

Sunday, 27 June: ‘Globalization: Incorporating Environmental and Human Rights’

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Abstract: The ancient “Right of Kings” (or victors) was to lay down the law to its subjects (or the vanquished). There were no limits to this power over others. In its extreme, this policy led to the extermination of the Jews in Nazi Germany. After World War II, the United Nations articulated the Human Rights Covenants, setting out basic human rights possessed by everyone irrespective of governments. It offered a line beyond which the “Right of Kings” could not go. More recently, the basic rights of the Earth and all living things were spelled out in the Earth Charter. Again limits were placed on power over the Earth and all living organisms. What does this have to do with globalization? We are in the process of forming a global community without the structures which protect human and earth rights. The International Monetary fund and World Bank decisions are made by the most powerful nations, often in their own interest, and those who must live under these policies have no voice. There is little or no transparency surrounding decisions, and governments and corporations can hold vital information secret under their national security or corporate privacy policies. On the global level there is no tax system which would help in distributing the wealth more equitably between rich and poor countries, and no accounting system which can assure that leaders of countries will not abscond with money meant for development. The answer seems to be the opposite of unbridled “free markets”. Rather it is to deliberately build in the infrastructure and checks needed to regulate, democratize and humanize economic globalization. Our goal must be to equitably share the wealth of the earth, our common heritage.

Problems with Globalization:

Globalization, as now defined by the economically developed nations, namely, free and unlimited markets and unrestricted global movement of money and jobs, is clearly a failure. Yet the concept of a global community, founded on justice, equity, fair trade and peaceful cohabitation of our earth home, is still a compelling vision. Marshall McLuhan called it the “Global Village”.

First we must determine precisely what is wrong with the present approach, and then we need to propose a way to set globalization on a more promising path. Globalization is now a fact of life, and most of us enjoy the ability to travel and communicate with people all over the globe. However, we also appreciate the problems of inability of people to freely move, creating refugees and immigrants; and the problem of movement of jobs and capital, while the employees cannot follow, causing unemployment and under-employment. People are not free to move and relocate where they wish around their earth home. Jobs become available only where multinational corporations decide to locate. Neither of these problems can be addressed by the people of this earth home, or

even by the United Nations. They are decided by national governments and unaccountable corporations. Even in a so called free trade economy, farm subsidies in rich countries undercut the developing nations markets and drug price fixing by corporations prevents the free access to farm commodities and medical assistance. While capital and jobs move freely, people cannot move freely. While food and medicines are needed globally, farm products and drugs are artificially controlled by undemocratic forces.

Obviously in such an unbalanced and unfair globalization, there will be a build up of tensions as people become desperate for food, drugs and jobs. The global response to this frustration is the global arms trade, promoting war and violence as the way to obtain the basic necessities of life. This is a clear recipe for global suffering, wars and violence, with children, the elderly and the weak the losers!

This problem is further compounded by the growing scarcity of natural resources. A few countries are blessed with more natural resources than are needed for their fair share of the global resources, but many other countries are not so blessed. The countries that are living within their national means are: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Finland, France, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Peru and Sweden. Most of these, however, are exceeding their fair share of global resources. The other countries are living well beyond the natural resources available within their borders, and also earth's capacity to renew them. The deficits run between -0.2 hectares per capita for Bangladesh, which has a population of 126 million, and -3.6 hectares per capita for the United States, with a population of 268 million. Bangladesh is a country poor in resources, with only 0.3 hectares per capita available, and it lives modestly on only 0.5 hectares per capita. The United States is rich in natural resources, with 6.7 hectares per capita available, but it consumes 10.3 hectares per capita, accounting for 25% of the global deficit consumption of natural resources. Consumption in hectares per capita, times the size of the population, is called the Ecological Footprint.

The sum of all footprints must remain within the carrying capacity of the earth, or we face an ecological collapse.

Currently there is an overall global deficit consumption of natural resources, effectively stealing from future generations. The overall deficit in natural resources for 1997 is 4,714 million hectares of mixed resources - farmland, fisheries, forests, etc. This is an increase in the rate of loss of natural resources over 1993 of 14.3%. It is not known for how long the world population has been overusing the earth's natural resources, but deficits especially in water and fish have become general knowledge. According to Sturm, Wackernagel and Muller [Winners and Losers in Global competition, 2000] only four countries - called the "heavy weights" account for more than 50% of the global deficit: USA 25%, China 13%, Russian Federation 8% and India 7%. Since the USA contains only 6% of the world's population and causes a staggering 25% of the total ecological footprint, and Russia with 3 % of the global population and 8% of the total footprint have been signaled out for special condemnation.

Perhaps the greatest destabilizing fact of today's world is not the economic differences, but rather this plundering of natural resources. It will be almost inevitable, should we maintain a competitive global society, to avoid major resource wars in the future. We are condemning future generations to life with major shortages of natural resources. In the face of this reality, bombing the infrastructure of a nation and then rebuilding it with scarce resources is insanity. Likewise taking resources needed for living, and investing them in weaponry is insane. Bread not guns is a survival slogan!

In the United States, there are millions of people below the poverty line and 43 million without adequate health insurance. Hence an over-consuming country does not equate to over-consuming citizens of that country. Here, the tactic used by government is: 1) reduction of taxes, which really benefits only the rich; 2) deregulation and 3) privatization, which policies result in reductions in the social net and impoverishment of

large numbers of people. The way this works is: reducing taxes and raising costs cause a fiscal crisis. In a fiscal crisis, unpopular legislation which withdraws money from social programs, namely health, education and social security, can be passed. This is the democratic method of disenfranchising the poor and growing the economy, to the detriment of both the local and the global community.

In economically developing countries, the tactic is called structural adjustment imposed by the IMF, and it has the same effect, namely sharing the country's wealth with only those who can fend for themselves. It looks to me as if the underlining plan is to deliberately reduce the number of people supported by the fruitfulness of this earth, causing this smaller number of favored people to prosper economically, while the poor or unfortunate will die off.

Perhaps some economic planners truly believe in the trickle down theory whereby promoting the wealth of the few will eventually bring prosperity to the masses, but history has never shown this theory to be sound. On the contrary, in the 1960's the richest 20% of the world had average incomes 30 times that of the average income of the lowest 20%. Now the richest 20% have an average salary 224 times that of the poorest 20%. Economists propose that the gap should be only a factor of 60 or less for a fully functional society.

A gap between rich and poor of this magnitude tends to destroy the middle class and impoverish the lower income families. In the 1960's, the richest 20 % of the world held 70% of the world's revenue. In 1999 the richest 20% held 85 % of the world's wealth. This, together with the growing deficit consumption of natural resources, is tangible and clear evidence that globalization is on the wrong track.

We need to put our thoughts together and imagine a workable global governance and global economy, humane, environmentally sound, just and equitable for all. Then we

need to strategize on how to move from the current dysfunctional system to this new more promising system.

Characteristics of the Desired Global System:

Planning within this envisioned system must be democratically carried out, in good faith deliberations in which all can participate at least through their elected representatives. Both planning and implementation must be transparent. The basis of decision making cannot be only economic, especially the economic advantage of one or a few nations, or even a few elites within nations. It must also include universal social benefits, equitable distribution of wealth, and the survival and well being of this planet, our life support system. This can best be accomplished by having three strong sectors of global governance: social, environmental and economic, and requiring these sectors to negotiate plans so all will benefit.

We came full circle to the recognition of this principle after World War II, when the Human Rights Covenants were first formulated. After fifty years of experience, the global community has also recognized the need for an Earth Charter to protect our common wealth in natural resources. No economy will survive without fresh air, clean water and fruitful land! However, neither Human Rights nor Earth Rights seem to influence the current direction of globalization based totally on trade and economics.

Strengthening the Social Policies Globally:

In order to make the Human Rights Covenants effective in the World Court, they must first be agreed to by member nations and second, be codified in legal terminology recognized by international law. While most of the civic and political rights have been codified, for example, the rights of free speech, free press and “free and fair elections”, most of the social and economic rights have not been codified. The United States has

never ratified the social and economic rights sections of the Human Rights Covenants, which undoubtedly slows its international implementation. These rights include the right to life and health, decent living conditions and safe work places. This needs to be one of the first remedies for the ills of globalization as we now know it.

The Earth Charter has not yet been codified, and this is an important next step in developing the infrastructure of a humane and just global system which respects the natural ability for restoration of earth systems. The lives of all peoples depend on the life of planet earth.

Preventing abuse of human rights and earth rights through an international court is only the negative side of future planning for the earth community. In a truly balanced approach to governance, human rights and earth rights need to be incorporated into the planning phase of all activities and plans for the global economy.

Deciding who speaks for people and who speaks for earth will be crucial for international discussions. If one accepts current practice of asking financial directors or ministers of the developed countries to plan for the global economy, it would be logical and within the same pattern, to expect directors or ministers of social programs and natural resources to be included in any planning. The descriptions of these Ministries or Departments of national governments may need to be redefined, for example, the natural resource Ministers cannot see themselves as promoting mining and fishing without thoughtful limits. Membership in global discussion must be extended to all of earth's people. Current domination of decisions by a few (or even one) countries is unacceptable.

At this point one might recognize the unwieldy size of the decision-making group! For this reason, organization into Geographical or Bio-Regions, and designation of Financial, Social and Environmental spokes-persons for each region (in a Democratic way) would be most helpful. Organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the

World Bank (WB), are clearly undemocratic. They operate on the assumption that one can exercise global decision-making power relative to one's contribution to the fund. In order to remove this bias, it would be good to tax people instead of relying on governments' donations. A tax on international financial exchanges and investments would seem to be appropriate. Global financial institutions need to become transparent and need to be democratized in keeping with this vision of a just global decision-making model. The present effective U.S. veto and dominance would, of course, be abolished.

Disparity in National Incomes:

The question will come up very quickly, whether, if one country is donating most of the money, that country should direct its use. Nationally we do not give rich people the right to direct national policy. Rather, we tax them and allow elected officials to make influence free decisions (at least in theory). Money interests still have ways to corrupt this political process, but such attempts to influence behavior are frowned upon and prosecuted as bribery or influence peddling. Assuring financial stability for the United Nations, the IMF and the WB, without pressures from either governments or industry, would be a step in the right direction!

On the global level we need some fair tax system which will allow global governance to redistribute wealth so that the social and environmental needs of the global community are met. There is now no such system of taxation. Indeed, what would on a national scale be called purchasing one's way, greed or bribery, has become a normal way of dealing with money and power in the WB and IMF.

In a true democracy, the wealthy have just one vote, exactly like the poor. They must contribute to the good of the whole based on their wealth.

One method of collecting a global tax is the so called "Tobin Tax", a 1% tax on

international money transactions. This could provide value free income for the United Nations, IMF and WB, which would in turn free them from pressure to make decisions in favor of the rich countries. Transparency in transactions and elimination of influence due only to wealth and power, would hopefully give rise to a generation of Global Public Sector Workers, who care for the global (rather than national) need.

A Global Public Sector:

On a national level, we have individuals who serve the nation as a whole, rather than their own local province or state. We call these people Public Servants. On the global level we have only a seminal group of Public Servants. Some NGO's truly espouse global community well being and are not focused on national good only. It will take time to develop such global Public Servants, who are officially recognized and trusted to provide the continuity of governance which elected officials, with short terms of office, cannot provide.

Priorities for Action:

The Global swell of voices opposed to current globalization policies has clearly already been heard in the halls of power. The clear call for change is unprecedented in the history of the world. However, being against the wrong is only the first step. We must now agree on some strategic steps toward a better and more equitable future. This means forming a global consensus for what we want, and priorities for moving the agenda toward that vision.

I would propose, for discussion, the following steps:

1. Campaign for a global tax on the richest people in the global community. This tax will provide funds for the United Nations, the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund. The Tobin tax is a possibility, but there may be other ideas which are viable. It is the richest people of the global community who must fund global governance, not the richest nations.

2. Develop Regional approaches to social programs, environmental protection and financial stability. These can form advisory boards for the IMF and WB. They may also work through other organs of the United Nations, WHO, UNEP, etc. to form policy guidance for these institutions.
3. Fund the International Court of the Environment, as a specialty court of the International Court of Justice, and an International Environmental Protection Agency to set international standards for environmental protection. This will counter the tendency to lower environmental standards because of economic competition. These organizations were agreed upon at the Earth Summit in Rio, 1992, but have never been implemented. These new agencies should be free from dominance by the multinational corporations and pharmaceutical companies.
4. Free the World Health Organization from standing committees not of its choosing and written agreements with other UN agencies, for example, the International Atomic Energy Agency, that interfere with its mandate to protect the health of the world's people.
5. Stop the international trafficking in arms.
6. Engage global grass roots efforts in locally implementing one or more sections of Agenda 21 from the Earth Summit, and linking their local efforts to other cities globally through ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives) [www.iclei.org or 1-416-392-1462]

Time Line:

Realistically, the infrastructure of the global community cannot be put in place immediately. It will need to develop over the next century or two. However, it is clear at this time, that the current plan for globalization is on a destructive path which can never lead us to the vision of a democratic, humane and earth-respecting future. Therefore, I see our task as changing the direction of globalization - not destroying it. These five

goals are doable on a relatively short time line.

Providing tax money to the UN, IMF, WB and other helpful global agencies could be done through the General Assembly of the United Nations. We have friendly countries which could introduce this motion for consideration. This would quickly break the hold of corporate money and powerful interests on these organizations, and open them to changed policies.

Those who bring about this transformation must act in the global good, and forget old categories such as first, second and third world. We are one world, and must begin to act like one world! We might even rename the United Nations: Association for Global Solidarity.

Development and strengthening of social and environmental regional organizations, and linking them with relevant UN Agencies could be accomplished in a matter of five or six years. Reorganization of the IMF and WB could take place simultaneously. We would need a few dedicated visionaries, which we must surely have in the global community. Work on a global Environmental Protection Agency and International Court of the Environment is already well advanced in Italy. It lacks global support to become a reality.

Efforts, to free the World Health Organization from external pressures from the nuclear industries, drug companies and multinationals has already been initiated by the People's Health Assembly, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and other international organizations. This work needs to become known and supported globally. Domination of WHO by IAEA in the area of the health effects of radiation is outrageous. Stopping the arms trade could be accomplished by strong public opinion to ban these sales, which solve nothing but promote violence.

I can envision a significant change in direction within the next ten years. Then it will be best to let this new global entity, designed and supported by the people of the world, develop as it will. Our biggest enemy is greed, over consumption and desire for power over others. We must keep this global undertaking in the bright light of our concern, transparent for all to see and fair to all. This monitoring function will be from now to forever.

This beautiful, elegantly designed earth which supports our life is worth every bit of effort we put into designing its governance! If we fight wars over the inequitable distribution of its wealth, we will destroy it. Resolving this most elementary problem on a global level is imperative for the life of the planet and for all future generations of humans who will want to live on it in peace and prosperity.

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TOWARDS A WORLD WITHOUT VIOLENCE

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