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THE ISSUE OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN TONY BLAIR'S POLICY OF NEW LABOUR PARTY

ABSTRACT. The purpose of this paper is to present the phenomena and the main directions of Tony Blair's government policy on international development. His political vision was significantly conscious about the need to make the world's development more equal. Undoubtedly Blair's involvement in the area of uneven world's development was directed by his interest in making Britain more influential on the wide, international arena. But it should be emphasized that UK under New Labour Government was really prepared to reach the needs of the poorest countries in the world.

Introduction

There has not been a British government that could ignore issues of international development. The United Kingdom's history, the Commonwealth associations, the reality of free market economy, migrations, individual and personal connections, and most of all, a deep concern of many citizens for humanitarian action can prove that fact. But still, at the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century the Britain's Conservative Government had been proving their traditional attitude towards the trade on global market and accepting the idea of depth reduction for the poorest countries. In fact, it had not shown a meaningful concern for the policy of international development. The main reason was their program of aid which in real terms occurred to be slowly turning down. In some cases the government's policy relating to the issues of international development had been found to have acted not completely legally. The Pergau Dam project in Malaysia might be a good example. It was often called "the most controversial mission in the history of British aid". The excessively costly dam was financed with the money of British taxpayers in order to support a major arms deal, despite the opposition raised by civil servants in the Foreign Office and the voice of international community.

Actually, looking more broadly, neither UK nor other OECD countries would pay enough attention to development issues at those times. This abandonment stimulated The Development Assistance Committee within the OECD to work out some basic directions. In 1996 an important document was published under the title *Shaping the Twenty – first Century. The role of Development Cooperation (Shaping the Twenty..., 1996)*. During the general

election in 1997 the British Labour Party promised to make the issue of unequal development one of the main targets of their international policy.

The following paper is an attempt to point out the main directions of the British New Labour's policy within the area of unequal development. The article has a descriptive character and its method is based on the documents and the literature of the subject. The structure and contents of the paper were built on published articles, books, party documents and other resources. The notion of the New Labour Party is rather affiliated with Tony Blair's vision of social democracy in the UK.

Dilemmas of the world's unequal development

It is an undeniable fact that the world is still facing a dangerous threat of unsustainable development that is causing exploitation of natural resources, increased pollution and changes in habitats. But it is also creating serious social problems that are being intensified by the inequalities in health, wealth, education, and employment. Those damages usually risk the poorest people at first. The following statistics show the facts of unequal global development. Half of the world – over 3 billion people – live on less than \$2.00 per day. 30,000 children die each day because of poverty – almost 11 million children under the age of 5 each year. About 40 million people live with HIV and over 3 million die from AIDS each year; approximately 3,900 children die each day because of a lack of drinking water and sanitation. Global life expectancy is 65 years compared with the UK average of 78. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the poorest 48 nations (a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's richest 3 countries combined (*First Steps Towards...*, 2006, p. 10; compare with Wolińska, 2008, p. 243).¹

These problems are not only ones faced by the world and which affect the poorest countries the most. Finite resources such as fossil fuels and finite water are also experiencing problems. Our lifestyle and consumption threaten the very planet that supports us. It has been proven that in order to support present consumption, we each need 50 liters of water a day for drinking, washing, cooking and sanitation. In 1990s over 1 billion people did not even have that. And still, by 2025 two thirds of the population will live in water stressed countries. We are losing 6% per year of our freshwater ecosystems and 4% per year of our marine ecosystems. We have already fished to the limits or beyond in two thirds of the marine ecosystems and altered the ecology of a vast range of marine species. Concerning the condition of world's species about 70% of our ecosystems are seeing a decline in biodiversity (*First Steps Towards...*, 2006, p. 11).

Almost all of us can admit that growing inequalities in the world have become a pressing issue. Even business leaders who came to Davos in 1999 identified this problem as one of the biggest threats to the world economy. But since the Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 poverty in the world has been still growing up. It is true that global inequalities are less visible and some people even say that they should not be the case of public policy. But, if we are a part of global human community, moral concern over unjust inequalities cannot be limited to national borders. This is especially important when the policies adopted in one country have repercussions in another country. Supporting globalization while turning a blind eye to global equality concerns is an increasingly anachronistic approach to the challenges facing international community. If the public investment can play an important role – equipping us with the abilities we need to work our way out of poverty, this might happen on a global level, too. *International aid is the equivalent of a redistributive fiscal transfer mechanism with a potential to affect change, for instance, through investments in health,*

¹ This data shows the figures reflecting the results of unequal development at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century.

education and infrastructure. Similarly, international trade practices can open – or close – opportunities for poor countries and their citizens to capture a bigger share of the economic pie (Human Development Report..., 2005, p. 39).

Taking under consideration an axiological point of view, there are two possible ways to conceive this scarcity as our moral obligation. One might assign a positive position to us, which is founded on the fact that we could improve conditions of those living in poor circumstances. Since they are suffering and we are better off, we should share some of our own time, energy and wealth to help them. The second option refers to the view of negative responsibility entailed on us. This assumption is based on the conviction that we in fact participate, and even profit from, unjust and coercive imposition of severe poverty (Pogge, 1998, p. 502). Yet, if we think correctly, there is no excuse for doing nothing to make the world more equal and just. Once even Charles Darwin wrote to his native Britain: “*If the misery of our poor be caused not by laws of nature, but by our own institutions, great is our sin*” (Quoted in: Gould, 1991, p. 19).² It should be noted that the case we are talking of is not about giving help to those who are just poor. We consider those who had been born into different social circumstances, that would always create additional constraints to lead healthy, happy, and productive lives as the rest of us. The root cause of their suffering is a bad social starting position, including the social context into which they are born, which does not give them much of a chance to become anything but poor vulnerable, and dependent – unable to give their children a better start than they had had themselves. It makes sense to call those people “radically deprived”. They do not merely lack what they need to lead a fulfilling life but that what they need is withheld from them through human agency. These people are not just poor and often starving, but they are being impoverished and starved by our common institutional arrangements, which inescapably shape their lives. As the more powerful and advanced participants in the global framework, we deprive them of what they need, because – whether purposefully or not – we put this framework upon them rather than suggest reasonable institutional solution that would not generate such severe and widespread poverty (Pogge, 1999, p. 506).

Considering those facts it seems that the promoters of the dependency theory are right. They argue that poor nations have always provided natural resources, cheap labour, old technologies, and – the most important – markets for developed countries, without which the latter could not have the opportunity to obtain the standard of living they enjoy. Dependency theory tries to prove that the existence of poverty within the nations in the periphery is not due to their not being integrated into the world system, but rather *how* they are integrated into the system. The poorer nations are locked within a detrimental economic system. They depend on the rich for the little work that is available to them. On the other hand this situation creates a barrier from the nation growing independently. Taking into account the future perspective, poor nations have no possible opportunity to improve their quality of life (Wallerstein, 2004; Amin, 1976).

It has been often pointed out that contemporary global economy needs to be radically transformed (Korten, 2006; Korten 2002; Amin, 2004; Shiva, 2005). There is a growing group of activists and theorists who claim that a “new capitalism manifesto” is needed to make capitalist development and growth more socially just and environmentally sustainable (Haque, 2011). Unequal character of capitalism expansion, that cannot be overcome by the mechanisms within its own structure, generally requires that the world would be established on the foundations of alternative bases – which is social system. Such a perspective was proposed, among others, by Tony Blair and his New Labour Party.

² This statement is remarkable especially when expressed by C. Darwin, because as we know he believed that human life should be a competitive struggle for survival.

The British New Labour's contribution to international development

The story of the New Labour's policy concerning international development starts with the *Foreign Policy Review*, carried out by the Labour Party in 1994 – 1996, under the leadership of Robin Cook, together with Joan Lester as the shadow spokesmen on the matters of aid. The authors of this review emphasized, among others, the urgent need to establish a new department under a cabinet minister with a responsibility to promote international development. A similar perspective, designed generally to eliminate the use of aid for political and commercial ends, had been included within the Labour's previous manifestos in opposition (Inspired by the work of the Ministry for Overseas Development (MOD), and established by Harold Wilson in 1964. Later on the MOD was restructured, but remained a part of the Foreign Ministry).

When the general election approached in 1997, Tony Blair considered introducing again a separate Department of State. He asked Clare Short, the shadow International Development spokesmen, if his decision was justified. After reviewing the practice in other countries, consulting leading development think-tanks, and taking advice from the Permanent Secretary of the ODA – Sir John Vereker – she was persuaded that the proposal for creating a new department under a cabinet minister is reasonable. The Labour Party election manifesto from 1997 stated: *In government we will strengthen and restructure the British aid programme and bring development issues back into the mainstream of government decision-making. A Cabinet Minister will lead a new department of international development. We will shift aid resources towards programmes that help the poorest people in the poorest countries. We reaffirm the UK's commitment to the 0,7 per cent UN aid target and in government Labour will start to reverse the decline in UK aid spending (New Labour Because Britain Deserves Better, 2000, p. 381).*

On 3 May 1997 a new Department for International Development (DFID) was introduced. In consequence of this decision, the Foreign Office lost control over a large slice of its budget. Clare Short became the Secretary of State for the new department. Under her leadership, DFID led the way in global development policy, and people queued up to work there. At the start, under Short's supervision DFID remained a sort of nongovernmental organization inside government and sometimes that situation caused significant problems. However, it gave Britain a meaningful reach into developing world (Blair, 2010, p. 24).

In October 1997 Blair's government issued the white paper *World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century* to define the route of the British international development policy. The authors of the document emphasized: *This White Paper sets out the Government's policies to achieve the sustainable development of this planet. It is first, and the most importantly, about the single greatest challenge that the world faces – eliminating poverty. It is about ensuring that the poorest people in the world benefit as we move towards a new global society. It is about creating partnerships with developing countries and their people, on the bases of specific and achievable targets, to bring that about (Short, 1997, p. 4).* It was expected that Labour government would play a leading role in making Britain as an example how to reach the needs of people living in developing world. Blair believed that the most important task was to set up internationally agreed policies and principles that would promote sustainable development. Encouraging environmental conservation was also a significant reason. At the beginning a meaningful role in shaping the British vision of international development played the UN Resolution issued in 1996 (see: *Shaping the Twenty-First Century...*, 1996). Its key target were:

- 1) Reducing by one-half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.
- 2) Achieving the universal primary education in all countries by 2015.

- 3) Making demonstrable progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015.
- 4) Reducing by two-thirds the mortality rates for infants and children under age 5 and reducing by three-fourths in maternal mortality, all by 2015.
- 5) Accessing through the primary health-care system to reproduce health service for all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015.
- 6) Implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005 – to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at global and national levels by 2015.

In constructing the policy for international development, the authors of the white paper *World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century* paid special attention to the idea of sustainable development. They emphasized that most international institutions agree that sustainable development requires interdependent relations between economic, social and environmental dimensions. Three points of the Rio Declaration from 1992 seem to be important: eradicating poverty as a requirement for sustainable development (Principle 5); treating environmental protection as a part of the development process (and sustainable development in general) (Principle 4); considering a vital role of women within environmental management and development, especially their participation in social and economic life (Principle 20) (*World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century...*, 1997, p. 18).

It was also pointed out that sustainable development requires the management and maintenance of different sorts of “capital” which support human well-being.³ The authors of the white paper emphasized that it is important to achieve economic and social changes, underlying policies that can be sustained through the long term. Agenda 21, Programme for Action from UN Conference, call for countries to have national strategies for sustainable development. According to the authors of this white paper the new established Department for International Development would be working through its bilateral and multilateral programmes, but also collectively with other government departments and non-governmental institutions (NGOs). British government promised to pursue this goal through (*World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century*, 1997, p. 19):

- 1) Building development partnership with poorer countries.
- 2) Working more closely with the private and voluntary sectors, and the research community.
- 3) Working with and influencing multilateral development organizations.
- 4) Working with other government departments to promote consistent policies affecting poorer countries.
- 5) Using knowledge and resources effectively and efficiently.

Those general goals were based on specific objectives such as policies and actions that promote sustainable livelihoods. It was promised that the British government would support sound policies for economic growth in developing countries. A strong emphasize was put on the development of efficient and well-regulated markets, good governance, realization of human rights, prevention and resolution of conflicts. According to the authors of the document the better education, health and opportunities for poor people seemed to play unquestionable role in making the world more equal. A special importance was focused on improving universal primary education, guaranteeing a basic health care for all, including reproductive services and lowering child and maternal mortality, and supplying safe drinking water, food security, emergency and humanitarian needs. Of course the protection and better

³ It is usually pointed out the following sorts of capitals: *created capital* – including physical infrastructure, buildings, machinery and equipment; *natural capital* – the environment and natural resources; *human capital* – human skills and capacity; *social capital* – strong social relationships and institutions.

management of the natural and physical environment were seriously considered (*World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century*, 1997, p. 19).

However, the work of DFID and its Secretary of State – Clare Short – was not the main influences on the British international development policy. Both Gordon Brown and Tony Blair also used their own connections and networks for increasing a number of specific initiatives in this area. Brown used his contacts from the International Monetary and Finance Committee, of which he was the chair from 1999, or the G7 meetings that played a fundamental position in promoting solutions to the depth problems for poor countries. For Tony Blair the key stage was the succession of G7/G8 Summits. But the most meaningful were his personal relations with leaders of developing countries, particularly those of Commonwealth. He had good and longstanding links with Thabo Mbeki, who replaced Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa. From 2001 they increasingly worked together to build up a new approach to development matters in Africa, which was to be more African “achievement”, not so much depended on donors. They even wrote joint article for *The Guardian* in September 2001 concerning problems which were then called the “New Africa Initiative” (Manning, 2007, p. 563).

In 2000, as a result of a failed WTO meeting in Seattle the previous year, the Labour Government issued the second white paper which supposed to set out how development policies could use globalization to work for poor (*Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalization Work for Poor*, 2005). This same tradition was maintained in the third white paper published in 2006 (*Eliminating World Poverty: Making Governance Work for Poor*, 2006).

Undoubtedly *The Millennium Development Goals* – which were agreed to at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 – played the key role to further projects and achievements of the UK’s Department for International Development and of the wider UK Government. The Millennium Declaration, signed by representatives of 189 nations during New York UN Summit, recognized that the responsibility for development falls to both developed and developing countries. It received a set of eight mutually reinforcing goals as the focus for the global development agenda, with 18 associated targets at 48 indicators against which to measure progress.

The UK Government planned to accelerate progress towards MDGs through substantially increasing the overseas development assistance budget and calling for an immediate increase of resources through International Finance Facility. Beyond that, Blair’s cabinet promised to strengthen activity at the country level and give much bigger support to the European Council. Obviously a reasonable action was to build meaningful partnerships with other donors (*The UK’s Contribution to Achieving the Millennium Goals*, 2005, p. 8).

The clear focus on the final elimination of poverty in poor countries – and Britain’s contribution to it – was presented in *The International Development and Cooperation Act* of 2002. This document made it illegal for the aid programme to be used for any purpose other than reduction of poverty or humanitarian relief. It is worthwhile to notice that British aid rose from 2000 onwards to the levels similar to those of France and Germany, from the position more than half their weight when the New Labour Government assume the office. In 2005, for the first time, UK’s aid exceeded both France and Germany, and in 2006 it rose above that of Japan (see: Manning, 2007, p. 257).

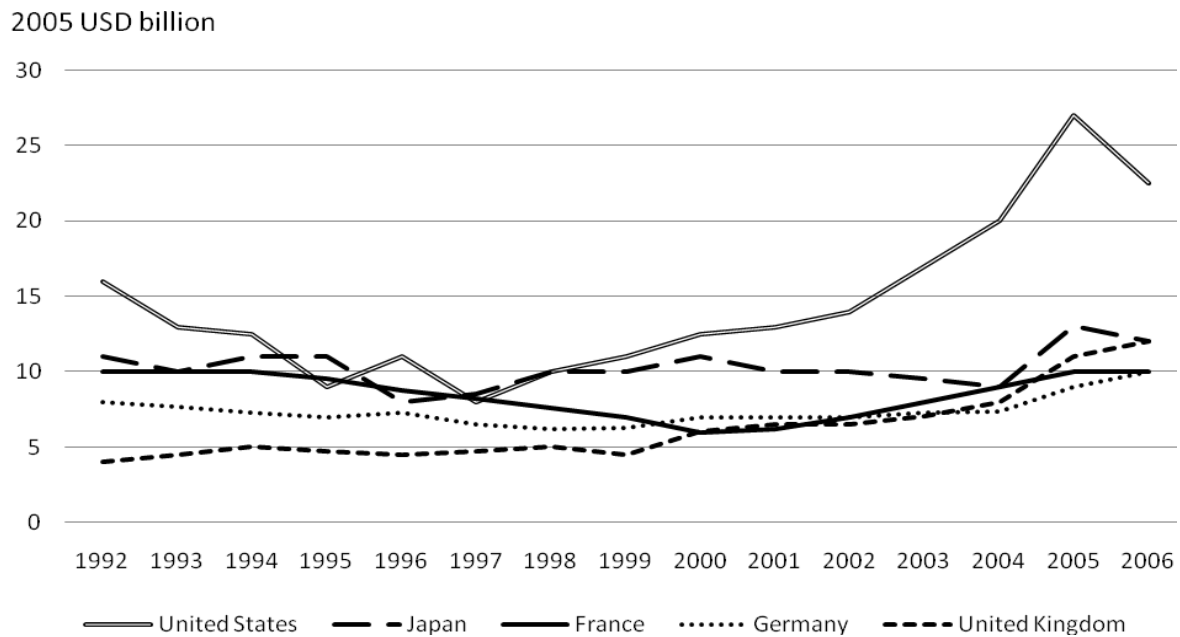


Figure 1. Five “top donors”, 1992 – 2006

Source: Author’s graph based on (Manning, 2007, p. 257).

The G8 Summit at Gleneagles Hotel in Auchterarder, Scotland, played a meaningful role both to Blair and Brown in the area of New Labour’s policy of international development. Traditionally, the host country of the G8 Summit prepares the agenda for negotiations which is primarily initiated by the joint work of multinational civil servants weeks before the summit starts. It usually leads to a declaration that all countries can sign. As host, the UK proposed to focus this G8 summit on the issues of global climate changes and the problem of uneven economic development in Africa. The British site tried to persuade the international committee to reduce the debts of the poorest countries and significantly increase aid. Before the Gleneagles meeting in February 2005, Gordon Brown persuaded G7 representatives to mobilize mutual efforts so that decisions which might be made at the summit in July would bring developed countries closer to achieve financing package of the Millennium Development Goals. At that time the G7 Finance Ministers were prepared to talk in terms of real increase in ODA between 2004 and 2010 of 2 billion dollars, but still with decisions awaited from Canada and the USA. It was the main intention to build strong consensus on the road to the G8 Summit’s conclusion of a planned 50 billion dollars increase in aid between the two dates. In 2006 the British government decided to allocate over 4,4 billion pounds on international development and humanitarian aid. Out of that amount, 57% was distributed individually to particular poor countries; 38% was distributed to international nongovernment organizations; and the rest of the aid was planned to cover the costs of the projects. The main beneficiaries included Ghana, Mozambik, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Financial support of the United Kingdom helped 3 million children from Malawi and Kenya start regular primary education in 2006. Because of the British financial aid of medical system in Zambia, over 6 million people had a free access to the health care at that time. In 2007, over 1 million people were given supplies with the medical supplies against AIDS and HIV. That same year the British government – supporting UNICEF – reached 400,000 poor orphans in Zimbabwe. And working closely with the United Nations World Food Program (UNWFP) it could supply food to 1,6 million inhabitants of that country (read more: Michałowska, 2008, p. 417).

Another demand of the G8 Summit was to move forward initiatives on reducing and finally eliminating global warming. Blair planned to achieve a goal beyond the Kyoto Protocol by including the most significant developing countries, such as India, China, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa within the international agreement. This depended on the transfer of clean technologies in exchange for commitments concerning reduction of greenhouse gases. International development and climate change policy seemed, to the organizers of the G8 Summit, obvious and mutual. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions not only saves the world against global warming but also eliminates dangerous development threats in poor countries. Commissioned by the British government, The Stern Review was crucial to changing the international atmosphere and managed to take the climate change agenda out of the marginalized sphere of environmentalism. It is worthwhile to notice the Labour Party had already decided to accept the Kyoto resolutions. They promised to reduce the levels of CO₂ by 20% by 2020 from the level compared with 1990 and reduce it by 60% by 2050.

The G8 Summit agenda, which was unquestionably connected to the unusually good political skills of both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown could not actually work to “make poverty history”, but it was a big step towards building an international dialogue on how to solve the biggest threats to the contemporary world. The proposals at Gleneagles could confronted the global politics of unequal development (On the G8 Summit at Gleneagles read more in: Payne, 2006).

Conclusions

Tony Blair’s government policy between 1997 and 2007 was a meaningful step towards giving a coherent push to the UK’s role in international development. It is obvious that he and his New Labour Party were conscious of the continuous pressure from poorer members of the ever more present “global village”. At that time Britain played a significant role in challenging the other developed countries to make a visible progress towards “global public goods”, from climate change to dealing with risks of uneven development in the world and avoidance of “bads” such as terrorism and failed states. As Prime Minister, Tony Blair left a strengthened UK voice in international development. His vision was strongly supported by the “third Way and its vision to protect social justice. Equality and individual freedom may conflict, but egalitarian measures would increase the range of freedoms available to individuals, too (read more on the Third Way and its values: Giddens, 1999).

The willingness to build a development agenda was unusually important for opening much bigger opportunities to involve civil society in policy discussion. It should be emphasize that Blair’s agenda on international development was qualitatively different from policies of previous the British governments. There are still some aspects to be developed such as Blair’s vision of humanitarian intervention as a part of his international development policy or the fact of the UK’s involvement into Iraq and Afghanistan wars. It would require additional consideration.

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