The Governance and Politics of Global Social Policy

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This paper does four things. It reviews recent contributions to the literature concerning 'global social policy' – understood here as global social redistribution, *global social* regulation *and global social* rights. *It traces recent developments and initiatives in one of these aspect of global social policy namely mechanisms of global* redistribution. *It discusses developments in the governance of global social policy arguing that this is increasingly the province of global networks, partnerships and tasks forces somewhat removed from public scrutiny. Finally, it reflects upon the need for and prospects of a global social reformist project and the contribution that both research and political alliances might play in this.*

Introduction

This paper firstly reviews recent contributions to the scholarly literature concerning 'global social policy', understood in this context[1] as global social *redistribution*, global social *regulation* and global social *rights*. It then traces recent developments and initiatives in one aspect of global social policy, namely mechanisms of global *redistribution*. It discusses developments in the governance of global social policy, arguing that this is increasingly the province of global networks, partnerships and tasks forces somewhat removed from public scrutiny. Finally, it reflects upon the need for and prospects of a global social reformist project, and the contribution that both research and political alliances might play in this.

The paper reflects some of the findings of the Anglo-Finnish Globalism and Social Policy programme (www.gaspp.org) that I have been involved with for the past few years. Some parts of this paper are based upon other recent or forthcoming products of the programme, including recommendations made to the Finnish Government as to how they and like-minded governments might advance a socially just globalisation (Deacon *et al*., 2003) and a contribution to a recent UNRISD[2] conference assessing the contribution that scholars working in and around the UN system have made to policy making at the global level (Deacon, 2004). This is part of a work in progress (Deacon, forthcoming).

Global social policy

Global social policy – understood here as global redistribution regulation and rights – embraces the emerging mechanisms of *global social transfer* (Funds for AIDS/TB/Malaria, differential drug pricing, the projected Global Social Trust Network), *global social regulation* (The UN global compact, core labour standards, international food quality

regulation) and *global social rights* (the advancement up the UN agenda of social rights and their monitoring and enforcement through soft law).

In 1997 Deacon *et al*. asserted, 'There is now a global social policy, constituted of global redistributive mechanisms, global regulatory mechanism, elements of global provision and empowerment' (p. 213). Given this, we went to on to argue our preference for 'a global social reformist project which would call for more rather than less redistribution of resources between states, for more rather than less global social and labour regulation as a framework for the operation of corporations, for more rather than less authority to be given to supranational bodies to intervene in the affairs of states where those states fail their citizens' (ibid.). The argument continues by insisting on the linkages between the elements. 'There should be no free trade without global social regulation. There should be no global social regulation without global redistribution. To ensure citizens (and not their governments) benefit there should be no global social redistribution without the empowerment of citizens before a global court of social rights. Trade, regulation, redistribution and empowerment go hand in hand.' Since then we have seen the unfolding of the politics of this global project and its stumbling on four counts, all of which suggest the difficulty of developing an effective form of global social governance:

1. the unilateralism of the USA, which has delayed or set back improved UN governance in these field;
2. the social protectionism of the EU, which has lead to a North–South impasse in global policy negotiation (Van Reisen, 1999; Holland, 2002);
3. the opposition of many Southern governments and voices to a Northern-driven agenda, especially when the resources to fund one key element of the matrix – redistribution – is missing (Bello, 2004); and
4. a concern that this global social reformist project, which can be seen as a western modernist project, does not respect immense regional cultural differences (Rieger and Liebried, 2003). Or as Yeates put it, 'It must be acknowledged that historical, cultural, ideological, religious and institutional differences render the pursuit of "universal" public goods, or an agreed global cosmopolitan form of progress particularly difficult' (2001: 169).

None-the-less others continued to develop the idea of a global social policy. Townsend and Gordon acknowledge that 'what remains is perhaps the most difficult: to bring about extensive redistribution of resources between and within countries to eradicate poverty and establish decent human rights' (2002: 421). But they assert that this objective 'is more plausible to world opinion than it was even five years ago'. George and Wilding devote a whole chapter to 'The future of global social policy'. They argue for seven major roles for social policy at a global level and conclude that 'global social policy will be multi dimensional- a mix of regulation, redistribution, provision of services and guaranteeing of basic rights' (2002: 192). They argue that the bringing into being of such a comprehensive global social policy will require 'creative thinking about . . . a radically new approach to global governance' (ibid.: 210). This is something we return to in a later section.

The case for a social democratic approach to the management of globalisation has been made by scholars working in disciplines other than social policy. Political scientists (Patomaki, 1999; Patomaki and Teivainen, 2004; Held, 2004; Lent, 2005) are among such contributors. The political desirability and feasibility of this wider global social democratic

project, given the objections to it that we have noted, will be returned to in the closing section of the paper. The next section of this paper, keeping its focus on global social policy, examines in some detail proposals and ideas arising in one of its three dimensions namely *global redistribution*.

Global social redistribution

In the context of widening global inequity, there is a case for *global redistribution* and for establishing a global levy through international taxation and other means to facilitate such redistribution (Patomaki and Teivainen, 2004; Atkins, 2004). The case for a tax on airline fuel for these purposes is currently being argued for in the context of the July 2005 G8[3] meeting by the French government. How might this new money be spent? How might international social transfers take place? What mechanisms for global resource allocation might be developed? Who would decide and on what criteria would allocations be made? Are there steps being taken upon which this project could be built? Some initial answers to these questions are suggested below. How far these are developed further in practice will obviously be the outcome of a period of international and supranational debate and consensus building.

Among existing mechanisms for international redistribution and the one we shall use here as an example are the ones used by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (www.theglobalfund.org). This fund uses a combination of criteria and mechanisms to allocate its resources where they are needed most in the world. Using the World Banks' categorisation of countries into low and middle income, the fund firstly distinguishes between low-income countries that are fully eligible for monies and lower-middle-income countries that must match international funds with national funds. A few upper-middle-income countries are also eligible in much the same way as lower-middle-income countries, if they have exceptional need based on disease burden indicators.

The procedure used by this fund for allocating funds, within the constraints above, is based on a competition between bids from Country Co-ordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) within each eligible country. CCMs are encouraged to develop partnerships with the private sector, the professions and users groups. Where governments are non-functioning, the applications can be made via non-governmental organisations. A board of internationally appointed technical experts adjudicate between competing applications, using the following list of criteria: epidemiological and socio-economic criteria, political commitment (of recipient governments), complementarity (to national effort), absorptive capacity (of governance mechanisms), soundness of project approach, feasibility, potential for sustainability and evidence of national evaluations and analysis mechanism in place.

Critics (Ollila, 2003) have however pointed to a worrying aspect of the *ad hoc* fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria, as well as of other initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunization (GAVI). The concern is that such funds lack democratic accountability and detract from more systematic processes of global health funding which could be developed under the auspices of the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Ollila, 2003: 53). These criticisms stem from a wider concern that the bringing of corporate interests into partnership with the multilateral system may erode the existing government-based multilateral system, rather than lead to its strengthening and democratisation (Martens, 2003). My point would be that some of the technical allocation mechanisms used by the Fund might usefully be built upon by democratised and strengthened global

social governance. It is to the topic of global (and regional) social governance that we now turn.

Global social governance

What passes for a system of global governance in the social sphere is a complex of overlapping and competing agencies, all seeking to influence policy. At the global level, there are a number of competing and overlapping institutions and groupings of countries, all of which have some stake in shaping global social policy towards global social problems. This struggle for the right to shape policy and for the content of that policy is what passes for an effective system of international social governance (Deacon *et al.*, 2003). The fragmentation and competition may be analysed as being made up of five groupings of contestations. First The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are in competition for influence with the rest of the United Nations (UN) system. The Bank's health, social protection and education policy for countries and for the world is, for example, not the same as that of the WHO, International Labour Organisation (ILO) or United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) respectively. While the world may be said to have one emerging Ministry of Finance (with lots of shortcoming), it has in effect two Ministries of Health, Two Ministries of Social Security and Two Ministries of Education.

Then again the UN social agencies (WHO, ILO) are not always espousing the same policy as the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and furthermore the Secretary General's initiatives such as the Global Compact or the Millennium project may by-pass and sideline the social development policies of the UN's Department of Economic and Social affairs.

Quite apart from conflict between the UN and the Bank and within the UN system, there is also the G8, G20,[4] G77,[5] and other groupings of countries. While the rich G8 continue implicitly to assume the right to make global policy, the newer G20 is struggling to forge a broader global consensus and the G77 remains more a party of opposition to the northern agendas. The emergence of the alliance of the G4 (China, Brazil, India, South Africa) supported by some other low-income countries, African Union and Afro-Carribean countries and Malaysia at the Cancun WTO talks suggests that some of the South may finally be finding a more effective independent voice. Regional groupings of countries also have to be brought into the picture to complete our understanding of the complexity of the situation.

Interaction between all of these actors has led to international social policy making becoming stalemated, with the EU, G77 and USA adopting entrenched positions. Significant global institutional reform seems check mated and major global social policy change is difficult to achieve. This is the case notwithstanding the new proposals on institutions and policies by the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation (ILO, 2004).

Because of this institutional and policy impasse, we may be witnessing a shift in the *locus* and *content* of global policy debate and activity from those more formally located within the official UN policy-making arenas (whether of ECOSOC[6] in New York or in the councils of the ILO and WHO in Geneva) and focussed on UN/Breton Woods institutional reform. Becoming more important are a set of practices and initiatives around Networks, Partnerships and Projects which in some ways bypass these institutions and debates and

present new possibilities for actually making global change in particular social policy arenas.

Ngaire Woods (Woods, 2002) argues:

> The global governance debate is focused heavily on the reform and creation of international institutions … yet global governance is increasingly being undertaken by a variety of networks, coalitions and informal arrangements which lie a little further beyond the public gaze and the direct control of governments. It is these forms of governance that need sustained and focussed attention to bring to light whose interests they further and to whom they are accountable.

Among examples of these networks, partnerships and projects is the UN Secretary General's Millennium Project, involving ten task forces to manage the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. The essence of this emerging networking and partnership form of policy development and practice is the collaboration between stakeholders in the international organisations, the global corporate sector, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO's) and civil society organisations. Such a shift in the locus and substance of global policy making and practice has received support recently from commentators coming from very different intellectual positions. Rischard (2002), The World Bank's Vice President for Europe in *High Noon: Twenty Global Issues and Twenty Years to Solve Them* argues that global multilateral institutions are not able to handle global issues on their own, that treaties and conventions are too slow for burning issues, that intergovernmental conferences do not have adequate follow up mechanisms and that the G8-type groupings are too exclusive. Instead, what is needed are Global Issues Networks (GINs):

- involving governments, civil society, and business,
- facilitated by a lead multilateral organisation,
- that create a rough consensus about the problem to be solved and the task to be achieved,
- that establish norms and practice recommendations,
- that report on failing governments and
- that encourage good practice through knowledge exchange and a global observatory which feeds a name and shame approach.

There is clearly something in these accounts of the way policy making has become projectised and task centred. Indeed this trend has led to some sustained criticism that these initiatives are undermining the more formal multilateral system (Martens, 2003). My own view is that we have to work with such initiatives, while at the same time continuing to put the case for a more effective system of global social governance (Deacon *et al.*, 2003; Deacon, forthcoming) A key question becomes how might some social policy principles of justice and equity guide these tasks and projects. We are back to global social policy, but not a policy to be debated and won in the chambers of the UN or won in intellectual dialogue with Bank experts (though these activities need to continue), but a policy made up on the spot and implemented in practice by those who find themselves on such projects. A global reformist political alliance would then act as a reference point for actors in practice.

There is an important caveat or corrective to enter at this point, which unfortunately this paper does not have space to develop in any depth. It is conceivable that, because of

the continued opposition by the world superpower to any kind of strengthening of the UN system and any talk of global taxation and redistribution, an alternative route to a more systematic global governance might need to be looked for. The concept of a strengthened Regionalism with a Social Dimension (Deacon, 2001; Yeates, 2005; Room, 2004) might be such an alternative. It this scenario of regional groupings of countries, each developing not only their own trading arrangements but also their own cross-border policies of cooperation in social and environmental fields, that could constitute the building blocks of a 'federated' world of regions. Thus the EU, that anyway 'offers novel ways of thinking about governance beyond the state' (Held and McGrew, 2002), would be joined by other regional groupings of countries such as ASEAN[7] and SADC[8] in a global federation of regions. Such regional groupings might be incorporated as members into, say, the G20 international governance mechanism. This would make the G20 not just representative of particularly large countries in each region, but representative of all the countries in the region. If such a federation of regions were to be developed, international redistribution from richer to poorer countries could be handled on an interregional basis. Global funds allocated on socio-economic criteria of need to some regions would then be allocated by that region to activities and projects within the region, using mechanisms such as those already established by the EU, or else by new mechanisms such as those being experimented with by the Global fund for AIDS/TB/Malaria discussed above. Such a regional approach to a global social policy might also chime with the sentiments of many southern voices who react against a northern-driven global social democracy as strongly as they react against a northern-driven global neo-liberalism (Bello, 2004). It might also embody at a global level the post hegemonic, relativist and multi-cultural global order that might be more acceptable to those who see the global social reformist project as western modernisation. It is to these global political issues and the place of global social policy research in it that we now turn.

Global social reformism: research and politics

How then do intellectuals act in some kind of alliance with global social movements from below in relation to the existing global governance institutions to make progress in the fashioning of a socially just globalisation? What scope for influence might these intellectuals have? The problems of trying to fashion a common interest out of the myriad inter-group conflicts thrown up by globalisation has been usefully rehearsed by Cox (1999) and Gill (2003).

Within this broader context, I argued at an UNRISD conference, convened in April 2004, to reflect upon the impact of research on international policy that the moment is ripe to work towards the establishment of a Global Social Policy Research Centre serving a Global Social Policy Observatory and acting as a Global Social Policy Think Tank. Its purpose would be to track, monitor and analyse for effectiveness all the elements of the emerging global policies of social redistribution, regulation and rights.

However, as we noted earlier, the argument for attempts to create a socially just 'capitalist' globalisation need to be defended against those who might object to a northern-driven agenda of global social redistribution, regulation and rights. Indeed the comments of the discussant (Hopenhayn, 2004) on this proposal encapsulated some of these possible southern criticisms. While welcoming the call for such research and sharing the same political project of a socially just globalisation, coming from a Latin American context he

was exercised by the claims of what he saw as 'this meta narrative' and 'all encompassing agenda' to be set and monitored at a global level. He argued that this left no space for the disparate movements and diverse critiques of globalisation emerging in localities.

> The basic premise is that we are at a turning point, where the neo-liberal hegemonic model must be countered with a counter-hegemonic project, rooted in the emerging global civil society. Counter-hegemony, however, is not a univocal concept. On the one hand, it may be understood as global thinking that encompasses the United Nations system, a profuse range of non-governmental organisations and academics around the world, connected through cross-border networks and in which the production of knowledge advocates the three 'musts' that Deacon has advocated: greater social justice, greater regulation and a global order based on rights. In addition, counter-hegemony is rooted in a set of local actors who may or may not be part of trans-national networks and who construct practices and discourses from the margins and interstices of economics, politics and global culture. These actors undertake actions and send out messages that imply solidaristic and horizontal forms of sociability; denounce the violation of civil, social and cultural rights in different places and nations of the globe; champion the cause of cultural minorities and vulnerable and ethnic groups who are discriminated against; advocate environment preservation; and struggle for fair and egalitarian treatment in terms of gender, community management, local democracy and others. (Hopenhayn, 2004)

The task for UN research, policy analysis and policy dialogue, Hopenhayn argued, must 'adapt to this emerging idea of bottom–up globalisation where all voices can be heard'.

The same kind of criticism of a 'top–down' conceptualisation of a global social policy to create a more just globalisation has been articulated recently by Ronaldo Munck:

> One could argue that this approach reflects the institutional bias of academic social policy that not only privileges state institutions but also as Nicola Yeates notes, it brings into the equation only 'the more institutionalised sectors of opposition movements' (Yeates, 2001: 130). There is however a much wider and 'wilder' process of contestation going on across the globe in relation to the social impact of globalisation. It is these globalisation from below initiatives that are shaping global social policy every bit as much as the policies of enlightened reformers in the international forums. (2005: 79)

Progress towards the end of fashioning a global regulatory authority and a global process of ironing out social injustice needs therefore not only to be articulated at a global level, but also to engage with and to reflect on the disparate voices of opposition in localities. The suggestion in this paper of a decentred globalisation, involving strong regions, each with their own social dimension, is one possible response to this engagement.

The political task that faces us (within which the global and regional social policy research agenda will play one part) is indeed quoting Cox: 'to bridge the differences among the variety of groups disadvantaged by globalisation so as to bring about a *common* understanding of the nature and consequences of globalisation, and to devise a *common* strategy towards subordinating the world economy to a regime of social equity' (1999: 26). This would seem to require dialogue based on humility and mutual respect between progressive social policy and social development intellectuals North and South (in the context of listening to social movement voices) in order that diversity in culture and experience can be married with a common set of values concerning social justice and rights and converted into a *shared international political project to secure a socially just world through some combination of restored and equitable national social*

policies, strengthened and effective regional social policies and a measure of global social redistribution, regulation and rights articulation and realisation.

Notes

1 'Global social policy' can be conceptualised in a number of ways reflecting the diverse ways in which the term 'social policy' itself has been used. In Deacon (forthcoming) global social policy as redistribution, regulation and rights is but one of several conceptualisations of the term.

2 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

3 The G7 (or G8 including Russia) is a self-appointed group of developed countries including USA, Canada, UK, France, Italy, Germany, and Japan.

4 The G20 is a wider group of developed and some middle-income countries established in 1999 by the G7. It is a meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi-Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, UK, USA and the EU. Its membership covers 90% of World GDP, 80% of World Trade and 66% of World Population.

5 The G77 was established in June 1964 to represent the interests of developing nations within the UN system. It now has a membership of 132 countries.

6 Economic and Social Council of the UN. It is a large body that was intended to enable the UN to act as overseer of global economic and social policy. Unlike the smaller UN Security Council, it never achieved effectiveness or legitimacy being marginalised by the World Bank and IMF.

7 Association of South East Asian Nations.

8 South African Development Co-operation.

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