



# Living in a Less Unequal World

The making of renewed progressive global policy

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## Foreword

This is a key moment for progressive policymakers in the UK. Reflection and renewal are necessitated both by a world much changed since 1997 and by the resignation of Prime Minister Blair after ten years in power. This is, consequently, a rare and short window of opportunity to question conventional wisdom, to generate new ideas to meet new challenges, and to push for new ways of thinking on the challenges that have been with us for far too long.

Nowhere is this latter task more required than on the issue of global poverty and inequality. The sheer scale and nature of the consequences of policy failure on this issue demand a place for it at the top of the progressive agenda. Governments around the world must not only do more to address it but must also deliver on the promises already made to do so. While the current Labour government has a better track record than most, not least on the politics of debt relief and on raising the international profile of the development challenges facing Africa, there is obviously still much more that can and should be done.

In this paper, which complements an earlier ippr paper by Ngaire Woods on global economic institutions (Woods 2007), Tony Payne issues a new call for progressive thinkers and policymakers to better harness an understanding of the realities of global power to the moral purpose of reducing global inequality. In doing so, he warns against the more common progressive approach of asserting a moral basis for policy which then proves unable to withstand first contact with reality. As such, he offers progress while avoiding the inevitable frustrations of wishful thinking. His analysis of both the material and ideational aspects of global power today also allows him to direct his recommendations at both the ideological and material aspects of the problem in creative ways.

This paper is a thoughtful, timely, and well argued reminder that the debate on equality does not stop at the water's edge. It calls for a broadening of the governance arrangements of key global economic institutions and for more 'development space' to be given to individual states. It also challenges policymakers to nest specific British foreign policy choices within a deeper structural understanding of what might be called a progressive global policy. On all three of these issues it deserves to be taken seriously.

*Ian Kearns, deputy director, ippr*

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## Introduction

Progressive attempts to introduce a moral element into the making of foreign policy always seem in the end to fail. The vision looks good in opposition, and can even enjoy sporadic success in government, but ultimately it either winds down in ever more dispiriting fashion or even worse crashes in some huge policy disaster. We only have to contrast the long debate about the prospect of a socialist foreign policy in the 1950s with the record of successive Labour administrations in the 1960s and 1970s. Apart from the Wilson government's stubborn refusal to send British troops to support the United States in Vietnam, the foreign policies of these governments did not show much evidence of strong moral purpose. Most recently, of course, we have seen only too clearly how the promise of the Government's initial commitment to an ethical foreign policy, and indeed some of the achievements chalked up in this connection (for example, the intervention in Sierra Leone), have been damaged almost to the point of destruction by the subsequent, ongoing catastrophe of Iraq.

The key reason for this consistent and cumulative bias towards failure is not actually hard to discern: it is that the pursuit of moral purpose has never been properly harnessed to a comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate understanding of the realities of power in global politics. Discussion and debate about the former are always prioritised over the hard work necessary to achieve the latter. At some point 'morality' then confronts 'reality'; unsurprisingly, it is 'reality' that triumphs, whereupon the whole project often then unravels in humiliating and politically damaging fashion. But this need not be so, for the apparent inevitability of this contradiction can be resolved.

How? The way forward, especially for a progressive movement already in government, fully apprised of the difficulties of carrying into action pledges made in opposition, is in effect to reverse the way that morality has conventionally been introduced into foreign policy making in the past. We must establish where we are before we focus on where we want to be, not the other way round. This requires that we proceed analytically and practically via a series of stages that must be undertaken in the following order: first, the establishment of a realistic grasp of the main features of the global order within which any UK government necessarily has to operate; second, the subjection of this analysis to moral scrutiny from the perspective of progressive values; and, third, the elaboration of a practical programme by means of which to redress at least some of the problems and right at least some of the injustices that have emerged. This is what, in outline, I seek to do in this paper.

I begin with a broad-brush analysis of some of the harsh realities of the contemporary global order and quickly establish that this order, although changed and still changing in a variety of ways, courtesy of globalisation and the rise of the emerging powers of Asia, is still characterised at its very heart by huge inequalities of power. No amount of reference to the notional sovereign equality of nation states within the international system can disguise this brutal fact. It becomes apparent with only a moment's thought that countries vary dramatically in the strength they can bring to the negotiating table, in the access they have to resources, in the capacity they have to serve the interests of their people. And yet the truth is that discussion of this fundamental inequality underpinning contemporary global politics is still strikingly absent from most conventional forms of international relations analysis.

It is even more extraordinary that it has not been picked up and highlighted over the years by more thinkers connected to the Labour party. After all, the concept of equality, albeit understood in different ways, has been frequently and widely deployed as a key moral imperative in the making of domestic policies and has long been regarded across all sections of the party and wider movement as a core progressive value.

I suggest that the time has come to think hard about ways in which equality can be deployed as the lodestar that guides a renewed progressive approach to the pursuit of foreign policy. This does not for a moment entail belief in the possibility of eliminating all inequalities of power in a world composed of no fewer than 192 states, and of in some sense creating an equal world, but rather of pragmatically seeking out policy options that might make it possible to live in a less unequal world. The former Labour politician and intellectual, Anthony Crosland (briefly also foreign secretary from April 1976 to February 1977) is an appropriate guide here. For, in a notable passage in *The Future of Socialism*, he wrote: 'How far towards equality do we wish to go? I do not regard this as either a sensible or pertinent question, to which one could possibly give, or should attempt to give, a precise reply. We need, I believe, more equality than we now have.... We can therefore describe the direction of advance, and even discern the immediate landscape ahead; but the ultimate objective lies wrapped in complete uncertainty' (Crosland 1956: 215-6). I very much concur. I

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would like to live in a less unequal world and I would like to see a Labour government under new leadership set this objective as its 'direction of advance' in all of its dealings with the rest of the world.

In the substantive parts of the paper I set out the two key ambitions that should drive the thinking of a renewed progressive administration committed to bringing us a little nearer to such a world and examine how they might be introduced into policymaking in some of the key arenas of contemporary global diplomacy. But, first, as indicated, it is necessary to establish more fully some of the realities of politics and power within contemporary world affairs and thus clarify the context within which a progressive government has to work.

## A changing but unequal world order

The concept of world order is the best way to begin to think about the structural pressures that bear upon all states aspiring to act in international relations. According to the eminent Canadian political economist Robert Cox, the world order is in effect the structural context within which international relations take place. The concept harks back to the older notion of a capitalist world system, but is preferred as the organising framework of analysis because it indicates a structure that may only have a limited duration. The notion of order should be 'used in the sense of the way things usually happen', not to imply 'orderliness' or lack of turbulence in international affairs (Cox 1981: 152).

In this mode of analysis the three forces that collectively create the structure of the contemporary world order are:

- first, the material capabilities of the key actors, principally still states and societies
- second, the dominant ideas that establish the 'common sense' of the times in respect of political action
- third, the practices and procedures of the various global institutions that now patrol the global stage.

None of these forces is seen to be more 'determining' than the others; rather, they interact to establish a mix of constraints, but also opportunities, that bear upon the behaviour of states and other actors in international relations (ibid: 136).

Importantly, this way of thinking about international relations has the great merit of bringing to bear upon analysis an attractively broad theory of how power works in international relations. Power is seen to have both material and ideational dimensions and to derive above all from the effective meshing of these two (conventionally separated) aspects.

The reason for rehearsing briefly these theoretical arguments is that Cox's method enables us to see with particular sharpness the changes that have been, and are still being, brought about within the contemporary world order by the sweep of globalisation. All countries, even the most powerful, have to find an effective place in a globalising world order that poses constant challenges of national adjustment and re-adjustment. There is a systemic fluidity to such a world order, with some countries apparently rising, others apparently falling and all under pressure to respond to external threats to their current position and patterns of production and trade.

Even the United States, the former hegemonic power that did so much to bring into being this global order by virtue of the liberal economic policies it espoused during the period of the Reagan presidency in the 1980s, now finds that it must worry about its falling currency and its balance of payments position. The European Union is caught up in a long-running argument about whether the welfare societies that many of its member states built up after 1945 now inhibit its competitiveness. Japan struggles to maintain the economic dynamism that underpinned its extraordinary rise from military defeat to full membership of the club of advanced industrialised countries.

Other so-called 'emerging powers' have manifestly seized the opportunities presented by a more open global political economy to thrust themselves upon its central stage, most notably China and India, but also other countries of growing significance such as Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, even Russia in its new guise as key energy-producer. Their new economic power is often still fragile, and certainly not securely entrenched in any case, not even that of China, but it is nonetheless both real and raw in many of its immediate implications.

As for all other countries, and too often in many analyses they are still dismissed as 'the rest', they too have

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to try to find a niche within globalisation if they are to sustain the desire of their peoples for the kind of prosperity that is so widely visible via the global media. There is certainly no iron law of globalisation that says that all have to be able to find a comfortable place within its structures. African countries are not alone in discovering that there may be no room left at the only inn in town.

In other words, it is striking what a profoundly unequal world order still exists at the beginning of the 21st century. The material, ideational and institutional dimensions of structural power interlink in ways that reinforce and embed, rather than challenge and undermine, power inequalities between states and their peoples. Consider, first, the basic material realities. It is obviously not possible to think seriously about redrawing the map of states to create a world of more evenly balanced units. The history of state formation in the 19th and 20th centuries is the history that we have to live with. But it is still worth pausing to note, and incorporate into one's instinctive reflexes, the huge disparities that consequently exist in respect of, for example, the size, gross national income (GNI) and position on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) of the countries that make up the current world order.

This is not the place to set out the detailed figures.<sup>1</sup> One has only to think of the gap between the Russian Federation and Nauru in surface area, between China and Tuvalu in population, between the United States and São Tomé and Príncipe in GNI, or between Norway and Sweden on the one hand and Niger and Sierra Leone on the other in relation to the HDI, to grasp the point. Yet it is perhaps just as important to note that all of these various indicators run from top to bottom via all points in between.

Countries are placed in such tables in complex ways, with a lot of bunching, as it were, around the middle or median positions. Clearly, one cannot read off their power in global politics from such indicators in any direct way, but there does immediately emerge an early sense of what quantity and quality of capabilities their leaders can potentially bring to the negotiating table when key global issues are being discussed. It is also the case, given the sheer number of countries that now exist, that the statistical dominance of the largest or the richest can never be more than a relatively modest proportion of *total* surface area, population or GNI. It is a big, complex and highly variegated world if only we lift our heads and seek to see the whole picture, rather than just the most easily visible or the most reported elements.

Keep that thought in mind when we turn, second, to consider the terrain of contemporary ideological debate on the global stage. This is actually structured on a markedly more unequal basis than the sphere of material capabilities might itself suggest or indeed require. For the last 20 or 30 years the so-called 'Washington Consensus' and then the 'post-Washington Consensus' have successively reshaped thinking about modes of development strategy across much of the world, initially bringing to bear upon divergent countries a stark new neoliberal paradigm and then subsequently in the 'post-phase' slightly qualifying the core tenets of that model by the incorporation of other considerations relating to governance, social capital and so on. Many older competing development models, which were very fashionable and in fact moderately successful in the 1950s and 1960s, came under great pressure in this period to concede ground in the face of these two Washington-based ideological juggernauts, and over time most fell by the wayside. We now hear almost nothing of the merits of 'import-substitution industrialisation', let alone 'state socialism'; we hear much less about the 'developmental state'; and, as already mentioned, we detect a lot of anxiety about the continuing viability of 'welfare capitalism' or 'social democracy'.

The point is that the main sources of these ideas have been the United States and the United Kingdom – the Anglo-American world – with the contribution played by UK thinkers and ideologues minor by comparison with their US counterparts. Ideologically, the global order danced increasingly to the tunes of one powerful country over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. In that sense the successive phases of consensus were aptly named by reference to its capital city, even though this descriptor was specifically formulated to reflect the location in Washington DC of key global institutions as well as key departments of the US state (Williamson 1990).

Interestingly, the more muscular neoconservatism that became so influential in US politics after 2001 has not spread in the same way to the global stage, in good part because its potential appeal has been tainted in many parts of the world by perceptions of excessive US unilateralism, even bullying. In fact, the neoconservative push has set in train a good deal of resistance, causing European politicians and thinkers to rally in support of softer Third Way neoliberalisms and encouraging others in Africa, Asia and Latin America to

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1. I have done this in Payne 2005: 49-72; 248-57.

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show interest in the merits of a putative 'Beijing Consensus'. To this extent, the field of ideas can perhaps be said to be slightly less unequally structured than it has been for some time. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the vast majority of the countries of the world contribute nothing to the way that the ideational debate about development, political economy and international relations is conducted on the global stage.

Third, and finally, note the existence of highly significant patterns of inequality in the way that the global institutions work. With the exception of the Security Council, the United Nations operates under a voting system that gives each country a single vote. But the price it pays for this is that the stronger states, most notably the United States, frequently ignore the resolutions it passes and the stances it takes up. As a result, the UN can often appear to be more the debating chamber of the world order, rather than its key decision-making body. The World Trade Organization (WTO) also operates notionally on the basis of country consensus, which means that it is harder for the most powerful countries to force through decisions, although that certainly does not mean that there do not exist and are not deployed some quite rough ways of bringing power to bear on awkward or reluctant members (Narlikar 2003). By contrast, the weighted voting mechanisms used in the decision-making apparatuses of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank entrench the position of the wealthiest countries, again most notably the United States, which has in both bodies what is, to all intents and purposes, a veto in key spheres of decision. Indeed, it is the case that the US is able to use its position within these two organisations to augment its external reach as a nation-state.

Underpinning all of this is the increasing centrality of the Group of 7/Group of 8 system. This has grown up out of an initial, exclusive meeting of Western world leaders held in Rambouillet, France, in 1975. These summits have since become regular events and have grown increasingly formal, prepared meticulously by representatives of the leaders known as 'sherpas'. The G7/8 system now also embraces meetings of foreign, finance, trade, justice, environment, home, employment, energy and education ministers and seems to be taking on more and more of the role of the organising political directorate of the global order (see Hodges *et al* 1999, Bayne 2000, Baker 2006). Here the numbers do not lie: only seven countries, all of them rich and powerful, are really involved, Russia being incorporated for mainly historical and symbolic reasons. For its part, the Group of 77 was formed at the first meeting of the UN Conference on Trade and Development in 1964 as a means to give voice in global politics to what were then generally seen as 'Third World' countries. Its membership now stands as high as 130 or more countries, even though the original name has been retained, and as a grouping it continues to take up positions on all manner of issues, especially within the UN system. But what it has not been capable of doing is redressing in any significant way the deeply unequal hold which a few leading countries have imposed on those global institutions which they consider to matter the most in the present era.

In summary, then, I suggest that, for all the recent and continuing changes and genuine sense of fluidity, a complex pattern of structural inequalities still characterises the present world order. These are not easy to reduce to simple formulae, even though the language of 'North vs. South' or, even more crudely, the 'West vs. the Rest' continues to be widely deployed in a lot of contemporary political and journalistic analysis. What is apparent is that ideational and institutional power is being used by a number of leading countries (*including* the United Kingdom) to entrench still further the dominance that they enjoy, albeit to a lesser extent, in respect of raw material capabilities. However one seeks to describe how international relations are presently conducted, they are manifestly not fought out on the 'level playing field' so beloved and lauded within liberal political ideology.

## The intermediate objectives of progressive global policy

A renewed progressive government has to confront this world order. Before it can even begin to address the particular foreign policies that need to be deployed towards particular countries, it has to recognise the necessity of framing its position within the structure of world order as a whole. I refer to this as global policy – not foreign policy, which I see principally as country-to-country in character – and argue that it is both a prior, and more important, issue than foreign policy making *per se* because it unavoidably has implications for every other subsequent foreign policy choice. It is where a moral stance has necessarily to be taken and it is the failure of progressives, both in the more distant as well as the more recent past, to realise this that has caused so many of the problems of implementation with which we are familiar. A renewed progressive politics should openly acknowledge that the UK might be said to gain, at least in the short term, from its prominent position within this highly unequal world order, but then go on to assert that it is

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uncomfortable with this fact and argue with passion and conviction that living in a less unequal world would over time generate huge benefits for the people it represents and leads.

I do not think for a moment that this will be an easy argument to put across to a domestic electorate that has often been said to be insular and selfish in character. For the core of the argument is moral: it is to proclaim that the British people believe in the principle of equality of respect between peoples – perhaps even can be defined by their belief in the principle of fair play (Brown 2004) – and want accordingly to take steps to reduce the glaring inequalities of power that still exist in international affairs, simply and in the main because this is something for which they stand. This would be a compelling start, but it will almost certainly not be enough on its own to convince a potentially sceptical electorate or to drive policymaking in that direction at the detailed level at which it is routinely made.

There is an intermediate stage marked by the elaboration of key objectives, or even ‘road-maps’ (if such a phrase can still be used after its abuse in the Middle East), via which the path to a less unequal world can be charted and voters persuaded that tangible gains will indeed flow from the new policy opportunities that are thereby opened up. I think that there are two such objectives that stand out and that would provide the disciplinary framework within which specific policies could be formulated and sold. The first can be described as ‘broadening global governance’, the second as ‘creating development space’.

### Broadening global governance

The notion of global governance is a serious misnomer; indeed, it is grounded in a deceit. What presently purports to be global governance is really governance of the globe by the powerful, justified by protestations about the need to offer leadership to the inhabitants of the whole of the globe. One can respond to this, as some critics have done, by calling for the establishment of something completely different that would construct global governance anew and give more substance to the claim to represent the world. George Monbiot, for example, has called for the creation of a global parliament by means of which to render more accountable the biggest and strongest countries (Monbiot 2003).

This is not a waste of time since the job of critical thinkers is to initiate new areas of debate and pose novel solutions, even ones that seem utopian at the time they are first advanced. But it does not constitute a programme for a government that inevitably also has to cope with immediate and real-world pressures. The reformist approach is to step forward from where we are now and seek to broaden the political base of currently existing global governance by making adjustments and changes that not only reflect more accurately contemporary realities of power in the world order but also deliberately seek to draw in countries and peoples hitherto largely excluded. I suggest that this is the direction in which renewed progressive thinking ought to move.

This thought immediately opens up a broad and challenging agenda. It points immediately to the need to expand the G8 to include, at a minimum, China, India, Brazil and South Africa; it highlights the case for a reframing of the membership of the UN Security Council to include again the addition of new members but also the establishment of a single EU representative; it demands significant reform of the internal constitutions of the IMF and the World Bank in order to create a fairer allocation of voting powers within the Executive Boards of these two key institutions; in particular, it requires the ending of the duopoly whereby the managing director of the IMF is always a (western) European and the managing director of the World Bank is always an American and the advent of proper appointment to these vital positions according to the criterion of merit; and it necessitates a rethinking of many of the procedures and processes of the WTO, especially around the biennial Ministerial Conference, with a view to giving substantially more substance to its claim to take decisions consensually.

Active debates already exist about the possibility of reform in all of these spheres of global governance and proposals are, or have recently been, on the table in some cases. Some, inevitably, have drawn opposition from currently privileged interests. The purpose here is not to review these various ideas and plans in detail, and certainly not to make light of the real difficulties of persuading opponents of reform to shift position, but rather to underline the fact that the United Kingdom presently has no coherent position across all of these agendas and to emphasise again that the vision of living in a less unequal world offers the best way of thinking through the shifts of membership and approach that are required.

It will be objected that such a strategy involves the UK giving up power. In a narrow sense, it does. This country is still living off the spoils of being a victor, albeit as an economically exhausted member of a US-

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led coalition, in the Second World War. Nobody drawing up today a list of five countries in the world that should have a veto power within the UN Security Council would include the UK. So it must be admitted honestly that a serious broadening of the base of global governance would diminish the relative standing of the UK within these councils, at least in the very short term. But it can also be argued forcefully that the UK would benefit even more from the greater legitimacy that would flow from a system of global governance that had been restructured broadly along the lines suggested and that huge moral (and therefore political) gains would accrue to the country that took the lead in setting in train such a process of re-legitimation. Moreover, the UK is perfectly placed to seize this mantle, precisely because it has been an historic gainer from the inherited structures of post-1945 global rebuilding.

It is also manifestly the case that the UK cannot engineer the kinds of changes in global governance being proposed here on its own. It has to acknowledge awkward facts, such as that the US and China fear that reform of the UN Security Council will dilute their influence, that the US enjoys the control that it has always had over the World Bank and the IMF, that Brazil and India have in effect been co-opted into the WTO hierarchy in all the latest talks and thus can no longer be said to represent the voice of marginalised countries, and so on. The argument that has to be put, both openly and behind the scenes, is that more legitimate global institutions, possessing extended reach as a consequence, are also likely to be more effective institutions and thus better able to bring positive energy to bear upon the many global and regional problems that need urgent attention. It is not at all the case that greater legitimacy can only be bought at the expense of effectiveness and those who purport to take this view need to be exposed as defenders of the inequalities of power at work in the status quo.

## Creating development space

Development space is something that the UK enjoyed pre-eminently in world history. That is to say, when the UK first embarked upon the great transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy during the 17th and 18th centuries, it did so in a world in which it was free to pursue whatever type of strategy of development its government chose. This was the prize of being the 'first mover' in the long history of development.

No such opportunity exists for contemporary 'developing countries'. They have to pursue their developmental ambitions in a world in which powerful ideologies, emanating principally from Washington, prescribe what should and should not be done in terms of policy and in which equally powerful global bodies, like the Fund, the Bank and the WTO, police the extent to which they stay within or otherwise breach these tram-lines. It can, of course, be quite fairly objected that the historical clock cannot be turned back. Bolivia or Papua New Guinea or Tanzania have no option but to seek to develop in a world in which many other countries have already built up strong economies that bestride markets, control intellectual property and run global institutions. So, as with global governance, we must avoid wishful thinking. But, even so, we have to ask whether the constraints placed on poorer countries seeking to develop have to be as intellectually narrow or as politically tight as is presently the case.

Ha-Joon Chang has aptly described the policies lately pursued by the rich G8 countries in relation to poorer developing countries as akin to 'kicking away the ladder' (Chang 2002). By his use of this phrase he draws attention to the hypocrisy of countries that engineered their own development behind protective barriers and were more than ready, if they so chose, to use the state to intervene in economic processes, but now take up stridently pro-free trade positions that seem to deny countries that are still poor use of the very tools that they deployed in an earlier historical time in the same cause.

The alternative is, of course, to espouse a set of policies that consciously seeks to help others up the ladder. Putting the point in more precise conceptual terms, as Robert Wade has done, the idea would be to create as much developmental space as possible for all countries of the world to pursue development according to their own judgements, beliefs and preferences (Wade 2003). Examples can easily be given of what this would mean in practice. It would open up space to protect, for a period of time, economic sectors that were being built up and could not yet be expected to survive in an open global market (the old 'infant industry' argument); it would allow countries to identify potential growth sectors and give them national support in whatever form was deemed appropriate (the old 'industrial policy' argument); and it would permit the support of different social groups, different regions, different workforces as they experienced the human costs of transition from one mode of development to another (the old 'social protection' argument).

At the heart of this type of thinking is actually another old-fashioned argument that used to be considered

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to have great appeal in left-of-centre politics, namely, that of the right to national self-determination. It is still held to be a powerful argument in what one might call its political nationalist form (sustaining anti-colonialism, opposition to external occupancy and the like), but it seems to have substantially wasted away in its economic nationalist form. Yet we still surely need to question why countries should not be allowed to chart development strategies according to their own chosen values and priorities. On the contrary, one might think that this is actually one of the deepest and most meaningful aspects of being a free country in an open world order.

Again, it can be objected that the UK's own continuing development (for that is what national economic policy seeks essentially to achieve, even though the language of development is not conventionally used to describe such ambitions in so-called 'developed countries') would be harmed by opening up development space to other countries along the lines suggested. Once more, to a degree, the charge is true. In a competitive world economy, the development of other countries cannot but pose challenges to the productive systems of countries that presently dominate markets. It is the case, to take just one example, that textile workers in Lancashire have lost jobs over the past two decades as rival production in China and elsewhere has built up.

Three counter-points can be quickly made, however:

- First, the UK currently takes up an essentially hypocritical stance in protecting – seemingly indefinitely – globally uncompetitive areas of its economy (such as the production of some agricultural commodities) while at the same time it advises much poorer countries to grasp the mantle of change, and that this damages its standing internationally in the eyes of many other countries.
- Second, the UK can itself exploit the greater development space being proposed for all countries precisely in order to manage economic transition in different sectors of its own economy.
- Third, and most forcefully of all, the UK would benefit in so many other more general ways (many of them economic) from the reduced levels of inequality between countries, and their average living standards, that the general strategy of creating development space within a reformed world order would bring about.

Finally, in concluding this part of the discussion, it should be noted that the absence of sufficient development space is not advanced as a complete and total explanation of the problems that some countries face in realising their development aspirations. Zimbabwe, for example, does not find itself in its present desperate condition primarily because of the limitations and constraints of donor conditionality, but rather because Robert Mugabe's government has been pursuing ruinous policies that have made the Zimbabwean people poorer. More broadly, it is clear that responsibility for Africa's current condition and general development impasse rests in good part with Africa's elites and with the nature of politics and governance across the continent (see Lockwood 2005). Quite what, if anything, the UK government can do to address this issue is another matter not explored further here.

## Arenas of global policy

The two key objectives identified here – broadening global governance and creating development space – can and should be used to guide and shape UK policy in a whole variety of arenas of global policy. Several could be itemised, but we will confine ourselves to consideration of the finance, trade and environmental arenas, some of the most important in the contemporary era. The aim will be to indicate, again in broad terms, the kinds of specific policy changes, and indeed policy continuities, that flow from the agenda I have sought to promote in this paper.

I suggest that the eight main priorities for renewed progressive global policy should be to:

- Draw up a plan to convert the 'G8 plus 5' formula deployed at the 2005 Gleneagles summit in relation to discussion of climate change into a fully-fledged G13, thereby adding China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico to the existing membership.
- Take the lead in proposing and building support for major reforms in the patterns of representation, internal constitutions and senior appointment procedures of the World Bank and IMF.
- Continue the very positive role that the UK has played, in good part courtesy of Gordon Brown's posi-

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tion as Chair of the International Monetary and Financial Committee of the IMF, in debt politics, but nevertheless determine to push even harder on this issue, because much still remains to be done fully to free poor countries of oppressive debt burdens.

- Confront, properly and diplomatically, but nonetheless firmly, some of the orthodoxies that dominate Bank and Fund thinking where solid research and critical opinion, much of it emanating from within the UK, shows how many of these received wisdoms act in unnecessarily constricting ways to limit the development space available to weaker and poorer countries.
- Continue and accelerate the upward trend in aid provision of the Blair years, with a view to reaching the target (agreed at the UN more than 30 years ago) of providing 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income as aid as early as possible.
- Rethink comprehensively the UK's position as regards the Doha WTO Round in the brief period of negotiating time left and raise as an urgent and pressing political issue within the European Union Council of Ministers some of the stances taken up by the European Commission on behalf of EU member states in these long-running talks.
- Propose the establishment, as soon as the Doha Round is either concluded or irredeemably stalled, of a high-level working group to undertake a root-and-branch appraisal of existing WTO negotiating procedures and processes.
- Give the highest priority to the global political dimension of controlling climate change, building creatively on the 'G8 plus 5' initiative to find the basis of a post-Kyoto politics wherein China, India and the US, as well as the Kyoto signatories, could cooperate to agree measures to cut back significantly global greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2012.

It is important to add that these priorities *must* be conceived as a package, not treated separately with different parts of the agenda being handled according to different habits and political inclinations by the Treasury, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development, the Department for Trade and Industry and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. A strong Prime Ministerial initiative is called for to draw all aspects of the policy together and render them mutually consistent.

The problem at present is not so much that the UK government has not been doing a number of the things it should have been doing, but mostly that the regressive and selfish stance of the EU (embracing as it does, of course, the UK) within the Doha so-called 'Development' Round vitiates much of its wider ambition. The argument that the trade round has been conceived of and might still yet become a genuinely developmental round, in the sense of giving support to the development objectives of the poorest countries of the world, is treated with nothing less than disdain in the capitals of these countries. The positions of the US and, in particular, the EU, are instead widely seen as crude defences of past privilege in relation to agricultural protection. Until this is tackled within the EU, and the position of France as the main defender of the old system is addressed, no renewed progressive global policy can come close to realising the vision being articulated here in this paper.<sup>2</sup>

Something more needs to be said here briefly about the role of the EU in UK global policy making. In general, there can be no doubt that UK policies are most effectively pursued within an EU framework. That applies to the issue of aid where it would be hugely helpful if the UK could succeed in getting the EU as a collectivity to advance its current target of 2015 to reach an aid level of 0.7 per cent GNI; to the kind of politicking that necessarily must go on in IMF/World Bank circles over debt where again a common EU position is likely to be more persuasive; to the general question of what kind of development the global institutions espouse where, obviously, the general European welfare capitalist model stands as an alternative to the old Washington Consensus; and certainly to the whole climate change question where, both before and after Kyoto, the EU record does show consistent seriousness of purpose, compared at least to other 'old industrial' countries.

The caveat, though, is that EU policy must be the right policy. There is no merit in a common EU stance *per se*, as in the case of the trade round, if the burden of the policy is to hold out against the legitimate develop-

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2. For a useful discussion of the case for supporting fairer global rules of trade, see Mephram and Lorge 2005

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mental aspirations of a large majority of the states of the rest of the world. Here the Commission needs to be brought back under political control and a different consensus hammered out between the national politicians. This will clearly not be easy, especially in an expanded EU with more and more countries having joined that historically have not had close ties with Africa, Asia or Latin America and the Caribbean. That said, the political challenge cannot be avoided by progressives if UK trade policy is not to cut damagingly across the Government's other global policy goals.

Finally, there is the question of the US to consider in relation to these proposals for UK progressive global policy. It almost goes without saying that the UK needs to chart and pursue its own vision of the world order separately from whatever working relationship it seeks to generate in practice with the US. The broad strategy must be home-grown and should not be diverted from in essence. That said, its implementation will require the support of other key states, and none is more important than the US. All of the policy ambitions set out in this section would gain hugely from US support. Nor is this completely inconceivable in the medium-term future. In an immediate sense, the high-water mark of neoconservative influence in the US has passed.

In the longer run, the US problem is actually to work out how to operate in a world in which it is no longer hegemonic, indeed in which it is weaker in many regions and in many arenas of policy than is generally recognised (see, for example, Jacques 2006). This is in reality the agenda that will have to be tackled by the next US president after George W Bush, whether or not that person comes from the Republican or the Democratic party.

It has almost become a cliché to suggest that the UK can play the role of 'critical friend' to the US. However, the point about clichés is that they generally embrace fundamental truths. Historically, culturally and institutionally, the UK is too close to the US to make any notion of breaking completely free of this connection wholly illusory. But the US in the next phase of its global policy making also cannot afford to ignore its longstanding friends. There *is* some room for manoeuvre to be had by the UK in its transatlantic alliance, provided that its own views are firmly grounded in a moral stance to which it is genuinely committed.<sup>3</sup> Everything thereafter becomes a matter of realistic bargaining in the real world of other states, which, to reiterate the key point made earlier, now includes as major players not only the US, the EU, Japan and Russia, but also China, India, Brazil, South Africa and many significant others.

## Conclusion

This paper has sought to set out a framework, and indeed a philosophical narrative, within which a renewed progressive government can relaunch a dynamic and integrated global policy from 2007 onwards. It recognises that there is an inevitable danger of courting disillusion and demoralisation, because, to reiterate, the UK by its actions alone cannot transform the global policy agendas identified. As ever, it will be necessary to manage expectations. Nevertheless, I argue that the UK can play a genuinely important and novel global role in the current conjuncture of world affairs, but only by abandoning the old, and surely by now discredited, vision of sitting 'at the top-table' as if somehow we were all still stuck in a late-1945 time-warp.

Tony Blair's vision of the UK as the vital bridge that linked the US and the EU was actually too narrow in its perspective. The progressive role for the UK in the early 21st century is actually to act as the country that seeks to connect the old centres of power, mostly the victors of the Second World War, with the rising forces of the new globalising world order, most notably China, India, Brazil and South Africa, and to do so in a way that shows respect for and supports the aspirations of all the many other smaller, poorer countries of the world. The aim should be nothing less than to build a new world order, marked by a commitment to reduce the severity of the inequalities of power between countries that so disfigures, and destabilises, the present world order.

The pursuit of such a global policy will demand a retreat from the arrogance that has frequently characterised UK foreign policy over the last decades and the embrace instead of a new humility towards other countries that will assuredly win friends and influence as it unfolds. It can be set in motion by focusing in the first instance on the objectives of broadening global governance and creating development space. It can

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3. For a wider discussion on the UK-US relationship see Gamble and Kearns (2007).

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also surely be sold to the people of the UK, especially in the light of the multiple cultures that now make up this global nation, as the means to bring into being a less unequal world in which we would all be happier and safer precisely because other countries had been enabled to acquire self-respect and self-realisation. It would also bring progressive politics back to its ethical roots and prevent future historians having to say that early twenty-first century progressives forgot that 'It's about equality, stupid'.

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