

# The left and the case for 'progressive reglobalisation'

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Neoliberal globalisation is in crisis – but it's an illusion to believe that we can turn back the clock on forty years of international economic integration. The left urgently needs to discover the ideas and agency necessary to resist the disaster capitalists of the right, and build a progressive reglobalisation.

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**T**he left needs to talk, again, about globalisation. You might think that quite enough ink has already been spilt about this ubiquitous term. Unfortunately, globalisation is still widely misunderstood, and it is too consequential a phenomenon for the argument to remain where it mostly sits in the general discourse of the (supposedly) developed capitalist world.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true during our era of profound – and profoundly disorientating – global upheaval. More to the point, and of special significance for the audience of this journal, it is our view that large parts of the left, in advocating – sincerely, but nonetheless erroneously – progressive forms of 'deglobalisation' have ultimately got it wrong when it comes to thinking through the politics, and political economy, of contemporary globalisation.

It is not that the left has not grasped the many social and economic problems associated with a long-decaying neoliberalism or the challenges these present to its broad vision of politics and society. Indeed, there is a bitter irony in the fact that the insightful critiques made by social democrats and socialists of the pathological effects of advanced, late-era neoliberal globalisation – about which too many centre-left politicians were too sanguine when in power before the crisis – now form the basis of a right-wing populist, hyper-nationalist backlash that promises to entrench globally even more dystopian forms of authoritarian capitalism.<sup>2</sup> The problem is that, in wanting to avoid the mistakes of the recent past, the

left has frequently advocated a misguided strategic response to its broadly accurate analysis, abandoning attempts to reform globalisation and taking refuge in the re-empowerment of the nation state.

This is a profound mistake: one that confuses one form of globalisation for globalisation *per se*. While the existence of globalisation itself appears compelling, its character, and therefore its consequences, are profoundly contingent. All economic and social relations now take place, or find expression, on an unavoidably 'global' stage. Even the most seemingly 'local' manifestations of everyday life – from the organisation of family finances to the taking of a taxi or the purchase of a takeaway curry – are embedded in global flows of commodities, labour, capital, technology and knowledge.<sup>3</sup> In a sense, then, its cheerleaders were absolutely right that globalisation is probably here to stay: the sheer scale of cross-border integration renders any decisive retreat, if not impossible, certainly implausible. But they were utterly wrong to suggest that there is no alternative to their preferred neoliberal form of globalisation.

What is at stake here is not *whether* those processes exist and play out over a global scale, but rather *how* they are to be managed, by *whom* and with *what* outcomes for society. Put simply: globalisation can be better (or worse) governed, placed under greater (or lesser) democratic control, and shaped to produce more (or less) socially and environmentally beneficial outcomes. The left cannot escape the terrain of the global: instead, it has to learn new ways to imagine, conceive and engage politically. The *only* hope of creating a better world is for those on the left to think seriously in 'global' terms. If we do not, the disaster capitalists will build a kind of globalisation that suits only them.

## The political economy of different globalisations

The core insight that underpins our argument is a straightforward one. Globalisation is, and has been, treated too often as if it embodies a kind of singular pre-ordained technological inevitability that has huge political consequences, but is at the same time somehow beyond political explanation. In fact, globalisation cannot be sensibly said to *cause* anything.<sup>4</sup> Thinking like this has the effect of turning it into an actor in the drama, propelled to the centre of the stage by some will or deity or force of nature. To be precise, it is to reify globalisation – to make it into a thing that of itself can act, behave and bring about outcomes. This does not really stand up to scrutiny since the concept actually refers to a highly complicated *process* of economic, social and political change that unfolds globally, and, arguably, is different and important precisely because it does unfold at that global level.

This was the insight that underpinned the classic definition of globalisation offered in 1999 in a brilliant overview of the early debate by David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton. They argued that globalisation should be thought of as nothing less – but also nothing more – than ‘the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual’.<sup>5</sup> This definition stands up well to the test of time, although what perhaps could usefully have been added was a qualification that counter-processes to ‘worldwide interconnectedness’ could be mobilised at any time. The point we are making here is not an irrelevant academic argument about conceptual precision. It is rather that the framing of globalisation as some sort of external actor bearing down on all of us actually lets off the hook all of the politicians and institutions who, through consciously taken decisions, have succeeded in transforming global political economy since the early 1980s.

What is more, we know who these actors are. They are the big global corporations and financial institutions. They are the political leaders of the major Western states and bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and European Union (EU). They are the formers of opinion, in both the global media and leading universities, who have collectively built and defended the theory and practice of global neoliberalism.<sup>6</sup> Put starkly, it has been global neoliberals, understood as real people, who have knowingly driven forward and defended the new behaviours, practices, institutions, norms and values that have come, over time, to constitute what we think of as globalisation. Equally, it was real politicians who subsequently argued, as British prime minister Tony Blair did in his 2005 speech to the Labour Party conference, that we should not bother to ‘stop and debate globalisation’, because ‘you might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer’.<sup>7</sup>

It is important, then, to see globalisation as a highly political process and not to be misled by the myth of its technological inevitability. What we mean by this is that, although dramatic technological progress from the 1970s onwards – especially in computing, communications and transport – unquestionably facilitated greater global interconnectedness and thereby helped to produce globalisation, it did not emerge and subsequently become entrenched of its own volition. It is important, too, to understand that we have lived under a *distinct form* of globalisation. To deploy again the phrase of Held et al, ‘the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness’ that took place progressed on specifically neoliberal terms and gained all of its social and political character from the major political shift towards the hegemony of neoliberalism that was initiated in the developed capitalist world in the early 1980s and rolled out thereafter.

In other words, while it is hard to conceive of a world without globalisation – and particularly so now given the extent of that interconnectedness – it certainly could *in theory* have been done differently, and it could have taken inspiration from a different set of ideological referents. At its heart, the term connotes only a spatial expansion of the terrain on which political economy functions. It was the neoliberal project that coloured it in practice, propelling it forward to become the ‘actually-existing’ globalisation that we live within and face today. We have not reached the fully-blown ‘hyperglobalisation’ – or ‘borderless world’ – envisioned by some liberals such as Kenichi Ohmae, wherein the market completely triumphs over states.<sup>8</sup> But, as the global financial crisis of 2007-8 showed, financial globalisation has been encouraged to a point where it is no longer properly under control and threatens the stability of the whole global political economy. The particular type of globalisation that has emerged is historically specific and distinctive to its times, and we must not make the mistake of forgetting this.

We must not make another mistake, either, which is to think that neoliberal globalisation has been all bad. This is really vital, especially as regards the position of the left. The problem here is that the bad aspects are both obvious to and much discussed by the left: the endemic instability (as above), the deepening trend towards inequality, the divisions enforced in societies between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in the process, the distorting pressure placed on local and national identities by homogenising global cultural artefacts. We could go on, and might also add – or rather reiterate – that it is unsurprising and perhaps even understandable that so many on the left might be quite happy to see the back of forty-odd years of globalisation that has brought with it a fair degree of misery.

But the reality is that there have also emerged other more satisfying features that characterise the neoliberal era of globalisation that need to be recognised in the balance: in general, the new opportunities opened up to so many people to live, work and love across borders and, specifically, the extraordinary economic growth and consequent escape from mass poverty attained by China, India and some other poor countries over the past three decades. Of course, the models of development pursued in many so-called ‘emerging countries’ have not been neoliberal in nature.<sup>9</sup> Nor can anyone deny that growth in these countries has been attained at considerable environmental and some social cost. Neither China nor India are ideal cases of just and sustainable development. But this massive reduction in global poverty nonetheless happened on neoliberalism’s watch, so to speak, and it is in our judgement hard to imagine that China’s and India’s economic take-off could have happened so dramatically absent their greater integration within a relatively open global economy.

What all of this suggests to us is that there can be, as the heading above suggests,

‘different globalisations’. If, as we have argued, the neoliberal variant has been a political construction born of a particular political moment and possessed of positive *and* negative aspects, then it must at least be possible to move on from it by addressing the bad and seeking to maintain and even improve the good. Indeed, the reality is that neoliberal globalisation itself has also changed over the different phases of its history, in ways that we simply do not have the space here to delineate.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, politics is always ultimately contingent on which economic and social forces are active and effective in any era, and it has been striking that alternative models of globalisation – including those that seek to wind it back – have lately begun to be advanced. Indeed, in the formulation of Ruchir Sharma, the Indian author and chief global strategist at Morgan Stanley, ‘deglobalisation’ has become ‘the new buzzword’ of our times.

We consider this trend to be highly problematic. Sharma first used the word in a newspaper article in July 2016, just a month after the vote for Brexit in the EU referendum in Britain. He argued that this event moved the world into ‘the AC era – after the crisis of 2008’. Brexit was less cause than symptom: ‘a manifestation of global forces unleashed by the 2008 global financial crisis, including slower growth, rising inequality, and a widening backlash against open borders and incumbent leaders’. The consequences would be rising protectionism, falling global capital flows and reduced numbers of economically-dynamic migrants. Accordingly, his conclusion was stark: ‘globalisation as we know it is over’.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as we know only too well, most of these strategies of ‘deglobalisation’ emanate from the right. There is much that it is very tempting to say about Trump and Trumpism – as well as Le Pen, Orban, Farage and others – but this is not the purpose of this article.<sup>12</sup> For, just as worryingly from our perspective, much ‘deglobalisation’ talk also flows from the left and it is to this vision of how best to react strategically to the complex legacy of neoliberal globalisation that we now turn.

### **‘Deglobalisation ... from the left’**

Many on the centre left in the developed capitalist world endorsed a *form* of globalisation about which they should have been more sceptical. There were plenty of others on the wider left, however, who always stood against the seemingly universal appeal of neoliberal globalisation. They were able to draw on a long history of critique of global capitalism. It is this strand of analysis that has again resurfaced today. Those advocating what we call ‘deglobalisation from the left’ advance a progressive left-wing – rather than a regressive right-wing – form of nationalism, but unfortunately reach much the same conclusion. Essentially, this is that globalisation needs to be pared back via a retreat behind domestic

borders, the difference (compared to the Trumpists) being that this process should ostensibly serve progressive ends, such as the re-creation of national industrial capacity and the building of a 'green state'.

This is an important intellectual and political development that needs to be taken seriously, not least because it challenges one of the supposed 'lessons of history' for the left. The Mitterrand experiment in France, which ran from May 1981 to March 1983, was the last time a full-throated socialist programme was attempted in an advanced capitalist country. As Jeffrey Sachs and Charles Wyplosz tell it, unemployment quickly rocketed to 10 per cent and growth collapsed. The emergence of European and global financial markets, as part of the incipient new neoliberal globalisation, meant that capital could easily flee. France's trade deficit widened precipitously, generating a major currency crisis in 1983 and an immediate political retreat by Mitterrand – the notorious '*tournant de la rigueur*'. By 1985 the French left had imposed even harsher austerity than the right-wing regime that preceded it.<sup>13</sup>

In common with many others, Arthur Goldhammer concluded that Mitterrand's programme was 'rooted in a faulty diagnosis of the evolving global economy in the 1980s'.<sup>14</sup> In consequence, a new orthodoxy was forged on the left in Europe: namely, that, under neoliberal globalisation, socialism – or even 'dark-red' social democracy – was impossible 'in one country'. This of course explains in part the fateful embrace of neoliberal globalisation by the European centre left in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Yet this totem is now questioned by progressive nationalists, albeit often under the guise of criticising the perceived hold of neoliberalism upon the EU, rather than the neoliberal nature of globalisation *per se*. The irony, as Goldhammer himself noted, is that the French architects of the EU's Maastricht Treaty, many of whom had served in the bitter end-days of the Mitterrand experiment, were so scarred by the experience that they designed many of the EU treaty frameworks (and later the Eurozone) in more inflexible ways than otherwise might have been the case.

The new left critique of globalisation takes many forms. In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's left-populist party, *La France Insoumise* (France Unbowed), calls for a new global economic regime based on ecological planning and 'protectionism with solidarity'.<sup>15</sup> As regards the EU, Mélenchon's current platform commits to renegotiating, or simply ignoring, the EU's 'neoliberal' treaties, but, as the mess in Britain intensifies, now explicitly disavows 'Frexit', leaving it to 'hard-right sovereignists'.<sup>16</sup> In Germany there has emerged a distinct intellectual position, sometimes dubbed the 'Cologne School', associated with the writings of Wolfgang Streeck, Fritz Scharpf and Martin Höpner.<sup>17</sup> Its claim is that the EU is 'a non-democratic non-state without demos' that is now lost to progressive causes and that the

fight-back against neoliberalism can only be built from 'retained' nation states.<sup>18</sup> As Manès Weisskircher has noted, these arguments have had an influence on the new 'party-movement' recently formed in Germany, *Aufstehen* (Rise Up).<sup>19</sup>

However, the most striking illustration of this new progressive nationalism is the case that has been made in Britain for a 'Lexit' (or left exit) from the EU, for which support exists in the Labour Party, including perhaps in the mind of its leader, Jeremy Corbyn.<sup>20</sup> Some have wrongly – and too blithely for our tastes – dismissed arguments for Lexit as little more than soundbites.<sup>21</sup> In fact, they draw on a substantial intellectual base and possess an inherent credibility. As advanced by its most sophisticated exponents – for example, Chris Bickerton and Richard Tuck, Samir Amin, Lee Jones, Costas Lapavistas or *Renewal's* Joe Guinan – the Lexit argument is that the EU has become too distant and anti-democratic and that governance needs therefore to be 're-scaled' back to the national level.<sup>22</sup> As Jones puts it, 'the EU emerged through the rescaling of governance to inter-elite networks insulated – by design – from popular control, which lock in anti-democratic and conservative policies'.<sup>23</sup> Typical in this view are the horrors of the Greek debt experience, which looms large in much Lexit analysis even though, as a non-Euro-zone member, Britain has never faced the same financial constraints as Greece.

There is undoubtedly something in this critique. The EU, as presently constituted, does suffer from a massive democratic deficit that has lately allowed deflationary German 'ordoliberal' hegemony to become firmly institutionalised.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the conventional Lexit reading of the EU strikes us as too partial. It says little or nothing about 'social Europe', or the EU's importance in global climate-change diplomacy, or its various initiatives to try to tax global financial transactions. It also paints the EU as fixed in stone, impervious to change, even though it argues, correctly (yet contradictorily), that the EU *embraced* neoliberalism as a result of *conscious decisions* made by political actors. In sum, the Lexit argument distorts, or underestimates, the complexity of the EU in order to make its case. This has the effect of obscuring, rather than illuminating, any serious understanding of the EU's influence over global political and economic processes.

It is worth reminding ourselves too that, socially, a supposedly progressive nationalism as expressed through Lexit is potentially just as regressive as its right-wing variant, particularly when it comes to questions of migration and free movement, the negative consequences of which threaten to fall in painfully racialised ways on the non-white working classes.<sup>25</sup> Other problems include the fact that – contrary to the almost-doctrinal belief on the part of many Lexit supporters – Brussels does relatively little to restrict a social-democratic programme of state-led industrial development. EU Single Market rules only proscribe certain

policy tools, like indiscriminate state subsidies, which are not that useful in a serious industrial strategy anyway, as they simply generate rent-seeking.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, the Single Market itself is an attempt to regulate, beyond the national level, global processes of production and consumption, and to do so in ways that balance the interests of workers and consumers against those of corporates. It could absolutely be argued that this balance has shifted too far in favour of the latter, but that is not a convincing argument for either undermining or completely evacuating the regulatory architecture itself.

Our primary purpose in this article is not, however, to adjudicate the Brexit debate, but rather to expose the big question unanswered by supporters of Lexit: how does Britain leaving the EU help in any way to resolve the neoliberal pathologies that concern them, and thus advance the interests of the left, either within Europe or globally? Brexit can only happen in three ways. Firstly, there is a 'hard' variant, which, in its original meaning, simply refers to leaving the Single Market. It would be a disaster for Britain's highly integrated economy, especially in high value-added sectors like car manufacturing and services.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, due to the uncertainty of the past three years, multinational automotive firms are *already* disinvesting, taking highly skilled jobs from places – often Labour constituencies – that have a desperate insufficiency of them. Secondly, there is an inordinately harder 'no deal' variant, which, as the Faragist 'ultras' in the Conservative Party and beyond have steadily warped the debate, has come to be wrongly described as 'hard Brexit' itself (we prefer to call it 'apocalypse Brexit', whilst Ben Rosamond, on Twitter, has also proposed 'Chernobyl Brexit'). Either term captures evocatively the scale of the ensuing disaster: if it ever came to pass, it would devastate the economy overnight by pulling the country out of all of its existing global trading relationships. Make no mistake: a left that did not stop either scenario would be complicit in the unfolding catastrophe and, more importantly, would be seen to be so.<sup>28</sup>

Yet 'no deal' is fallacious in any case: if it did happen, we would only be further down the rabbit hole, with the preposterous spectacle of 'soft' and 'hard' no-deal positions emerging: the former desiring some kind of new relationship with the EU (hence, not really 'no deal'); the latter effectively advocating never again signing any diplomatic treaty with Britain's previous major partner and still closest neighbour. One alternative to this nightmare prospect - the third Brexit option - is, of course, 'soft Brexit', which means leaving the political institutions of Europe while remaining in the Single Market. Economic logic has always dictated that this is where we should end up – even though it is essentially a second-class form of EU membership – but, at present, it seems further away than ever.<sup>29</sup> However, the inescapable reality is that, on hard or no-deal Brexit day zero, a weakened Britain still has to negotiate with the EU, with any substantive continuity deal looking, at

the very minimum, rather like that which was negotiated by Theresa May, and taking on much of the EU’s regulatory *acquis* anyway, just with less say over it.<sup>30</sup>

The only question is the extent to which this happens in a humiliating fashion to a resentful nation – which in turn depends on the statesmanship of those managing the process. Yet all of this, in the final analysis, is in any case a largely pointless sideshow. What really matters is that – after any kind of Brexit – this diminished country would still have to re-find its niche within the shifting structures of neoliberal globalisation, and to do so rapidly, under a degree of self-inflicted pressure somewhere on the scale between extensive and exorbitant. Here, Aditya Chakraborty’s disbelieving words capture the problem well: ‘Lexiteers ... just know 29 March [or, we might now say, 31 October] will bring the death of neoliberalism even though the neoliberals will still be in charge’.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, then, Lexit is a ‘faulty diagnosis’ – to repeat Goldhammer’s appraisal of Mitterrand – of the evolving global economy of the 2010s and beyond. Indeed, it runs away from the big challenge, which is how to tackle the power of ongoing but crisis-ridden and decaying neoliberal globalisation, specifically at the global level. It is surely *even harder* now to conceive of ‘socialism-in-one-country’ than it was in the 1980s. Global value chains and production networks are not going away: firms operating within them *want* transnational regulation and governance. Accordingly, the game that states have to play involves sitting at the top table influencing the development of these rules and systems in socially beneficial ways. If they do not, and try to deglobalise alone, the game just goes on without them. As Nissan and Honda have entirely predictably shown in recent months, cutting-edge firms will move to where regulation gives them the best and most predictable access to the biggest markets. Once that investment is gone, it is gone forever.<sup>32</sup> We on the left have to learn to play this game: we can seek power to build (and reform) global institutions in order to regulate global capitalist forces to serve progressive ends. But, if we choose not to, they will not simply evaporate. Right-wing, hyper-globalising neoliberals masquerading as nationalists will deregulate them in ways that serve regressive ends. In sum, ‘deglobalisation from the left’ is a chimera that avoids the crucial conundrum of how to offer global citizens substantive solutions to the problems created for them by neoliberal globalisation.

## Towards a progressive reglobalisation

Where, then, do we go from here? We have seen that neoliberal globalisation, as we have known it since the 1980s, has generated serious economic, environmental, social and political problems that significantly outweigh its achievements. We

do not feel on the left that that we need to rebut intellectually the arguments of ‘deglobalisation from the right’, even though we know (or should know) that they have to be defeated politically. We have just argued that the equivalent model of ‘deglobalisation from the left’ does not offer a satisfactory solution either, precisely because it proposes only a different form of negative retreat from globalisation from that advocated by the right. For many people, it seems as if we have run out of globalisation road.

There is, however, no reason to despair. For in the opening pages of this article we have already set out the intellectual bases of the move forward that we need to make. The *first* is to recognise the growing contradictions of a neoliberal globalisation undergoing a process of transformation, and accordingly to re-intensify our critique of it. Governments of the centre and centre left in the US, Britain and other parts of Europe have not only presided over much of the recent expansion of globalisation, but have entrenched its legitimacy by rendering it in effect a cross-party, almost universal, project of the developed capitalist world. The *second* is to acknowledge that globalisation could in theory have been done differently, and could therefore be different again in the future. Yes, structures of political economy exercise powerful constraining influences on actors, but, as Mark Blyth rightly reminded us some while ago, they ‘do not come with an instruction sheet’.<sup>33</sup>

So far, so good, it might then be said. The next moves we have to make are more contentious and take us to the heart of our broader argument. We suggest that globalisation, of some sort, is almost certainly here to stay. There can be no easy, painless or full-scale retreat from that in a world in which so much economic activity and so many of the prospects of economic development are now shaped by the complex linkages formed by global networks of wealth, value and production. The prospect, still held out by some, of a return to a pre-globalisation world of autonomous national economies is simply delusional. Moreover, even if we could get there, the process of doing so would carry with it a host of undesirable consequences, purchased at disproportionate political and social cost.

Yet, as we have already said, globalisation does not have to be of the neoliberal kind. Indeed, it is vital that, in future, it is not. As Paul Mason starkly put it after the Brexit referendum, ‘if we want to save globalisation, we have to ditch neoliberalism’.<sup>34</sup> In that article, he focused on making the case for an alternative post-neoliberal national economic model and did not address in detail what needed to be done at the global level of politics. But the corollary of his argument was that globalisation also needs to be reformed, or controlled more, or steered better, however you prefer to put it – and, in effect, to be rebuilt around particular post-neoliberal values. Of course, the slowly emerging post-neoliberal world is one

of pronounced flux and uncertainty, and we have been careful to avoid defining this term in this article (in large measure because it would take a further article to do so).<sup>35</sup> However, it is that amorphous, unwritten character that makes the contemporary period both so perplexing and so filled with possibility. It is – as far as any political era, with its myriad path dependencies, can be – a relatively blank canvas on which we can paint new ideas and envision new possibilities. So, rebuilding a better globalisation is definitely *theoretically* plausible, but is it possible in the real world of political practice?

We suggest that there is actually a lot that 'our' states, acting on behalf of us as 'their' citizens, can do collectively to reshape globalisation for the future into a different, and more attractive, set of economic, social and political processes. To quote a famous paper in our political economy community from a few years ago by John Hobson and M. Ramesh, 'globalisation makes of states what states make it'.<sup>36</sup> Put simply: they have acted previously to construct and adjust global orders, and this means that they can do so again. In any case, it is always important in politics to try to imagine what else might conceivably be done, especially in political circumstances that appear dire at first sight. So let us be bold and begin to examine what an attempted reconfiguration of globalisation by our states around a different set of assertively post-neoliberal values might look like and how it might be achieved. We propose to describe this as a process of 'reglobalisation', of 're-doing' globalisation better.

In making this argument we build on insights from other analysts. As long ago as 1997 the Harvard political economist Dani Rodrik famously asked in the title of a book *Has Globalisation Gone Too Far?*<sup>37</sup> By 2011 in *The Globalisation Paradox* he was calling for 'a sane globalisation' grounded in the tighter regulation of trade and finance and the reform of immigration policies. He suggested that 'we can and should tell a different story about globalization'. Instead of taking the 'hyper-globalisation' line and 'viewing it as a system that requires a single set of institutions or one principal economic superpower, we should accept it as a collection of diverse nations whose interactions are regulated by a thin layer of simple, transparent, and commonsense traffic rules'.<sup>38</sup> Rodrik has continued to press these views right up to the present.<sup>39</sup> Eric Helleiner's 2014 work *The Status Quo Crisis* described how the 2008 financial meltdown failed to lead to major changes in global governance, as many had initially anticipated. It reinforced the same broad point that Rodrik had made, by discerning in his assessment of what could come next a third scenario (between 'strengthened liberal multilateralism' and 'fragmentation and conflict'), which he dubbed 'cooperative decentralization'. Helleiner's book focuses on global financial governance, and acknowledges that in this sphere states could continue to develop certain minimum international

standards through the Financial Stability Bureau. But he adds a vital qualification: that, ‘rather than detailed one-size-fits-all rules, those standards could be based around broad principles that allowed significant national or regional policy space’.<sup>40</sup>

Most recently, in a short book, *The Globalisation Backlash*, published in early 2019, Colin Crouch has called ‘for moderate forces of left and right to stand together for a regulated globalisation against xenophobic forces’.<sup>41</sup> He dismisses ‘the illusion of economic sovereignty’ and suggests that ‘it is far more constructive’ to work out how ‘in some policy fields’ this idea ‘needs to give way to one of pooled sovereignty in pursuit of a better transnational regulation of the globalised economy’.<sup>42</sup>

These are all invaluable glimpses of what ‘reglobalisation’ has to be like (that is, sane, cooperative, decentralised, regulated), but they do not specify with enough precision the political bargain that necessarily has to underpin such a process if it is to gain ground and take off. To frame this properly, we have to look back to look forward, and, more precisely, to recall the precise definition of the ‘embedded liberalism’ that John Ruggie defined as the key ingredient restored to the world economy at Bretton Woods in 1944. As Ruggie saw it, the task at Bretton Woods was to manoeuvre between the extremes of both nationalism and liberalism and craft a ‘compromise’ (Ruggie’s telling, but often forgotten, description) that would ‘safeguard and even aid the quest for domestic stability without, at the same time, triggering the mutually destructive external consequences that had plagued the interwar period’. In a key passage he went on to specify the key features of this compromise in these words: ‘Unlike the economic nationalism of the thirties, it would be multilateral in character; unlike the liberalism of the gold standard and free trade, its multilateralism would be predicated upon domestic interventionism’.<sup>43</sup>

Ruggie’s analysis contains the clue that opens up the politics of ‘reglobalisation’. We need to move now in 2019 to begin to chart a way towards what we describe as ‘re-embedded post-neoliberalism’. Within this framework of global governance, states would again be permitted to pursue legitimate social purposes and enjoy the necessary national policy space to manage successfully their economic development. This permission – or encouragement – would be generated by a multilateralism that was still necessarily liberal in character, but ‘dialled down’ substantially in intensity from the excesses of the neoliberal era.

It will certainly not be easy to engineer the stability, legitimacy and fairness that must be the essence of such a new global compromise, but there are lots of changes that can practically be made within global governance that would bring us nearer to this goal. We conclude therefore with a little ‘thought experiment’ and ask what a recasting of globalisation around post-neoliberal values might

begin to look like. We start by imagining what would happen if the following political moves were to occur in the not too distant future:

- Leading global states agree to assess at each annual Group of 20 summit the condition of the global economy (i.e. growth, investment, employment, inflation) and agree amongst themselves the necessary national measures best to foster its continued health and dynamism.
- All states whose societies contain inadequately funded and dubiously controlled banks and other financial institutions sign a compact mandating their own national supervisory bodies to work in conjunction with each other, supported by the appropriate global bodies, to bring them back under satisfactory regulatory control.
- Key states that are losing badly-needed tax revenue to the unseen hands of global corporate tax management decide collectively to challenge their declining fiscal bases by making the necessary legal changes to empower them to collect taxes more effectively from global business actors, possibly by establishing some kind of incipient 'world tax authority'.
- New commitments are made by the Boards of Governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to take forward still further the rebalancing of voting powers between member-states that has tentatively been started, although as yet without great impact or full implementation, over the past few years.
- Member-states of the World Trade Organisation react to its current impasse by embarking on serious reform of the organisation with a view to re-orienting its purposes in future around socially progressive and egalitarian, as well as merely trade-expansionist, goals.
- All states negotiate and sign an agreement, brokered by the International Labour Organisation, whereby their governments commit to make the necessary changes at national level to rebuild the rights of trade unions and to do this in a mutual, non-competitive way, thereby again enabling the bodies that represent workers to defend their members in effective and proper fashion as and when necessary.
- Leading global states act to break the log-jam caused by the current management of climate change negotiations by the United Nations and move to establish a new global institution tasked with bringing climate change fully into the global policy debate alongside issues of growth, stability and development where it belongs.

We could easily add in other possible reformist moves, but hope that we have said enough for the moment to clothe the vision of 'reglobalisation' in some potentially practicable initiatives and measures. What is presently blocking such a programme is obviously politics. But serious politics is always about working incrementally towards

an attractive and plausible vision, even if it presently seems far off or unattainable. We suggest that ‘reglobalisation’ is a far sounder platform upon which to build progressive global left politics than the dubious promises of ‘deglobalisation’.

To put it more directly: our enemy is not globalisation, it is neoliberalism. The well-intended, but nonetheless troubling, dalliance of some on the left with forms of nationalism that seek a retreat from the global stage is a dead end. Worse, they threaten to give succour to a regressive, right-wing project that paradoxically seeks to entrench yet-more pathological forms of neoliberalism. That this may be inadvertent is no excuse. The irony is that, as we seek to enter fully into the post-neoliberal era, we have a greater chance to shape globalisation in ways that favour our interests than at any time in recent memory. The range of genuinely ‘global’ challenges – from automation, digitisation and the scale of monopolistic power amongst the major technology firms, to tax and finance, climate change, mass migration and pronounced demographic shifts – demands that we do so. To avoid that challenge at this point in time – to choose to remain trapped intellectually in the cul-de-sac of ‘progressive nationalism’ – would be both a gross abdication of responsibility and a staggering missed opportunity for the left. This failure would be predicated, moreover, on a tragically misguided interpretation of the world.<sup>44</sup> Globalisation is not going away. Our only option is to advance a progressive globalism over a regressive nationalism, and to avoid handing the advantage to the neoliberals once again.

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## Notes

1. On the question of the ‘supposed’ development of ‘advanced’ countries, see Matthew L. Bishop and Anthony Payne, ‘Is Britain “un-developing” before our eyes?’ *SPERI Comment*, 29 and 30 January 2019. Part One: <https://bit.ly/2WAeRTe> and Part Two: <https://bit.ly/2WDMAuP>.
2. See Cemal Burak Tansel (ed.), *States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order*, Rowman and Littlefield, London 2017.
3. For examples of how seemingly mundane products and activities are fundamentally ‘global’ and ‘political’ in nature, see the various excellent short pieces on the *International Political Economy of Everyday Life* (I-PEEL) initiative by academics at Warwick University: <http://i-peel.org/>.

4. See Colin Hay, ‘What place for ideas in the structure-agency debate? Globalisation as a “process without a subject”’, 2001: [http://www.criticalrealism.com/archive/cshay\\_wpisad.html](http://www.criticalrealism.com/archive/cshay_wpisad.html).
5. David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1999, p2.
6. For a more detailed version of the argument in this passage, see Anthony Payne, ‘Who dun Brexit’: “globalisation” or global neoliberalism?’, *SPERI Comment*, 26 July 2016, at <https://bit.ly/2Xadcb3>.
7. Tony Blair, ‘Leader’s Speech, Labour Party Conference, Brighton, 27 September, 2005 at <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=182>
8. Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in an Interlinked Economy*, Collins, London 1990.
9. See Matthew L. Bishop, ‘Rethinking the political economy of development beyond the “rise of the BRICS”’, *SPERI Paper No 30*, Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute, 2016: <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Beyond-the-Rise-of-the-BRICS.pdf>.
10. Amongst the voluminous literature on this subject, four especially good books are: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005; Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010; Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survives the Meltdown*, Verso, London 2013; and William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*, Sage, New York 2014.
11. Ruchir Sharma, ‘Globalisation as we know it is over – and Brexit is the biggest sign yet’, *Guardian*, 28 July 2016: <https://bit.ly/2at7sBw>.
12. We do discuss this, however, in the blog series on which much of this piece is based: Matthew L. Bishop and Anthony Payne, ‘The political economies of different globalisations Part Two: “deglobalisation from the right”’, *SPERI Comment*, 14 March 2019: <https://bit.ly/2XK7oLE>.
13. Jeffrey Sachs and Charles Wyplosz, ‘The economic consequences of President Mitterrand’, *Economic Policy*, Vol 1 Issue 2, 1986.
14. Arthur Goldhammer, ‘How French socialism built – and destroyed – the European Union’, *Foreign Policy*, 9 September 2016: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/09/how-french-socialism-built-and-destroyed-the-european-union/>.
15. Harrison Stetler, ‘The rise of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and France’s “post-democracy”’, *The New Republic*, 18 April 2017: <https://bit.ly/2WJlebF>.
16. See Paul Leleu, ‘Europe : Mélenchon abandonne le Frexit à la droite’, *Agora Vox*, 11 September 2018: <https://www.agoravox.fr/tribune-libre/article/europe-melenchon-abandonne-le-207556>.
17. The most substantial statement of this position is found in Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*, Verso, London 2017. But see also the work of Fritz Scharpf at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wanAHt9p7Zg> and Martin Höpner at <https://www.socialeurope.eu/social-europe-is-a-myth>.

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21. See Owen Worth, 'Lexit: did it ever really exist?', *Marxist Sociology Blog*, 5 December 2018: <https://bit.ly/31yIms4>.
22. Christopher Bickerton and Richard Tuck, 'A Brexit proposal', *Briefings for Brexit*, August 2018: <https://briefingsforbrexit.com/a-brexit-proposal-by-christopher-bickerton-and-richard-tuck/>; Samir Amin, 'Brexit and the EU implosion: national sovereignty – for what purpose?', *Monthly Review Online*, August 2016: <https://mronline.org/2016/08/08/amin080816-html/>; Lee Jones, 'The EU referendum: Brexit, the politics of scale and state transformation', *The Disorder of Things*, May 2016: <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2016/05/24/the-eu-referendum-brexit-the-politics-of-scale-and-state-transformation/>; Costas Lapavistas, *The Left Case Against the EU*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2019; Joe Guinan, 'Forbidden fruit: the neglected political economy of Lexit', *IPPR Progressive Review*, Vol 24, Issue 1, 2017.
23. Jones, 'EU referendum'.
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25. See: Robbie Shilliam, *Race and the Undeserving Poor*, Agenda Publishing, Newcastle 2018; and Owen Parker, 'The Labour Party's free movement dilemma', *SPERI Comment*, 30 July 2017: <https://bit.ly/2IDFIc1>.
26. On Lexit, see: Simon Wren-Lewis, 'Lexit', *Mainly Macro*, 24 July 2017: <https://bit.ly/2MMCyRN>; 'Lexit misdirection', *Mainly Macro*, 6 January 2019: <https://bit.ly/2RdtfQe>; on state-led development see: Matthew L. Bishop and Anthony Payne et al, 'Revisiting the developmental state', *SPERI Paper No 43*, Sheffield Political Research Institute, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2RhoIvX>.
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28. On the perversion of Brexit terminology, see Chris Grey, 'How the Hard Brexit goalposts shifted', *Prospect*, 5 September 2018: <https://bit.ly/2liLX6h>.
29. See Matthew L. Bishop, 'Brexit: making the unpolishable sparkle?', *SPERI Comment*, 13 July 2018: <https://bit.ly/2uIeREy>.
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