

IPPR, 17th January 2002

**Best of Enemies: have globalisation and September 11th
permanently split the left?**

Peter Hain, Minister for Europe

Globalisation is a force that doesn't allow the luxury of saying 'stop, I want to get off'. It is impossible to stop the internet, satellite TV and telecommunications. Impossible to ban air travel or pop culture. Impossible to ban the global mobility of capital and currency flows.

The question, therefore, is not whether it can be stopped or abolished. Globalisation is a fact of life and the real question is altogether different: 'what sort of globalisation do we want and how can we get it?'

A look the left's reaction to industrialisation in the early nineteenth century is instructive. Like globalisation today, industrialisation then was also a fact of life. Today's rock throwing militants who trash

McDonalds are the modern equivalents of the Luddites who trashed factory machines.

But both are and were minorities. The majority in the early nineteenth century formed friendly societies and trade unions – the origins of the modern left and socialist movement.

There is the same split in the anti-globalisation movement today. Between the balaclava rock throwers with their nihilist ideology on the one hand. And Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Drop the Debt on the other. Two centuries ago, the former would have been Luddites, the latter the embryonic labour movement. A comparison also between failure and success: like the Luddites, the balaclava boys are totally ineffectual and in the long term irrelevant.

So when we are asked: 'is the left split'?, the answer is: 'it always has been!' Between revolutionaries and reformists. Between Marxists and democratic socialists. Between practical solution builders and purist posers.

Whilst the Genoa G8 summit last July was being besieged by violent elements from Europe's middle class on the outside, the voice of Africa's poor was being heard for the first time inside. At the insistence of Britain's Labour Prime Minister, leaders from South Africa and Nigeria were invited to put their case for debt relief, fair trade and investment. A case first heard loudly and clearly by purposeful campaigners at the Birmingham G8 Summit in 1998 – proof that the left can succeed through protest which is targeted and effective, not narcissistic.

Our task is to master globalisation in the interests of the poor and not just the rich; in the interests of the environment and not just the multi-nationals; in the interests of the many and not just the few.

And by deploying the European Union's huge resources, together with its potential as a catalyst for progressive change, we can push for an international agenda of which the left should be proud. An empowering agenda for fighting poverty, re-distributing wealth and eliminating weapons of mass destruction. An agenda that recognises there is no security at home without freedom and good

governance abroad, and that human needs can no longer be met by treating the environment as a free resource to plunder at will.

This agenda needs to be promoted beyond Europe through the United Nations, the G8, the OECD, the Commonwealth – and, yes, through NATO, too. August's Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development is crucial. Such international diplomacy is difficult and often frustrating. It also needs prodding and pushing by protest. But ultimately it is the only mechanism for action.

I sometimes feel that too many on the left are trapped in a time warp, comfortable with Cold War shibboleths. Of course we were right during that period to protest as the USA, purporting to act in the name of 'freedom', trampled destructively over Vietnam, or propped up brutal dictatorships in Latin America. Franklin Roosevelt justified one such dictator: 'He may be a son of a bitch, but he is *our* son of a bitch.'

We were right also to attack the Soviet suppression of democratic uprisings in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The Cold War also saw proxy wars fought throughout the developing world, Angola a classic example, torn apart and virtually destroyed by UNITA - a CIA and South African backed force of murder and terror – just because the Government called itself ‘Marxist’.

Such ‘intervention’ was obnoxious and many on the left opposed it. But we are now in a new era. We can no longer look at the developing world through an East/West prism, because new geopolitical changes are afoot.

Russia, together with China, has backed the US-led international action in Afghanistan. Russia is also now seeking a partnership with NATO and the European Union. China has recently requested courses in Britain for thousands of its public officials to be trained in modern administration.

These are extraordinary changes, and if the left is about anything surely it is about recognising change and pressing for more of it, rather than being trapped in the past?

After Britain and our allies intervened to save the people of Kosovo from ethnic cleansing and genocide in 1999, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called for a progressive new doctrine of 'humanitarian intervention'. It should get our full support.

Take Sierra Leone. Who really objected to British troops intervening in 2000 in support of UN peacekeepers to prevent a legitimate Government being destroyed by rebels whose speciality was chopping off the limbs of babies in their way? Why, John Pilger of course. He wrote that this was a classic imperialist mission to grab the country's diamonds - left wing paranoia of the first order, since the diamond fields were controlled by the rebels and are now gradually being returned to the Government - another intervention success story some on the left prefer not to acknowledge.

The truth is the people of Sierra Leone were desperate for us to go in and save them from a bunch of vicious terrorists. And the truth is that our intervention there – as in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Macedonia and – yes – Afghanistan, was necessary. And successful within what was practically deliverable in dangerous and difficult conditions.

Rather than classic wars between states, or even progressive revolutions against corrupt old orders, we have new phenomena. States that have failed, like Afghanistan, dominated by a terrorist clique. Or neighbouring peoples brutalised by tyrants like Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic. Or wars like in Angola, the Congo or Sierra Leone, with rebels fighting, not for noble causes, but for money and minerals to buy arms and grab personal power.

On Afghanistan, I still see banners saying ‘Stop the War’. I have seen no apologies from critics who relentlessly predicted reckless US escapades, failure and mayhem – no suggestion that it might, after all, and despite all the problems, have been the correct course. Such critics have turned a conveniently blind eye to the liberation of

millions of Afghans from the Al-Qaeda backed Taliban, probably the most odious regime in the world.

I would like to see the left abandoning its knee-jerk reaction of condemning, on principle and in advance, any action by the USA because it is by the USA. Instead a reasoned judgement is needed: whether, on balance, the proposed action is the best thing to do. Or maybe even the least worst thing to do.

And I would also like to see the left recognising the pivotal role Britain, under this Labour Government, now plays. Being a steadfast ally of the USA doesn't mean being a patsy. Otherwise, how would we have been able to develop good relations with Iran, Syria, Cuba, and Libya? Or stand up for the Kyoto Treaty on climate change? On the contrary, being an ally gives us real influence which is no less effective because it rarely appears in headlines.

The fall of the Berlin Wall triggered a huge shake of the international kaleidoscope. Subsequent events have continued to shake it. As the

pieces now begin to fall down into new configurations, we are at a defining moment.

Can we build on the international unity following September 11th to create a new world order shaped by the left's values – of democracy, human rights, environmental protection, equality and justice – or will it be shaped by a quite different agenda driven by hawks on Capitol Hill?

Ours should be a project for the *globalisation of responsibility* around which everyone on the left could unite, from Greenpeace militants to Labour Ministers – even if we respect the different roles each quite properly plays. We must try to unite on such a new agenda, because it is the biggest challenge of our times.

Ends

Peter Hain is Minister for Europe and the author of *The End of Foreign Policy?* (Fabian Society)