Woods as an integral part of the UN system. Today, however, the IMF, the World Bank, and the successor to the GATT - the World Trade Organisation - operate outside the UN's human rights framework, and are not accountable to the UN system or the civil society which it represents. Today the debate rages on in the pages of the Financial Times, and the Economist, on whether the IMF blanket prescription for monetary reform will indeed cure Asia's woes. This debate, which is essentially about sustainable economic development - needs to be opened up to include those who are on the receiving end of these policies.

Until this reform happens, the IMF, in particular, will remain an instrument of US foreign and economic policy, an agent whose mandate seems largely to protect the interests of reckless, speculative investors, as opposed to its original mandate to 'contribute to high levels of employment and to the development of the productive resources of all members'.

Unless it is fundamentally reformed, the World Trade Organisation will continue to impose rapid liberalisation on developing countries simply to secure market access, while protecting the markets of the EU and the US, distorting global trade all the way.

Essentially, I am arguing for a policy of engagement and reform of the international bodies which today seem remote and unaccountable. Our value base has to be an essential commitment to universality of Human Rights. The current treaties and the Covenants which protect our social, economic, cultural, civic and political rights will be critically strengthened by such reform. A stronger, more united Europe, committed to the protection of human rights, the prevention of conflict and the reduction of poverty, is crucial to this process of reform.

The challenge today is both to develop and implement new social compacts at the national and international level through which our human rights can be realised. This will require institutional change as well as reforms in economic policy. Weak institutions which are loosely connected to civil society cannot oversee the effective implementation of strategies for achieving social and economic rights, however well-intentioned governments may be. That is why transparent and accountable government, popular participation in decision-making and investment in institutional reform are essential to genuine global development.

If the present pattern of development is allowed to continue unchallenged by socialists, the future is a frightening prospect — of a world of deep divisions, of societies segregated between those with skills and opportunities, jobs and wealth and those with none; between those who 'count' in economic, social and political terms and those who do not. This is a prescription for both deepening instability and escalating injustice.

Summary of discussion by Triona Dooney

Initiating the discussion, the facilitator, Jim O'Donnell, identified a number of key points in the papers by the two speakers. In Philip's paper these were:

- the concept of capitalism as a force for development;
- the idea that we should continue to facilitate the role of the nation state internationally, but without imposing our own model of development on other countries with very different histories;
- the view that we should work towards a 'world welfare state'.

The points identified in Mary's paper were:

- poverty as the major international issue which socialists must confront;
- opposition to the view that human rights are 'relative';
- the belief that socialists should work to strengthen international institutions in order to increase their ability to eliminate poverty, confront human rights abuses and prevent conflict within and between states.

Some contributors from the floor saw the two papers as representing two quite different approaches within socialism to international issues - the 'coldly analytical' and the 'moral' in the words of one person. Philip's approach was seen as economic determinism by some, with the question being posed "do we just let capitalism rip?".

It was argued by these people that 'scientific socialism' and economic determinism had been a disaster for socialism, especially in the West. The Jacobin model which had accompanied this approach, of a revolutionary elite 'riding the cusp of history', was entirely inappropriate. Other points were:

- the Tom Paine approach, based on human and civil rights, was a far better one;
- a European social model had evolved which was better than either the American or

Asian versions and represented a degree of control over markets;

- many of the progressive developments in society had been brought about not by capitalism but by those struggling against capitalism for rights and dignity.

Against this it was argued that the development of capitalism had opened up the possibility of tackling poverty, that capitalism would continue to develop and that we had to respond to that reality.

The speakers themselves both saw this as a false dichotomy, as did a number of other contributors who stressed the necessity for socialism to be values-driven as well as aware of the realities of power. Values determined the objectives. Analysis of power relations was crucial to strategy.

The human rights issue, and specifically that of 'relativity' was the focus of much discussion, with the following points being made:

- human rights were absolutely critical to building world development in a humane and sustainable way;

- you can only talk to regimes such as Iraq, Algeria or China about human rights if you are part of the socialist movement - if you are part of a white oppressive regime with its own human rights abuses (such as capital punishment, profound racism etc) you carry little credibility;

- human rights clauses should be incorporated in trade arrangements;

- throughout Europe even right-wing parties now accept the arguments for human rights. In Asia, Africa, etc. it is the ordinary people who want these rights. Socialists should embrace these aspirations and values to the full;

- the basic human rights issues are food, shelter, power and sanitation. More people die from dirty water than from wars. The application of human rights would save far more lives than a weapons ban;

- socialism without human rights was unthinkable but we had to look closely at the institutions through which it was hoped to develop human rights - e.g. law, UN Conventions etc. These were highly ideological and in fact they created numerous platforms which actually facilitated capitalism.

Other points made in the discussion were:

- capitalism has internationalized very successfully; it is essential for socialism to do likewise, making more use of organisations like the ILO as well as the UN;

- capitalism still needs wars and weapons;

- the developing world is being forced by the first world to destroy its own environment, with consequences for all of us;

- existing international institutions such as IMF and G7 etc are not controllable by progressive forces; alternatives have to be developed but first we need a clear understanding of what we wish them to do.

In response to the discussion, Mary reiterated that socialism must be values-driven, arguing that values-led people have made much significant change possible. The questions themselves needed to be reframed. Rather than asking "how do we make more wealth?" we need to ask "how do we promote people's dignity?".

Philip, in his response, stressed the ideological nature of the organisations driving the current debate about human rights, resulting in the issue being framed in a way which suited the interests of the most powerful states. Economic development could not be stopped. The left should assist those forces which are helping to democratise but should not use them to destroy countries as part of a capitalist agenda.

Title: The Coffee Circle Papers: Paper 3 - Beyond the Parish Pump: Internationalism Today

Organisation: Democratic Left

Author: Philip O'Connor, Mary Van Lieshout, Triona Dooney

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