

# The anti-politics of inequality: reflections on a special issue

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From the World Bank to the United Nations, from Buenos Aires to Calcutta to Salisbury, the decade or so after 1945 was marked by an extraordinary optimism about the state of the world. Well aware of the world's vast problems in the post-war years (poverty, malnutrition, and minimal opportunities for large swaths of the world's population, primarily in the colonies of European powers), scholars, philanthropic officers, diplomats, and political leaders around the world nevertheless hoped – even expected – to solve these problems within a couple of generations. They were led by their hopes more than any firm ideas about the nature and extent of the problems. This was a result, on the one hand, of the optimistic zeitgeist of the time, and, on the other, of the paucity of detailed knowledge of the colonial areas. The knowledge of colonial officials ran deep, but focused on specific areas and on practical problems.<sup>1</sup> Western social sciences took as their near-exclusive subject the industrial economies of the North Atlantic.<sup>2</sup> While American foundations and missionaries had long been active in what would come to be called the 'Third World', they focused on small-scale and ameliorative missions.<sup>3</sup>

Then the second half of the 1940s brought four almost simultaneous and intertwined transformations: the escalation of American–Soviet tensions, the expansion of America's global reach, the growth in scope and prestige of the social sciences, and decolonization. These shifts energized actors, new and old, as they set about fixing the world's problems, meaning, especially, the problems of the 'Third World'.

The dozen years or so after 1945 were an era of optimism, indeed of certainty and silver bullets; the problems of the 'Third World' could be quickly identified and quickly righted, or at least set on the right path. Social scientists, with unprecedented prestige and financial support, began to focus on the 'Third World', adapting theories of social change to inject a

- 1 Frederick Cooper, 'Modernizing bureaucrats, backward Africans, and the development concept', in Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *International development and the social sciences: essays on the history and politics of knowledge*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 64–92; Cooper, 'Writing the history of development', *Journal of Modern European History*, 8, 1, 2010, pp. 5–23.
- 2 On American social science, see Dorothy Ross, *The origins of American social science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; and Edward A. Purcell, Jr, *The crisis of democratic theory: scientific naturalism and the problem of value*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1973.
- 3 Edward H. Berman, *The ideology of philanthropy: the influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American foreign policy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983, ch. 1. The term 'Third World' dates only to Alfred Sauvy, 'Trois mondes, une planète', *L'observateur*, 118, 14 August 1952, p. 5.

new sense of historical dynamism into what came to be called modernization theory. Even those who did not wave the banner of modernization theory – a Weberian flag painted by Talcott Parsons – shared some key elements with that line of thought. Modernization was a broad process, affecting all aspects of society for all its inhabitants; it was marked by simultaneous economic and social changes, not just industrialization but urbanization, increased physical and social mobility, and transformations of social structures, ranging from the family to occupational hierarchies.

The polarities between traditional and modern societies were rooted in late nineteenth-century studies of Europe. Yet, in what would become a hallmark of social science after the Second World War, scholars slipped effortlessly from description to prescription; they took analyses of the past and turned them into programmes for the future.<sup>4</sup> While the complexity of the process of modernization might suggest the need for multifaceted programmes to spur social change, the initial tendency was, in fact, the opposite: most of the approaches emphasized a single lever – typically agricultural production, population control, or industrialization – and then claimed that the interconnectedness of social change would carry modernization to society as a whole. A single silver bullet would slay the manifold problems of the ‘Third World’.

As social scientists (especially in the United States) turned their attention increasingly to trends in the ‘Third World’, they exhibited growing confidence, even hubris, about their ability to bring about positive social transformation. Knowledge of the social sciences, they suggested, gave them the power to solve the world’s problems and the responsibility to do so. They invented or appropriated new measures, and developed new techniques for measurement based on the claim that measurement was not just the key to knowledge but the key to action. Nutritionists narrowed their focus from variegated foods to caloric intake, applying a simple unit of energy (the kilocalorie) to the complex question of human sustenance.<sup>5</sup> Demographers, who had mobilized their work for nationalist or eugenic ends (for example fears of ‘race suicide’) through the early decades of the twentieth century, conceptualized a global population that needed to be fed by a global supply of food (measured, not surprisingly, in calories).<sup>6</sup> And, perhaps most importantly, economists began formulating and then calculating national income in the form of Gross National Product (GNP).<sup>7</sup> Social scientists turned these measures, each useful for specific tasks, into barometers of well-being, as well as tools for effecting social transformation. Knowledge of food, of population, and of that abstraction called the national economy became inseparable from the power to change those measures. As Daniel Speich notes in his article in this issue, national income accounts were highly imperfect measures of the size of a given nation’s economy; in order

4 Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the future: modernization theory in Cold War America*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003; Howard Brick, *Transcending capitalism: visions of a new society in modern American thought*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006; Thomas Bender, *Community and social change in America*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978.

5 Nick Cullather, ‘The foreign policy of the calorie’, *American Historical Review*, 112, 2, 2007, pp. 337–64.

6 Matthew Connelly, *Fatal misconception: the struggle to control world population*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, chs. 1–2.

7 For citations, see David C. Engerman, ‘American knowledge and global power’, *Diplomatic History*, 31, 4, 2007, pp. 613–15.

to facilitate comparison, the accounts embedded a long list of judgement calls about handling unpaid labour, about imputing prices for goods transferred outside the market mechanism, and the like.<sup>8</sup> As Speich notes, the American economist Simon Kuznets, rightly credited as the father of national income, recognized these judgments and warned against using such measures to compare very different economies.<sup>9</sup> He also differentiated between measures of national income – his primary concern – and calculations of social welfare, which were not captured by his measures. Or, in the words of Colin Clark, Kuznets' counterpart in Great Britain: national income measures 'only part of economic welfare, which in itself is only part of well-being as a whole'. Clark blamed the discipline of economics, which concerned itself 'only with those things which can be bought and sold for money, [and] remains quite unmoved by the charge that it is neglecting the most important aspects of human life'.<sup>10</sup>

The measurement impulse was not, of course, new to the social sciences; the social science building at the University of Chicago (constructed in 1929), for instance, was emblazoned with Lord Kelvin's dictum, 'when you cannot measure, your knowledge is meagre and unsatisfactory'. But in the 1940s measurement, especially economic measurement, gained further lustre. Knowing national income was the first step towards increasing it. And economic growth would solve not only economic questions but any number of social ills. There was a strong impulse to reformulate all kinds of complex political questions – from Hindu castes in India to food shortages across Asia – into narrow economic questions, suggesting technical economic solutions. These technical discourses had no room to reckon with past histories or with current politics, let alone with notions of justice and injustice. This point was brought home to John Boyd Orr, the crusading Scot who served as the founding director of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). He proposed an elaborate mechanism for essentially taxing the surplus food of rich countries in order to insure that the poorest would not starve; the FAO board, led by the United States and Great Britain, shelved this mission and called for the FAO to gather and disseminate data on the global food balance. Boyd Orr fumed that the hungry of the world wanted food, but all they got from the FAO were statistics.<sup>11</sup>

Economic factors were also prevalent, not surprisingly, at the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development – the World Bank. Yet, as Michele Alacevich points out insightfully in his contribution here, it need not have been so. Alacevich compellingly shows that, in its first decade, the Bank's eleven missions to individual countries revealed a broad conception of problems, many of which did not admit of technical economic solutions. Mission consultants, who were not World Bank full-timers but were nevertheless selected and paid by the Bank, envisioned the problem of poverty in sophisticated ways, and had an especially broad-gauged notion of the tools necessary to combat it. Early

8 See also Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of experts: Egypt, techno-politics, modernity*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, pt. 3.

9 Simon Kuznets, 'National income', in Edwin R. A. Seligman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the social sciences*, New York: Macmillan, 1937, vol. 11, pp. 205–24.

10 Colin Clark, *The conditions of economic progress*, New York: Macmillan, 1940, pp. 1–2.

11 Amy Staples, *The birth of development: how the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization changed the world, 1945–1965*, Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006, p. 79.

Bank missions favoured what economists came to call ‘social overhead capital’ as a top priority, even though they would not have an immediate impact on GNP. Rather than seeking to increase production as measured through national income, the Bank missions’ recommendations emphasized investments in health, education, and nutrition. Yet Alacevich’s extraordinarily valuable effort to recover this broad-minded stream of thought in the World Bank also notes that these missions did not shape Bank policy, which remained focused on what he calls (quoting Charles Maier) the ‘politics of productivity’. One wonders, though, whether Maier and Alacevich might better refer to an ‘anti-politics of productivity’ – the hope that increased production would render irrelevant political disputes over scarce goods. A larger pie, the hope went, meant no more fighting over the size of an individual slice.<sup>12</sup>

This anti-politics of productivity did not only apply to Maier’s focus on industrial production. In their contribution to this special issue, Andrés Rivarola and Örjan Applevist track the careers of the economists Raúl Prebisch and Gunnar Myrdal, showing how their efforts to promote a redistributionist vision of trade concessions, the General System of Preferences, ran aground on the power politics of the United Nations. In another contribution, Ruth Jachertz and Alexander Nützenadel demonstrate effectively how the FAO quickly rejected zero-sum solutions that involved redistribution of ‘First World’ food supplies in favour of plans to increase food production – and decrease food demand growth (through population control) in the ‘Third World’.

The hopes for technical, ostensibly anti-political solutions to the problems of the ‘Third World’ often worked, as in the case of the FAO, in the interests of the ‘First World’. As Speich, as well as Jachertz and Nützenadel, rightly underscore, however, such hopes were found all around the world; they were no direct Western imposition but another aspect of the optimistic zeitgeist of the middle decades of the twentieth century. ‘First World’ diplomats and economists joined ‘Third World’ leaders and planners in focusing on technique as the means of solving the problem of poverty. These techniques were usually oriented towards economic production, but covered everything from agriculture through industry to economic planning. India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the most influential leaders from the newly independent nations, constructed economic planning as something taking place outside the political hurly-burly of competing interests, allowing difficult problems to be solved through the application of apolitical expertise.<sup>13</sup>

India quickly became an important stop on the international tour for experts the world over. Nehru’s interest in apolitical solutions made his India a proving ground for many new techniques or, in Corinna Unger’s apt term in her contribution to this special issue, a labor-

12 The term ‘anti-politics’ comes from James Ferguson, *The anti-politics machine: ‘development’, depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. See also Charles S. Maier, ‘The politics of productivity: foundations of American international economic policy after World War II’, *International Organization*, 77, 3, 1977, pp. 607–33; and idem, ‘The two postwar eras and the conditions for stability in twentieth-century western Europe’, *American Historical Review*, 86, 2, 1981, pp. 327–52.

13 Partha Chatterjee, ‘Development planning and the Indian state’, in Terence J. Byres, ed., *The state, development planning, and liberalisation in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 51–72; Sugata Bose, ‘Instruments and idioms of colonial and national development: India’s historical experience in comparative perspective’, in Cooper and Packard, *International development*, pp. 45–63.

atory. These went from family planning to the high-yielding seeds of the Green Revolution, and were funded primarily by the US-based Rockefeller and Ford foundations.<sup>14</sup> If this was an empire of technique, however, it was one of ‘invitation’ and not just ‘imposition’; leading circles of Indian scholars and policy-makers sought out expertise and cultivated their own transnational networks of knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

Networks spanning ivory towers, halls of power, and panelled boardrooms of American philanthropies sprouted across the ‘Third World’; while each network had its own particularities, many had as key nodes a ‘Third World’ capital (New Delhi, Jakarta, Conakry), Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard’s Development Advisory Service and MIT’s Center for International Studies), Washington, and former colonial metropolises (London or Paris). Scholars and officials met at the various UN commissions and special agencies, whether in New York, Rome, or Geneva; they sent each other statistics and students, held visiting appointments at each others’ institutes, and met regularly with political leaders at home and abroad. The Calcutta-based Indian Statistical Institute, for instance, opened a New Delhi office in 1956 to formalize ties to economic policy that dated back to India’s independence in the sultry summer of 1947. Its director, the inimitable Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, was a flurry of activity around the world: chairing a working group of the UN Statistical Commission in New York; lecturing at American, British, and continental European universities; hosting scholarly visitors at the ISI; and advising the Indian Planning Commission on a regular basis.<sup>16</sup> His work with the UN centred on statistical sampling, an essential technique for measuring the sorts of economic activity captured by national income accounting. Mahalanobis, then, seems a perfect candidate for the sorts of transnational networks of expertise discussed explicitly in the articles by Alacevich, Rivarola and Appleqvist, and Speich, and, implicitly, a part of the articles by Frey, Jachertz and Nützenadel, and Unger.

Yet Mahalanobis’ itinerary and list of visitors suggests a striking omission from these articles: the extent to which the networks crossed the great East–West divide of the Cold War. Mahalanobis, for instance, first met the liberal economist (and future ambassador to India) John Kenneth Galbraith in Geneva, whereupon he arranged for the American to visit his institute. But their next encounter was in Moscow, where Mahalanobis was being fêted as Honorary Foreign Member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Expert economists visiting India included not just liberal Americans (such as Galbraith and MIT’s Max Millikan) and radicals from western Europe (Charles Bettelheim and Joan Robinson), but also economists from Poland, Hungary, and especially the USSR. Indeed, Poland’s Oskar Lange, a key figure in European debates about planning in the interwar years, made multiple trips to Calcutta and New Delhi. As Galbraith put it, the ISI was a place of ‘easy and intense exchange between peoples of the socialist and the nonsocialist worlds and of the rich countries and the poor’.<sup>17</sup> American institutions were undoubtedly the most important nodes and espe-

14 Connelly, *Fatal misconception*, ch. 5; Nick Cullather, *The hungry world: America’s Cold War battle against poverty in Asia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

15 Words from Geir Lundestad, “‘Empire by invitation’? The United States and western Europe, 1945–1952”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 23, 3, 1986, pp. 263–77.

16 Details in Ashok Rudra, *Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis: a biography*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

17 John Kenneth Galbraith, *A life in our times: memoirs*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1981, pp. 323–8, 346–7.

cially underwriters of transnational networks of expertise, and Americans were probably the most populous single nationality within those networks. And yet it was not just Americans and their allies who inhabited the networks. For every visit of Milton Friedman to India, for instance, there came Lange and the Soviet Academician M. Rubinshtein; for every E. Everett Hagen in Jakarta, there were also Soviet and Chinese economists and engineers.<sup>18</sup> Seeking apolitical – anti-political? – expertise, ‘Third World’ scholars and policy-makers roamed widely in the Cold War marketplace of ideas, a place in which American and Soviet variants may have occupied different aisles but were part of the same stock of knowledge.

Matthew Connelly’s *Fatal misconception* suggests that the brutal effectiveness of technical solutions such as population control came from their location in the interstices of conventional forms of power. The forced sterilization programme in 1970s India, mentioned by both Corinna Unger and Marc Frey here, was not simply the exercise of state power; nor was it purely the work of the transnational network of population controllers. The violence of the sterilization campaign resulted from the combination of a transnational network operating beyond the reach of politics, supported by American public and private funds, and the power of the Indian state.<sup>19</sup> It is not a coincidence that both Unger and Frey focus so heavily on India; it was there that the combination of national and transnational power came together so destructively, revealing in stark terms a process taking place around the world.

For all of the power, intellectual and otherwise, present in these transnational networks, the efforts to define technical problems and formulate technical solutions left crucial questions unanswered, and by and large unasked. It was striking to read six very interesting articles on ‘global inequality’ and find so little mention of what inequality was, where it existed, and how it could be overcome. Here our historians are replicating, perhaps inadvertently, their sources. Global inequality was often identified in general terms, but the specifics of what precisely constituted inequality were all too rare: was it more important to study inequality between nations or inequality within a specific nation? What had caused that particular inequality in a given country? To what extent were the causes in the social or cultural sphere versus the economic or even the political sphere? The Indian economist Amartya Sen famously argued that famines were not only about the food supply but also about individuals’ access (entitlement) to food, an approach that suggests the difficulties of claiming that food production on its own will end starvation.<sup>20</sup> Without having explicit theories – or at least historical interpretations – of inequality, efforts to create a more equal world were sure to founder. Was the ultimate goal to reduce inequality or to eradicate it? And if the former, then what constituted an acceptable level of inequality?

It is not a coincidence, I should note, that the word ‘inequality’ was absent from this article until the previous paragraph. The term itself is an elusive one, one whose presence is noted (or assumed) but rarely defined or directly addressed. Would the ‘anti-politics of

18 Ragna Boden, *Die Grenzen der Weltmacht: Sowjetische Indonesienpolitik von Stalin bis Brežnev*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006, ch. 2.5.

19 See also Connelly, *Fatal misconception*, chs. 7–8; Matthew Connelly, ‘Seeing beyond the state: the population control movement and the problem of sovereignty’, *Past & Present*, 193, 2006, pp. 197–233.

20 Amartya Sen, *Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and deprivation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 1; idem, *On economic inequality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

productivity', for instance, reduce inequality? It could certainly reduce poverty, along the lines of the English cliché 'a rising tide floats all boats'. In another sense, however, the focus on productivity not only narrows the problematic to an economic one, but also ducks the question of inequality itself. To switch to another cliché: a large pie divided 80/20 is just as unequal as a small one; inequality is about distribution, not diameter.

The search for silver bullets in the form of technical solutions ignored most of these kinds of questions in favour of exhortations that today seem like sheer hucksterism. That is not to diminish the great minds or good intentions of those proposing such solutions – only to point out how their optimism tended to skirt blithely over the central concerns that they purported to solve. Just as Boyd Orr wondered how to feed people when his FAO was spurring the production of statistics rather than food, we may wonder what the goals of the massive effort for 'Third World' development entailed; how its practitioners balanced short- and long-term aims; and how they expected their silver bullets – whether industrial productivity, food supply, or population – to slay the demons they defined. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, in other words, we may ask how so many intelligent and well-meaning people managed to create such elaborate intellectual edifices, built on such extraordinary simplifications, and why they considered those simplifications sufficient.

To answer these questions, and thus to reach a fuller understanding of the campaigns against global inequality after 1945, scholars need to bring together the topics and approaches evident here. They – we – need to examine the relationship between ideas and institutions, or, in Nütznadel and Speich's terms, discourses and agents. The articles here, as the issue editors acknowledge, generally divide into those studying ideas versus those focused on institutions. In the world of ideas, Speich focuses on GNP, Jachertz and Nütznadel on world food balance, and Frey on global population. Two articles fall more readily into the world of institutions: Alacevich on the World Bank (and particularly its country missions), and Unger on American foundations operating in India. The remaining article, by Rivarola and Appleqvist, traces the ideas of two prominent development economists, as each worked through various national, regional, and global institutions.

Here, historians of inequality and the efforts to combat it need to contemplate the intellectual historians' questions about the meanings of words and the definitions implicit in various descriptions of the problem and prescriptions for how to solve it. Daniel Speich, for instance, carefully outlines the limits of national accounts that founders such as Kuznets and Clark raised; how did these limits shape the direction of statistical information gathered, the means to gather that information, and the policies suggested by efforts to increase national income?

Similarly, historians need to consider the approaches of political scientists interested in the nature of institutions. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore's analyses of UN bureaucracies, for instance, offers many insights into the ways in which bureaucracies both adopt and transform ideas.<sup>21</sup> Michele Alacevich comes closest to combining approaches by

21 Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the world: international organizations and global politics*, Ithaca: NY: Cornell University Press, 2004. Political scientists have been exploring such embedded ideas in collections such as Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993; and Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

showing how different components within the World Bank held conflicting ideas about the problems and especially the solutions. Yet why did the economic focus of the permanent staff ultimately win out over the broader approach of the mission consultants? Did the two sets of ideas (and institutions) change as a result of the conflict? Indeed, did the economists, permanent and otherwise, even recognize the conflict that Alacevich so incisively describes? How were ideas embedded – if that term has not been completely discredited by the information policies of the US Army in Iraq – in various institutions? How did those institutions, and their various operating definitions of inequality, poverty, and welfare, shape their missions?<sup>22</sup> Rivarola and Appleqvist's narrative points to the power of institutions to co-opt and ultimately reject ideas that challenge their *raison d'être*. Both Prebisch and Myrdal became 'defiant bureaucrats' while at UN CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America) and ECE (Economic Commission for Europe). Even as they came to lead those organizations, bureaucracy wins out over defiance, as their heterodox economic ideas garner much attention but little traction in shaping economic policies. Yet the authors are more effective at showing how the UN institutions ultimately cast aside challenging ideas, without fully reckoning with the ways in which the regional agencies related to the New York headquarters. How did the ideas flow through the UN bureaucracy – but also through other organs from the Group of 77 to the General Assembly? What concrete policies came out of Prebisch's and Myrdal's ideas? And how, exactly, did their ideas change in new institutional settings?

Focusing upon the interrelationship of institutions and ideas, furthermore, allows closer attention to the ways in which reigning ideas change over time. Most of the ideas and many of the institutions that defined post-war global civil society had important antecedents in years before the Second World War, as many of the articles note. They found new uses in the 1940s, and continued to evolve through the remainder of the century (and still today). Calculations of national income, for instance, evolved through various technical improvements over the late twentieth century. More important, though, were the new deployments of GNP in a plethora of institutions: UN agencies as well as scholarly institutes and policy organs around the world. Even those so critical of GNP and GDP that they developed competing measures, such as the Human Development Index, played the game on national income's home turf, developing a single index that reduced the complexities of economic production – or even social welfare – to a single data point.

While the emergence of the Human Development Index is itself a fascinating story, what is more typical is the shift in ideas as a result of learning from seeing them play out in practice. As Nick Cullather observed, development work – especially in the 1950s – was less about the application of a theory and more about theorizing about development practices already in existence. Similarly, American theories about Indonesian development changed markedly in response to events on the ground in Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup>

22 He explores some of these issues in Michele Alacevich, *The political economy of the World Bank: the early years*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, ch. 4.

23 Nick Cullather, 'The third race', *Diplomatic History*, 33, 3, 2009, pp. 507–12; Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with guns: authoritarian development and US–Indonesian relations, 1960–1968*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.



Along these lines, discussions of global inequality must account for the relationship of ideas and practices not just within an institution (Alacevich), between institutions (Unger), or between concepts (Speich), but also within the Cold War geopolitical framework. While scholarship on development has helped put the global superpower conflict in appropriate perspective, there are crucial ways in which development was an instrument of Cold War competition and not a separate sphere. The USSR makes occasional appearances in the articles here, but Soviet efforts at economic development are rarely a part of the story. The Soviet Union played a complicated and generally counterproductive role in development efforts at the UN agencies (as Jachertz and Nützenadel note for the FAO). But what about Soviet and Soviet-bloc aid programmes in the ‘Third World’, which included education and training, health, industry, and agriculture? These were announced with great fanfare, even if they ultimately produced rather meagre results.<sup>24</sup> Western, and especially American, programmes to attack global inequality incorporated not just a general anti-left disposition but also explicit battles with the Soviets. Many Americans called this battle ‘competitive coexistence’, but, in typically earthy phrases, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev relied on the analogy of a horse race.<sup>25</sup>

While American–Soviet antagonisms have perhaps loomed too large in past accounts of the ‘Third World’, the fact that such an ideological conflict raged as a postcolonial world order emerged had a crucial impact on the mechanisms and meanings of economic development and political independence. The Cold War conflict impinged upon international agencies as well as on the ideas that animated them. These articles’ helpful explications of ideas and institutions are important building blocks in a broader history of global inequality and the battle against it after 1945. They provide great insight about pre-1945 antecedents, while introducing some of the key categories and locations (geographic and institutional) where global inequality was fought and (more rarely) defined and theorized. If it is hard to muster, in the early twenty-first century, the heady optimism that infused the post-1945 world, it is still possible to conclude that historians are well on the way towards not just documenting but also explaining that optimism.

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24 For citations to scattered scholarship new and old, see David C. Engerman, ‘The second world’s third world’, *Kritika*, 12, 1, 2011, pp. 183–211; and Tobias Rupprecht, ‘Die Sowjetunion und die Welt im Kalten Krieg: neue Forschungsperspektiven auf eine vermeintlich hermetisch abgeschottete Gesellschaft’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 59, 3, 2010, pp. 381–99.

25 Wilfred Malenbaum, *East and west in India’s development*, Washington, DC: National Planning Association, 1959. N. S. Khrushchev, ‘Rech’ na torzhestvennom grazhdanskom prieme v Deli (12-go Fevrial’ia 1960 g.) (Speech at the Grand Civic Reception in Delhi (12 February 1960))’, in N. S. Khrushchev, *O vneshnei politike Sovetskogo Soiuza, 1960 god (On the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, 1960)*, Moscow: Gospolizdat, 1960, p. 88.