



PA NEWS

The 'G' force

How has the concept of globalisation developed over the last decade? What part has LSE played in the process? **Meghnad Desai** examines the power and the potential of globalisation in the 21st century.

Globalisation is a buzzword today. But even as recently as five years ago it was being mocked as globaloney. People doubted the existence of the phenomenon and hated the word. Many in the International Political Economy (IPE) field insisted that it was inter-national-isation, not globalisation. The Asian crisis led to a new jargon. Then we had to worry about the international/global financial 'architecture'. The alphabet soup of G7, G15, G24, G77 is being stirred as never before to come up with some solution.

At LSE we have a 'déjà vu, déjà lu' feeling about all this. The School began to think about globalisation ten years ago. Our previous director, Dr IG Patel belonged to the Committee of Thirty, which was one of the earliest global think clubs. At that time Anthony Giddens was pouring forth his thoughts on this new phenomenon called globalisation – little did we know then that he would become LSE's director in 1997.

In 1991 Professor John Ashworth used his contacts in the science and business fraternities to bring together

Sir Maurice Laing and Sir Austin Bide with a group of us at LSE. The challenge was a simple (!) one. Why was humanity so good and fast at technical and scientific progress and so slow and clumsy at social and political solutions to its problems? Could we at LSE do something about it?

This was the germ of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance (CsGG) set up in 1992. Our timing was brilliant. The Rio Summit was about to happen, President George Bush (Senior) had just announced the birth of a new world order and Francis

Fukuyama had told us about the end of history. The Centre's mission was to inquire, inform and influence:

- Inquire into problems of famine, poverty, population growth, human rights, refugees, international conflicts and international economic and political co-operation
- Inform the people in opinion forming and policy-making circles and widely disseminate our findings
- Influence policy making at national and international level

I am quite sure that we were the first place to use the words 'global governance'. There was soon a Commission on Global Governance chaired by Sonny Ramphal, the ex-secretary general of the Commonwealth and Carlson, ex-prime minister of Sweden. We met with the Commission members in a brain storming session in 1993 and out of our efforts came two books. The first was called Global Governance. The subtitle was: economics and ethics of the world order. It dealt with globalisation and the economic and human rights perspectives necessary to understand it. The other book published jointly with Save the Children, The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention, was much more directly concerned with the urgent problem of the day – the need to provide humanitarian intervention in failing states. Somalia was very much on our minds. Within the UN system each state was sovereign. It required a country's permission to rescue it from famine even when no government existed to give such permission. It was to get much worse as the 1990s progressed.

In subsequent years, the Centre has published over 30 papers. Public lectures have been given by leading international figures such as Sadako Ogata, UN high commissioner for refugees, Pierre Sane of Amnesty International, Robert MacNamara, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and Chief Emeka Anyokou, secretary general of the Commonwealth. As the director of the Centre I have visited and lectured at the World Bank and in the USA, Canada, Australia, India, Japan, China and many other countries about globalisation. We collaborated with UNDP first in 1996 in a conference on governance and in 1998 on poverty, governance and the new world order.

Like the rest of LSE, the Centre does not have a single 'line' on globalisation. But from the beginning we have seen it as a dynamic, fast moving phenomenon with positive as well as negative aspects. My own view has always been that it is more a positive thing than not. When you think of the possibilities that a global institution like the World Trade Organisation creates for economic

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growth of the developing countries through more open trade, and which without globalisation and the free flow of capital would not have come about, then you have to appreciate the strengths of the process.

But there are also some worrying negative processes. Mary Kaldor, who joined the Centre in January 1999, has written extensively on the new ethnic and national conflicts raging since the end of the Cold War. Her books *New and Old Wars* (Polity, 1999) and *Global Insecurity* (Pinter, 2000) have been widely discussed in the media. She is now heading an exciting new programme on global civil society at the Centre, funded by the MacArthur Foundation. This will lead to an annual handbook on global civil society to be published in 2001 and subsequently the Rockefeller Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund are also supporting this programme.

The Centre is concerned, above all, with ideas. It was in this pursuit that we organised a five lecture series on the Ideas of 1989, re-examining the liberation of Eastern Europe from Soviet domination and all the many things it led to. Speakers included Jan Kavan, Adam Michnik, Timothy Garton Ash, George Papandreou, Robin Cook and Mary Kaldor, who organised it all. In October this year we held a conference on finan-

cial crises and global governance with economists, political economists and policy makers, in co-operation with LSE's Financial Markets Group.

We are about to launch an ambitious three-year programme of seminars and research on globalisation and global governance, thanks to a generous grant from BP. This will take the form of a Distinguished Visiting Fellowship, tenable at the Centre for a leading actor in the active field of global governance, as well as four global seminars to be held round the world in collaboration with BP on some of the difficult issues facing the world today – human rights, corporate governance, technological change and environmental degradation. These seminars will bring together a select audience of leaders from the worlds of politics, business and academia with distinguished speakers who will be the innovators of new ideas.

The Centre, soon to celebrate its tenth birthday, is thriving. It is small but vibrant; it is catholic in its outlook but fearless in facing up to the most challenging issues. It is a pioneer in its field and acknowledged as such. But then you would expect that of any research centre at LSE wouldn't you? ■



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Left: Anti WTO protestor
Above: UN Assembly



MEGHNAD DESAI

IS DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE
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