



“THE CHALLENGE OF INTERDEPENDENCE”

Speech delivered at the World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil

3rd February 2002

I speak this afternoon as a politician in the Conservative tradition, who might be thought to be out of sympathy with the aims of the World Social Forum. However during my fifteen years in the European Parliament my work on Trade and Environment, Climate Change and subsequently as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, gave me ample evidence that the world as we have it just does not work.

On leaving the European Parliament I have devoted myself to the study of globalisation and global governance. In that context I am pleased to note an evolution of slogans. We have moved from ‘no to globalisation’ to ‘no to corporate globalisation’. One of my favourite banners in Genoa read ‘replace globalisation with something nicer’. Now here in Porto Alegre we are invited to assert that ‘another world is possible’. My interest is in what are to be the institutions of that alternative world? I think it is common ground that there will need to be institutions, if we are to have a world where human rights are respected and which offers no hiding place for torturers or dictators. A world with a functioning International Criminal Court that offers no tolerance of genocide. A world with a strengthened regulation of transnational corporations, where corporate lobbying cannot disrupt Kyoto and progress toward climate sanity.

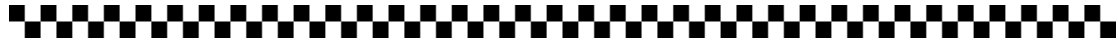
The question is how do we get to that alternative world. I don’t believe we can get there just by abolishing the WTO. Distaste for the functioning of the existing system should not blind us to thinking about the necessity of global governance. We will arrive at Another World by pruning some institutions, by strengthening others and by creating some new ones. They will all have to reflect the trinity of legitimacy, accountability and transparency if they are to have credibility in the world of today. Such a need is most urgent when one examines the environmental challenges which we face. Whatever the limitations of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg is the best opportunity we have to make progress. I want to argue the unfashionable reality that environmental disruption must be our over-riding concern. Two days ago I listened to my friend Vandana Shiva describe with her customary clarity an Indian village untouched by world trade, where the water was clean, the children healthy and the population living in a sustainable relationship with the forest. They are unaware of their statistical place as part of the poor of the world, living on less than one dollar a day. However Vandana must realise that we are not starting from a clean sheet. Even her pristine village will have its climate disrupted and its monsoon fail. Its inhabitants already contain within their bodies unacceptably high levels of persistent organic pollutants and endocrine disrupting chemicals impacting on their genetic inheritance. They may be unaware of global power struggles over the environment, but they cannot escape the impact of our inability to take global action. ‘Another World’ will not be a Utopia, but a world still alive with the problems and injustices of all the failings of humanity. What it must not be is a world built on the lie of endless growth entwined with human hubris.

The sweet scent of solidarity in this southern summer is no excuse for us to revert to old and failed ways. It is no excuse for us to abandon creativity. It is no excuse for us to be exclusive in the name of the excluded and to ban from our councils those who could genuinely help, such as the current prime minister of Belgium. Interdependence is a tough business. It is more than an alliance of the good guys. It is more than Marcuse’s rainbow coalition of the oppressed. Interdependence is not just with our friends, it is with our opponents. It is not only about singing our own solos beautifully, for that way lies cacophony. Rather it is about striving to take different songs and blending them into a meaningful harmony.

The Commission on Globalisation is a manifestation of this aim. It is not a bridge between Porto Alegre and Davos, rather it is a safe space. It is not a slogan, but a frequency on which all those concerned about a ‘world that works’ can meet. Living with interdependence is not about selling out or buying in. It is not about ignoring the events of September 11th or treating the outrage of Enron or the

tragedy of Argentina as some cheap counterpoint to the consequences of bin Laden. It is not about opposing neo-Liberalism with neo-Socialism. It is not about the politics of anger, the politics of fear or the politics of hate. It is quite simply about collectively finding our way to a world that works. It is about mining ideas and not minerals. It is about trading knowledge not trees. Above all it is about winning wisdom from our differences.

It is supposed to be a sign of genius to be able to hold two incompatible ideas simultaneously. To hold these ideas and to wait for the flash that reconciles them at a higher level of understanding. The Commission on Globalisation holds these incompatibilities and is prepared to be the lightning conductor for the flash.



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