



Britain in the World

A Response from
Greater Manchester Trade Justice Movement/
Jubilee Debt Campaign Steering Group

Introduction

On May 4th 2007 the Greater Manchester Trade Justice/Jubilee Debt Campaign Group* held a public event at Manchester Town Hall. Delegates were invited to take part in the Labour Party's *Britain in the World* consultation. In small groups they discussed international development issues that were important to them and put questions to guests Rt. Hon. Hilary Benn MP, then Secretary of State for International Development, Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, then Chair of the Labour Party and Phil Bloomer, Director of Campaigns and Policy for Oxfam GB.

Rt. Hon Hazel Blears MP, whose Salford Constituency office helped organise the event, invited the Greater Manchester Trade Justice/Jubilee Debt Campaign Group to submit a report to the *Britain in the World* Commission outlining the main points that delegates raised. Delegates understood that their opinions would be counted as part of the overall research to inform the Party's next election manifesto.

Seventy delegates took part in the event; what follows is based on notes taken by facilitators at each of the six tables. A summary of the table notes is also available, as well as a transcript of final guest comments.

UK Government taking the lead

By taking part in the *Britain in the World* consultation, delegates send an important message: that they value their democratic responsibilities. More importantly, they value how their opinions are interpreted and acted upon by the UK Government.

Delegates believe the UK Government has a moral obligation to do its utmost to improve the lives of the poorest people. For example, not only must the UK Government stay on track to commit 0.7% GNI to official development assistance by at least 2013, but they must also put pressure on other European Union Governments



to achieve these targets and ensure that this is distinct from already-agreed debt relief. Furthermore, the UK must robustly champion the pledge that the Group of Eight industrialised nations made in 2005 to double aid to Africa by 2010. Without achieving these targets in the very least, the Millennium Development Goals will be goals in name alone.

The role that UK Government plays on the European and international stages was raised in relation to different areas of concern. For example, during trade negotiations the UK Government must ensure that justice for poor countries is central and cannot be negotiated; that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ceases to be credible unless governments take a rights-based approach to international development, and that the social and environmental responsibilities of trans-national businesses must be regulated and not left to chance.

As you read this report, know that those taking part recognise the role *they* must play in bringing about change: from ethical and sustainable consumption to lobbying their MP. On their behalf, thank you for considering the points raised as part of *Britain in the World*.

* Greater Manchester Trade Justice and Jubilee Debt Campaign Steering Group is an informal group of North-West based non-governmental and faith organisation staff, volunteers and supporters.



Justice and International Institutions

- Britain has in recent years established a leadership position challenging the injustices of global poverty.
- Delegates felt that justice was none negotiable and Britain should stand out more resolutely for justice in international agreements.
- International Institutions should move to a more equitable distribution of power and control and to a more open and transparent decision-making process.

Delegates were agreed that Britain had established a very valuable position of leadership internationally with respect to 'International Development', particularly through addressing the global problems of poverty and placing the injustice of poverty high on the political agenda. The government's leadership role is illustrated by its new initiatives on and support of debt cancellation, increases in both the quantity and quality of aid programmes and the focus on poverty at the G8 summit in 2005. The importance of the UK's position, in terms of influencing other affluent countries to aspire to meet similar levels of support, cannot be underestimated.

Justice for the world's poor is at the heart of and the driving force behind the campaigns and initiatives to tackle global poverty. In discussing the leadership issue



the primary concern was that a leadership role demanded that issues of principle should not be compromised to expediency. Justice is not negotiable! Every time justice is compromised to achieve a political deal the integrity of the leadership is eroded. The consensus of the delegates was that Britain had the opportunity and the respect to insist on sustaining the core principles of justice, of speaking out and exposing injustices in international institutions. Delegates felt that Britain risked eroding its position of leadership every time it compromised its principles or tried to sustain hypocritical positions. In circumstances in which it proves impossible to negotiate a just agreement, Britain should not seek to pretend that it is just, but should set out clearly the areas of concern and scope for future improvement. The practice of presenting every agreement as a success and trying to gloss over the failures undermines the integrity of Britain's position in standing up for justice.

Globally justice rests in the hands of the many international institutions and multilateral bodies that have been established. Historically most of these institutions were established by an elite group of countries who dominated the economic and military bases of power, their structures and leadership were established to reflect that power base. In contrast, politically, much weight is given to the importance of democracy and universal suffrage, reflecting respect for the individual and the individual's control of their own destiny. Some institutions have sought to distribute power more widely through their structure (for example the



WTO is, at least in principle, based on consensus with every country carrying an equal vote). Nevertheless, either through the historic voting structures or through the abuse of political patronage, the majority of institutions are controlled by the world's economic powers and the interests of developing countries are not adequately respected or influential.

Delegates took the view that justice in international institutions would never be achieved whilst control and policy formulation is in the hands of elite countries who are able to exert their economic power in the decision-making process. The institutions need to be reformed to reflect the aspirations of all countries and to empower those in greatest need of global justice. To assist in the transformation, delegates felt that institutions needed to be more open and transparent, in both their appointments and their proceedings. Delegates looked to the British Government to show leadership in this reform, to promote the transfer of power to a more equitable basis and to facilitate and protect the interests of the less well-developed economies.



Millennium Development Goals

- Many aspects of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are currently off target; the UK government must increase its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.
- The UK government must take the lead in ensuring that the MDGs are reached and encourage other governments to prioritise such international development issues.

We urge the UK government to live up to its commitments to international development and to take the lead in ensuring that the Millennium Development Goals are reached. There is a real danger that many of the targets will not be met, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The MDGs should be viewed as the minimum levels towards which we should be working; if the targets are not met we will be failing in our moral obligations to the poorest people of the world.

Delegates at our *Britain in the World* event were concerned with a number of issues that fall under the umbrella of the Millennium Development Goals, namely: access to clean water, gender equality and education and HIV/AIDS.



Delegates made the point that spending on access to clean, safe water is minimal compared to military spending. While it was recognised that water usually falls under the jurisdiction of regional authorities which makes it difficult to implement more effective policies, delegates supported the idea of the formation of a single UN authority to plan water investment.

As current progress suggests that the MDG target on water will not be achieved in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (by one billion people) we welcome the UK government's commitment to spend half of its direct aid budget on basic services, including water and sanitation. We also welcome the commitment to double assistance to water and sanitation in Africa (to £95 million per annum by 2007/8 and £200 million by 2010/11). We urge the UK government to maintain and monitor the implementation of these commitments.

We also ask that the UK government focus upon the recommendations of the Millennium Project regarding access to clean water, in particular: commit to moving the sanitation crisis to the top of their agenda, empower local authorities and communities with the authority, resources and professional capacity required to manage water supply and sanitation service delivery, and to encourage innovations to speed progress toward reaching several development goals simultaneously.

With the number of deaths from AIDS continuing to rise in sub-Saharan Africa and 4.3 million people becoming newly infected (across developing countries) in 2006, the MDG to combat HIV/AIDS will not be met. Delegates believed that the UK government should continue to push for increased international finance for HIV/AIDS (finance to contribute to prevention programmes, antiretroviral drugs, medical care and care of orphans). We welcome the government's current commitment to spend £1.5 billion on HIV/AIDS between 2005-2008 and hope that this pledge is fulfilled.



Delegates believed that the UK government has to act as a champion for women's representation at all levels of decision-making within developing countries. Gender inequality should be targeted as a matter of course in all aspects of the implementation of the MDGs; interventions and development packages should include the protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights, equal access to economic assets such as land and housing, increased access to education (primary, secondary and further education), equal opportunities in the labour market, freedom from violence and increased representation at all levels of governance.

However, the target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 was not achieved in many regions (particularly the Arab States, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa), and the subsequent 2015 target (for all levels of education) is currently unlikely to be achieved. We welcome the UK government's commitment to gender equality in its development initiatives; however more needs to be done to meet the MDG on gender, particularly as achieving this goal is central to meeting all of the other goals.



Corporate Accountability and Workers' Rights

- The UK government must regulate the actions of transnational companies, including the establishment of a legal framework to determine best practice.
- Groups such as the ILO need more support in their struggle to establish and enforce workers' rights.

Many tables discussed questions surrounding international trade issues and corporate responsibility. It was recognised that the British government has made positive steps in this area such as the replacement of the Companies Act in the UK. However, it was established that more needs to be done at EU and international levels to promote and implement the regulation of corporations and to protect the rights of workers. In this country the public assume that companies are held responsible for their actions by legislation regarding environmental protection, worker's rights, social impact and health and safety standards - they are not allowed to act without regard to the world around them. As such it is widely assumed that companies are similarly held to account for their actions outside of the UK. At present many developing countries lack the capacity to enforce a legal framework similar to that in the UK, and so it is the responsibility of the British government and others to regulate the actions of transnational companies.



Delegates emphasised the need for the government to intervene in aspects of international trade that have a negative impact on development. One method that was suggested to achieve this was to establish a legal framework for transnational companies that determines levels of best practice. This legislation should cover employment practices including: safety, wages and the rights of workers, as well as environmental issues and responsibility. There was a general belief that voluntary codes of practice are too open to abuse and as such any legislation should include the necessity of independent audits and monitoring as well as mechanisms for enforcement. The UK government must be bold and assertive to drive forward changes that work in favour of developing countries and their people, even if this means standing against big company interests.

The government should also support the rights of workers around the world including their right to organise - greater support should be given to groups working in this area such as the International Labour Organisation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains two articles that enshrine the rights of workers. Firstly article 23 states that:

Everyone has the right to work, ... to just and favourable conditions of work ... to equal pay for equal work ... to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection ... to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Whilst article 25 states that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care.



To achieve this workers need to be paid an adequate wage. There should be a legal framework that holds companies to account in terms of the wages that are paid to their workers. Whilst we cannot dictate a global minimum wage, all workers have the right to a living wage and to work in conditions that are safe. It was acknowledged by Rt. Hon Hilary Benn that pressure from consumers, supported by the actions of governments, is of the utmost importance for bringing change, and as such we would encourage the government to press for legally enforced change in the international arena.

Other issues

Delegates also raised a number of other issues at our *Britain in the World* event. These included:

The empowerment of civil society in the North and the South

Delegates emphasised the importance of listening to local communities (in both the North and South) in order to understand their needs. Education was seen as the priority, particularly in terms of building confidence, encouraging participation and creating a sense of 'global citizenship'.

Arms Trade regulation

The issue of Trident renewal was particularly important for the delegates; it was felt that the government had not taken into account the views of the British public when deciding to renew Trident. It was hoped that the decision could be reviewed in the future, particularly in light of the forth-coming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2010.

We welcome the government's recent decision to close DESO and its commitment to the new Arms Trade Treaty and ask that the UK government push for the inclusion of references to human rights, international law and sustainable development in the new treaty.

Trade Agreements

In light of the UK's commitment to poor countries, delegates believed that the EU should reform the Common Agricultural Policy and review plans for Economic Partnership Agreements.



Fairtrade

Delegates welcomed the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI) guidelines which encourage public authorities to request fairtrade products (where appropriate) from their suppliers; however delegates wish the UK government to make a stronger commitment to fairtrade and put in to place a policy to ensure that all government departments and public authorities procure fairtrade products wherever possible.



Conclusion

As a 'superpower' the UK has a moral imperative to deliver justice to the world's poor; to hold such power and influence and not to use it is immoral. The Labour government must uphold its fundamental commitment to social justice and take the lead in eradicating poverty in the 21st century.



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The report represents the consensus of opinion expressed by delegates at the Manchester BITW event (May 2007); it does not represent the policy and opinions of the agencies/organisations represented by the authors.

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