



Sustainable Development Policy Institute

Distinguished Lecture Series no: DLS-002

Globalization and collective action

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01 November 1998



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There are many simplistic and schematic assessments of globalization going around and also when it comes to social movements, polemics easily prevails over analysis. So the first step in a reflection on globalization and collective action is to problematize globalization. Globalization may refer to a process, an awareness or a variety of projects. Turning to collective action, the first concern is to address the globalization of collective action, or collective action as a globalizing force. A second concern is the different strands in collective action in relation to globalization. Here four main currents are distinguished: anti-globalization, alternative globalism, shaping globalization or global reform, and 'quiet encroachment' – or gradual collective adjustments to and in globalization. In reality, of course, these currents overlap and each sprawls broadly around a central theme. For each current this chapter gives a profile of its claims and ideological or theoretical lineages, and a sketch of what it means in emotional and imaginary terms, or in terms of political psychology. Finally it turns to their prospects – that is, the likely or possible future options of each of these positions.

In an earlier paper on globalization and emancipation (Nederveen Pieterse, 1997a) I argued for a political continuum from local empowerment to global reform, such that local empowerment connects with efforts towards democratization and reform at wider levels of governance. If local action is a preference there is still a difference between inward- and outward-looking localism. What is needed is not only local empowerment but also global empowerment. Implementing such an agenda would involve greater cooperation among civic organizations, including labour organizations, and developing multilevel connections from local organizations to international networks working on global reform. This was a programmatic paper; the present chapter is wider in

ambit and seeks to scan and analyse the wide variety of collective action in relation to globalization.

Unpacking globalization

Unpacking globalization is necessary because the theme lends itself easily to rhetorical spill-over and ideological manipulation. Recourse to social science provides no remedy because each discipline has its own take on globalization. In effect at present we have widely dispersed globalization discourses based on profoundly different premises and regularly occasioning a dialogue of the deaf. This globalization reductionism feeds into popular perceptions and stereotyping, which in turn inform collective action. Without a separate analytics of globalization, a discussion of globalization and collective action might easily become tautological or a matter of circular reasoning: (perspectives on) collective action echoing the premises built-in in the first place. Since globalization is multidimensional and open-ended, at minimum what can be done is to provide insight in its multiple dimensions (Table 1.1).

These may also be termed dimensions of globalization. Globalization, thus, is shorthand for several major interwoven trends. A few brief points may further develop this perspective. (i) To distinguish contemporary globalization from long-term trends it may be appropriate to speak of *accelerated globalization*. (ii) Contemporary accelerated globalization comes in a package together with informatization (the role of information and communication technologies), flexibilization (that is, changes in production systems towards flexible production), and the reconfiguration of states and regionalization. (iii) Recent accelerated globalization coincides with the prominence of neoliberalism and the drive to free markets. What is usually presented as deregulation in effect implies re-regulation. Structural adjustment means the alignment of economic regimes and standards of accounting to Anglo-American standards. (iv) Arguably, accelerated globalization is driven or at any rate conditioned by technological changes, but technology needs unpacking as well. Current globalization may be characterized as, among others, a macroeconomic phenomenon driven by microeconomic changes – that is, at the level of firms. (v) Globalization is a process and not an outcome: it refers to the trend toward the growing interconnectedness of different parts of the world, not to their *being* interconnected.

Besides these dimensions and trends we can distinguish several

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