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DEGLOBALIZATION Fast Backward to the Future

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Globalization

HERE, THOUGH DEFINED SIMPLY AS A WORLDWIDE spread of ideas, goods, services, and people, globalization means different things to different people. Good, bad, or a mix of both. To some, it's manna from heaven, to others, an apocalypse in the making.

Or, it may just be a reality we're caught in and have to live with. Human Development Report 1999 described globalization as shrinking space, shrinking time, and disappearing borders.

It's new but not quite new. You might want to trace it back to when earliest humans roamed the world as nomads, when land bridges still linked continents. Or from the beginning of capitalism, like how Marx and Engels tracked it in their 1848 Communist Manifesto.

"Modern industry has established the world market. All old-established national industries have been destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that work up raw material drawn from the remotest zones, industries whose products are consumed, not only at home but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the product of distant lands and climes. All fixed, fast-frozen relations are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind."

Forget for a moment that these words were penned by communists. But take note that the words of these authors were taken as call to arms by more than half of humanity, and so seriously as to cause historic disintegration and reorganization of societies around communist ideals. Forget about who actually said those words, you might think you heard World Bank president Wolfensohn or some bankers and economists at the last Davos World Economic Forum hinting at something quite kindred.

What's really new about today's globalization, according to HDR 1999, is new markets, new actors, new rules and norms, new (faster and cheaper) tools of communication. We may want to reduce all these to two symbols—finance capital and the Internet—which seem to drive all the so-called linking and shrinking, and the exponential growth of the global economy, among other things.

But shrinking time, shrinking space, disappearing borders *for what* and *for whom*?

Globalization cuts in many ways. Neither its good side or bad side is clear-cut and can pass judgment without contest. Here we chose to lean more on the negatives for an obvious reason—activists and reformers like us need to focus more on deficits without losing sight of the good things we already have and only need to sustain.

Positive globalization can be about coming together. A sharing of humanity's best across cultural divides. And negative globalization, just the opposite—a boundless spread of man's worst, threatening global solidarity to come apart. The first seems so scarce, the second we find so abundant in today's world.



Negative globalization is on the roll. It speaks of negative outcomes of globalized systems of production, trade, investment, finance, debt and ODA. And among these are growing world poverty, widening rich-poor divide, intensifying wars and conflicts, international crimes, globalwarming, loss of biodiversity, and so on.

In other words, negative globalization is largely about a high-speed shrinking of space and time that benefits a few and drags us all down into a rat-race towards a very uncertain future. To borrow George Soros' metaphor, it's like a wrecking ball creating havoc and bringing disaster after disaster everywhere.

Worldwide poverty has reached a magnitude never before seen in human history. Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion—almost half—live on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion—a fifth—live on less than \$1 a day. The magnitude exceeds the total world population at the beginning of industrial revolution.

Poverty runs deep amid plenty. There's more than enough created wealth, if wealth is all that's needed to resolve poverty and all the miseries poverty breeds. The world economy's output in 2000 was \$42 trillion, up from \$31 trillion in 1990 and \$6.3 trillion in 1950.

It's also a world of high inequality.

A few billionaires simply have much too much while billions got barely enough to survive the next day. In 2000, the richest 1% of the world's people received as much income as the poorest 57%. The assets of the 3 richest people are more than the combined GNP of all LDCs; the assets of the 200 richest more than the combined income of 41% of the world's people. A yearly contribution of 1% of the wealth of the 200 richest (about \$7-8 billion) could provide universal access to primary education for all.

And inequalities are widening.

Between countries: The distance between the richest and poorest country has been increasing over time: 3 to 1 in 1820; 11 to 1 in 1913; 35 to 1 in 1950; 44 to 1 in 1973; and 72 to 1 in 1992. The British in 1820 had an income about 6 times that of the Ethiopians in 1992. In 1960, the richest 20% living in the world's richest countries had 30 times more income than the poorest 20%, by 1995 the gap grew to 82 times. The global online community is growing exponentially—reaching 26% of all people in the US but fewer than 1% in all developing regions.



In 1998, US GNP was \$7,903 billion; GNP/person-\$29,240; PP/person-\$29,240; and, 25.5% of world carbon emissions in 1999; while India's GNP-\$427 billion; GNP/person-\$440; PP/person-\$2,060; 4.5% share of world carbon emissions in 1999.

Poor countries continue to suffer deteriorating terms-of-trade, mounting debt burden, and declining ODA flows.

Within countries: In the US, the top 10% of the population has 6 times the income of the lowest 20%; in Brazil the ratio is 19 to 1. More than 10 % of the people living in "rich" countries are still below the poverty line, and in many, inequality has grown over the last two decades. India talks of a grains stockpile of 50 million tons while suicide among its poor farmers is becoming an everyday scare.

Between men and women: Even in high-performing countries like South Korea, women rate lower than men in all human development indices. Imagine how it's like in many other countries not doing as well.

Between generations. Our world of poverty amid plenty rests on an ecological foundation threatening to collapse. We may not have any secure legacy to leave behind for the coming inhabitants of this planet. And that, despite a mounting pile of some 200+ multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) intended to moderate plundering human activity.

Ten years had gone by since the Rio Earth Summit. And yet little progress has been made to reverse the process of environmental deterioration. Back then, moderation would counsel that in order to stabilize our climate system each of the 5 billion or so inhabitants of this planet at that point could still be tolerated to enjoy his/her 'right' to shit (to throw away to) our environment a yearly equivalent of only 1,500 kilograms. And this threshold assumed zero deforestation and zero growth in population. We're past 6 billion now, and throwing away far beyond the limit. The scientists could be wrong or planet earth is simply that resilient.

A recurrent question: Too many people? Who knows how many is too many? Or is it because a few are taking, wasting, and throwing away too much while so many got barely enough to survive? But we already knew long ago that even in shit the poor would not be equal to the rich and did not do enough to level the field. Or is it both inequality and carrying capacity? Are choices still unclear?



If we look back to the first settled societies or the more recent enlightened feudal societies in the middle ages when there was less created wealth but more caring, our modern society is way, way beyond recognition. The process of creating a one-world, particularly during the last decade, seems to be leading nowhere near that goal. Rather, globalization is leading us to where no sane person wants to be—to the brink of global systems collapse.

The process of globalization has brought us within touching or wrecking distance of each other, literally and figuratively. We now have before us a modern world that has more than enough accumulated wealth to sustain us even if we work less hours and spend longer time for leisure and making love. We have more than enough to feed, to clothe, to house, to educate, lengthen the life, expand the freedom of movement and choices of every man, woman and child now living and yet to be born. We can use this accumulated wealth to pay back social dues and start off the greatest ever social leveling process. And probably there will be more left to clean up the mess we have caused our environment.

But we seem to be just going through the motion and living our lives as usual. Many just watch things take their course and leave the wrecking ball be. If nothing else, the current human crisis should be a wake-up call. It should make us realize how so tightly connected we are, how a minor glitz in one part could trigger a breakdown in the whole system. Like it or not, and for good or ill, the world we live in has become so small that we can hardly avoid each other. We live in this closely interconnected world where we have just seen how a country like Russia that does not trade with Latin America and is located on the other side of the globe could crash and bring down Latin America, if not the entire world economy.

The civilized world has come this far, and still remains divided. The civic and friendly world we all desire is yet to be. We may not have enough time to build it. The writing on the wall is so clear and compelling. We can hang on to each other like brother to brother, like sister to sister or we will all go down together. There is no individual way out of our present mess. We can and must come together or be torn apart and perish together.

De-globalization

Thank goodness, the world economy is rolling into recession!

Already, worldwide, alternative voices and movements among ordinary citizens are forcefully demanding some respite from the whirlwind pace



of globalization. We hear the words of Donella Meadows (Club of Rome) resonated in various forums worldwide. And these tell us that what we need is to **slow down**, yes to slow down the pace of everything in order to buy time to rethink and reflect, at the very least. This includes reflecting on the violence we do to ourselves as a bunch of activists-reformers-do-gooders in such a great hurry.

The clock must be turned backward—fast backward—to a more secure common future.

D*eglobalize* seems to be the keyword of the moment. Like globalization, *deglobalization* suggests both positive and negative meanings, such as sharing ideas and resources freely across national borders or a return to protection regimes of old, if not outright autarky.

For what many of us wish to see happening, *deglobalization* here is taken to mean promoting positive globalization—the global sharing of ideas, knowhow, resources, goodwill and hospitality, the free movement of people and mutual learning among different cultures. Sounds cloud nine, but so let it be. This probably is what we should be shooting for and spending our intellectual energies on if we were to build more inclusive, sustainable societies in a highly unequal and environmentally-damaged world.

Down to earth, *deglobalization* means strengthening the local economies, making the positive sides of globalization serve the needs and aspirations of people in their communities and living environments.

In Asia, for example, given the five-year experience with WTO, and considering the lessons of the 1997 Asian crisis, it could mean setting up region-specific systems around trade, investment, debt, ODA, and financing, building on or even diverging from existing arrangements. As well, this might imply getting WTO out of agriculture and preventing this multilateral body from deciding the fate of small farmers and hungry millions, from determining whether and how we all could be secure in food.

Closing the equality gaps within our societies is a prior basic concern for deglobalization to really happen. This is a matter of urgent concern that cannot be postponed any longer. All policies and programs must be able to accelerate the social leveling process. This goes beyond the rhetoric of making poverty the all-encompassing theme and goal of national plans, programs, and resource allocations. It means much more than land and asset reforms and taxing the rich. Or asking the



poor what they want and how they want to be helped deal with their situation or allowing them all the space and chances they need to be able to participate in every decision that affects their lives.

All this, and more. All told, it means concentrating our energies, our thoughts, our passion and action on the main intellectual challenge of our time—the eradication of poverty and inequality wherever we find them, anywhere in this world.

In building a deglobalized one-world the first tall order is a fundamental change in our thinking and value system. Some would say that the root of everything that's going wrong today comes down to mindset and values. And they may be right. But what sort of thinking and values must change? We are talking here of modern society or societies of 6 billion people believing, thinking, valuing, doing different things. True, but some ideas and judgments came out much stronger than most others and they happened to be the most crucial and hegemonic in guiding and shaping human actions. The dominant institutions that we see today have been built around them. Until they are questioned and changed it will be development-as-usual in the third millennium.

We need a philosophy and science of fusion, as it were, to survive and create a one-world without exclusion. We need a worldview and method that will enable us to bring more solidarity in our divided world, more sharing and caring instead of cold-blooded scientism and destructive competition. We need a philosophy of life that will make us more sensitive and caring for the things around us, for things that sustain life across generations.

The new world we are trying to build needs a fundamentally different consciousness, though its features are still being debated and its shape still evolving. However it is fashioned, this new consciousness should enable us to learn to live together despite our extreme diversity, it should be able to help us build a globalized society where everyone has a dignified place on the table. This new consciousness should be able to steer us into actions that help to restore our depleted and polluted environs.

The world badly needs people of high civic consciousness and initiative. They can come from anywhere—government, business, the local community, from different social institutions. They are the people who believe that the tortuous road toward a new deglobalized one-world entails inclusive participation, gender equality, social justice, civic initiative, concern for the common good, solidarity and caring. They are the bearers of a new consciousness and civic action needed for the



new millennium. They understand why paying our social and ecological dues now, and not later, will make for a sustainable society that is vastly different from what we have now.

Deglobalization is about local action, about strengthening the voice and power of ordinary citizens. There are many stories out there waiting to be told and shared globally. Let's consider two examples—Kitakyushu and Porto Alegre.

The case of Kitakyushu is about a successful cooperation among state, corporate, and civic sectors to transform an environmental basket case into an environmental success story. The city and its surrounding prefecture was the industrial center that lifted Japan to modernity and to the status of a global power before and after World War II. Imagine the heavy costs of such take-off to the people and their living environments. The city was once choking in pollution and overcast smog, its ground water was heavily contaminated, marine life in the bay was totally gone. Local action was initiated by ordinary citizens who studied and monitored environmental quality then mobilized to press for government action. The, academic, technical, and research institutions and later the industrial sector were sensitized to the issues and drawn in to get a piece of the action. It took some time before people could see real changes. Now, Kitakyushu is green and you can fish around the bay.

Porto Alegre, a southern city in Brazil, is a model of local action for good governance. Its claim to success is demonstrated by dramatic improvements in basic services, such as education, health, social housing, public transport and roadbuilding and sewerage, waste management, environmental clean up, culture, law and order, and so on. Key to such performance is its noted "participatory budget" (*orcamento participativo*). Ruled by the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) for 12 years now, the city government has ensured that citizens of every neighborhood vote democratically on where and how municipal funds are to be used. The citizens decide what infrastructures they want to build or improve and are able to monitor closely how work is progressing and how money is being spent. This is supposed to leave less room for corruption and diversion of public funds. And that investment is more likely to match popular demand.

But models as these two cases might seem, still more questions are left unanswered. In the Kitakyushu case, the money involved in the clean up ran up to billions of dollars. Who really paid the bill and how? Obviously, the present generation of Japanese taxpayers. Is this fair or a kind of transgenerational inequality, and therefore



unsustainable? Or is it simply a well-deserved payback to Kitakyushu people who made possible the high living standards of the present generation of Japanese? But consider further that the shift to clean production needed massive transfer of the dirty (i.e. heavy and chemical) industry to willing hosts elsewhere in Asia and other less developed regions. In other words, environmental restoration happened at the expense of another country's carrying capacity? On balance, can we consider Kitakyushu a replicable model of cooperation?

In the case of Porto Alegre key sectors were excluded, such as business, media and other mainstream institutions which remain controlled by conservative and rightwing forces. Can this kind of cooperation sustain without the willing participation of the rich? And how can the rich be engaged to participate in a process that demands a heavy price on their possessions? How much of their wealth and power are they prepared to give up for the common good? What compromises the state-citizens alliance would be willing to make seem uncertain. What value then do we put to a kind of collaboration seeking to sharpen the rich-poor divide in order to dramatize the compelling need for social leveling?

We need more such stories from below.

Civics as citizens, prominent or ordinary people, like you and me, have come a long way from the time of Plato's exclusive city. They were the opposing voices to the monarchs and popes during the Enlightenment, the leading advocates of the emerging civil society of that time. They were the opponents of politicians and militarists who caused wars and sent men (and women, too) to the frontlines. They were the activists behind the most powerful social movements of modern times. They were the alternative voices of the 1960s who dared think and do anything the Establishment did not want, from marijuana to anti-war mass demonstrations. They were the voices of citizen participation in an era when decisions affecting our everyday lives at home, in the neighborhood, in the workplace, in schools, churches and parks were made by a few.

These new citizens are yesterday's and today's alternative voices celebrating and shaping the coming age through their songs and poetry, through voluntary associations and communal living, through caring and sharing for each other. They are the derring-do's who lay their lives on the line to bring down dictators and corrupt governments, to stop companies from further hurting our already degraded environment. They are reformers in government who strive to be good governors worthy of public trust. They are the leading social activists challenging



distant and highly-centralized institutions of power in order to restore sovereignty in the hands of ordinary people.

We belong to this bunch of idealists and activist-reformers in great hurry. We are in such a hurry to stop and reverse negative globalization. In a sense, we are one driving factor for a creative disintegration of the present system. It might be that we are for the creation of smaller worlds—small defensible spaces where everyone will have a better chance to participate and exercise self-determination—and for building one-world on this foundation. From each other we can learn how best to live together, to come together before the wrecking ball succeeds in tearing our world apart.

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