

Should Globalisation be Resisted? If so, how. If not, why not?

This writing will argue that Globalisation could become an overall positive movement for society. The full potential of this movement, if developed successfully, will be reaped in future rewards which will be greater than the unbalanced benefits of globalisation of present (which is in the relatively early stages). Resistance should be in the form of counterbalancing globalisation-from-below and resistance against globalisation-from-above as well as consumer tactics. The best tactic depends upon the specific cause of resistance and span of organisation against it and could take the form of social action, political lobbying or consumer tactics.

Globalisation should be resisted because we claim to live in a democratic society and to have individual liberties. The decision therefore lies with the independent responsibility of each individual. (Often those same individuals who have exercised their right to vote and voted for capitalism and individual responsibility.) It is the duty of citizens to organise and engage in collective action intended to alleviate those who suffer under the uncontrollable process of globalisation by taking action from this day onwards rather than engaging in endless discussion of political propaganda praising far reaching future ideals and merely highlighting the failures of present. The fact that globalisation is uncontrollable does not mean that resistance is futile.

Policy makers do not have perfect information. Resistance improves the knowledge of policy makers by showing them who is affected and how. Policy makers are therefore more careful and make decisions in the context of the reactions they may invoke from a wide plurality of world citizens as opposed to rushed, exploitative decisions that intentionally or ignorantly benefit one group at the expense of another. For example, startlingly transparent protectionist trade policies carried out by countries signed up to GATT and WTO terms. In essence from a realist point of view, resistance co-exists with globalisation as politics co-exist with globalisation as exclusion co-exists with politics. Even James Wolfensohn, head of the World Bank now concedes that 'globalisation is not working at the level of the people²', and it is clear that wealth is not trickling down as predicted. Resistance is essential in reducing exclusion from the movement that needs continuous improvement in order to move into a fully global society not just for an increasingly elite, global bourgeoisie.

If we consider (1) that globalisation is an unstoppable force in the foreseeable future with (2) the diminished powers of the state on an international level and (3) the fact that citizens are at

liberty to resist and do resist, the question of whether globalisation should be resisted is inevitably yes. In the Marxist sense (but not strictly), resistance at it's most effective should restore the priority of labour over capital but at the same time as allowing for a capitalist system by improving and protecting workers rights internationally so that we all start on a level playing field so that it is not possible for any workers to be exploited in terms of wages and conditions. If this is achieved, the claim below will no longer hold true:

In reality, globalisation is to the world economy what monetarism is to the domestic economy. It represents the final triumph of capital over labour³

Broadly speaking, resistance can be either organised or independently carried out by individuals. Organised resistance is generally the most effective as we are talking in terms of affecting international arrangements that have the potential to apply to all of the 400million world residents. However, the importance of individual actions should not be overlooked as they have great potential considering that the economy reacts to the aggregate actions of consumers in terms of what we buy, and how much we buy and save.

Resistance can be exerted in two general ways:

The first is resistance against globalisation-from-above. This would involve trying to limit or fully remove the powers of international organisations linked with globalisation, with the most powerful being the world trade organisation, World Bank and international monetary fund. Regional level organisations such as the EU and APEC also come under this category. Resistance against globalisation-from-above could also attack more specifically interested groups for example pro-abortionists resisting against international pro-life organisations trying to impose their views globally. However, organisations like this are likely to insight little resistance at present due to their limited impact in international and regional agendas although they may more contestable in future for example the kinds of pressure groups refered to below:

They feel no need to concern themselves with the concerns of others, as would occur in a genuine democracy. Sometimes the coalitions of interests are global in their concern, but often they have highly nationalistic undertones, and sometimes the wishes of the demonstrators can be downright nasty¹

Resistance would be through political lobbying in the way of involving oneself in negotiations and pressurising for certain international decisions and social actions such as marching, protesting etc. The latter of which have up until now only had an indirect impact however they are important especially for attracting media attention which should be professionally employed as best possible. Extreme rioting tends to misrepresent many peoples interests although many would argue and publicity is good publicity.

The organisation of resistance against globalisation-from-above could be in the form of an international (or even national) organisation (see later writing) for example the Combined Pensioners Association. International, centrally operated organisations may be as effective as an organisation of organisations however, they may misrepresent the interests of their members. Within these organisations, members usually only play a small part by paying membership fees and have no participation in decision making within the bureaucracy⁴. Disabled people's history of misrepresentation in national and international organisations for the disabled provides an example of this problem. At the world congress of rehabilitation international in 1990, a motion calling for 50% representation by disabled people was refused resulting in a backlash and the formation of the Disabled People's International (DPI) as an alternative⁵.

Alternatively, resistance could be organised through an 'organisation of organisations.' This is a collaboration of smaller organisations (which still exist in their own entity) uniting against a common cause under one new umbrella organisation. An example of this type of organisation is the Transnational Information Exchange (TIE)⁶ which since the early 90s has brought together labour activists in local and national movements from Brazil to Russia amongst many other countries. Each of the regional areas has operational autonomy, while reviewing and evaluating each other. An organisation of organisations reduces the degree of bureaucracy that can exist in a centrally planned organisation as an organisation of organisations brings together associations who have already developed a smaller, therefore probably less hierarchal, structure. The umbrella organisation needs to be democratic to ensure each subsidiary organisation is represented thus gaining from the benefits of plurality. This type of organisation benefits from a plurality of knowledge and resources as well as being easy to initiate. It does not break down actions at a local level as each smaller organisation continues as an independent player as well as a single player in the international realm.

Finally local groups with international links who share practices and knowledge but with no central umbrella could attempt resistance against globalisation-from-above, however, they are unlikely to have as much impact as the two other forms of organisation discussed above. This is because they are unlikely to have access to sufficient resources, expertise and experience to

engage in the effective political lobbying and social action that is needed against the international and highly resourceful superpowers. However, the impact of numbers on actions such as marches, protests and consumer tactics cannot be underestimated.

Instead of working directly against globalisation movements, the advantages that the process brings to organisation and in knowledge can be used to create a better system that remains within the global framework. This is where we raise the alternative approach to resisting the general direction and trends in globalisation - to globalise-from-below (organisation in residence). Globalisation-from-below would be small scale, 'grass-roots' projects designed at inducing people to take a political stand or initiate economic activity themselves. Emphasis is on participation and equity believed to be more appropriate and less exploitative than the present situation. For example, local self-help schemes that aim to mobilise people into taking advantage of local-scale economic opportunities within the market system. A real life example would be The Older Women's Network (OWN) - a community based network directed by the members themselves where there is a system of 'active participation in events and decision-making'⁷. A disadvantage of small-scale initiatives run by the government designed to inform and mobilize is that if these initiatives become too threatening to the state control at any level, the initiative is withdrawn or funding reduced.

The underlying agenda of conservative governments is about increasing control. Once community development initiatives become visibly successful, all sorts of blocks, subversion tactics or co-options are set up. This leads to a discourse of despair. Community development always seems to fail at the point of its greatest success.⁸

Much of the success of globalisation-from-below will depend on how well educated people are in political terms. This will also apply to globalisation-from-above. Education is also a way to mobilize people for political activism. For example the Magee Unit set up in Ireland⁹ - a local, non-governmental organisation providing education to adults designed to prepare them for work but also to empower them with knowledge and guidance in terms of political action. 50% of the assessment is a practical project on participatory action research. This unit has linked up in a network of 21 other EU universities and some universities in developing countries to

develop a common curriculum. The unit has been considered a specialist in adult education for community development.

The practical project (50%) by the participant is a basic exercise in participatory action research: that is, an effort by the disadvantaged group, through the participating person to investigate reality in order to change it; an effort by unwaged persons, and the community group to which they may be attached to gain control over their own lives, drawing on models of intervention offered elsewhere.¹⁰

However what reiterates the preliminary quote is that the unit has recently faced funding problems and had to shift from guidance towards radical action to voluntarism for the state.

There are various methods of resistance that can be undertaken by consumers (all come into this category). Boycotting is probably the most notable of these. Each company and the economy as a whole are demand driven; they depend on purchasing for their profits. The consumer is at liberty to purchase and can exercise their right not to buy by boycotting certain product or minimising purchases. This can have a large impact especially in reversing a firm's decision that has been controversial to many consumers for whatever reason. For example when Greenpeace in the name of environmental protection initiated the boycotting of shell products and service stations in resistance against their intentions to sink a large oil rig (Brent Spar) in the North Sea.

The impact of this movement was so great that both the *wall street journal* and *financial times* editorialised against greenpeace, complaining that it had become an environmental superpower.¹¹

In summarizing this argument, we conclude that Globalisation can be made into a positive movement for civil society. A positive movement conditional on effective human organisation and action, which only if done correctly, can collectively guide globalisation along a progressive path. Resistance is therefore necessary within the globalisation movement. Rather than being aimed at stopping the movement altogether (which would be futile, at least in the visible future) resistance should be used as a tool for continuous improvement of the process. Firstly, in alleviating the current negative impacts within our global society caused by globalisation.

Secondly, in tackling new, arising problems at their root and preventing them from evolving and becoming so discretely entangled within the network of globalisation script that they become irreversible. Resistance can be in the form of new ideas (globalisation-from-below). All forms of resistance and organisation of resistance can be used to create impact although globalisation-from-below may, in the current situation, be more effective than resistance against globalisation-from-above although the first is often bound by the latter. Consumers also have potential to play their part through careful purchasing and boycotting. Boycotting has not yet exercised at extremes maybe due to lack of confidence of poor campaigning. To maximise its effectiveness all resistance should be carefully organised, informed and professional. Education is also important as ignorance can lead to inaction or poor action. Perhaps re-introducing politics as a national curriculum subject in years 7,8 and 9 would make societies more politically aware and wise in their decisions. As a final note the effective use of communicative technologies offers increased opportunity for organisation.

As globalisation is a relatively new process in relation to powerful international bodies, resistance needs a fair few years yet to reach a quality great enough to noticeably rival the negative forces within globalisation.

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