

## Epilogue

# Pauperisation: the Process beyond Poverty

**I**N FUTURE, we need to burrow down much more deeply into the phenomenon of poverty. Its nature has changed: because the material achievements of the past 30 years in some redeveloping countries have been offset by a steep rise in what we call *pauperisation*. This condition touches everyone on both sides of the income divide. Here we present this concept, the evidence for which is elaborated at length elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

In 1994 the United Nations argued that the world had to move beyond national security – the notion that was narrowly concerned with territorial imperatives, the need to guard against external aggressors. We now required “another profound transition in thinking – from nuclear security to human security”.<sup>2</sup> This was defined by four characteristics. Human security is a *universal* concern, the components of which were *interdependent*. Human security was easier to ensure through *early prevention*, and was *people-centred*. “It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much

access they have to market and social opportunities – and whether they live in conflict or in peace.”<sup>3</sup>

This was a restatement of the human rights doctrine embodied in the UN’s foundation document. But since 1948, people’s need for security has been systematically abused. Insecurity has deepened in the rich nations (most notably in the Anglo-American zone), let alone in those countries populated by people living on less than \$1-a-day.

- In the UK the geographical maldistribution of wealth and poverty since 1970, explained elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> has been confirmed by exhaustive examination of official statistics.

The historic trend is away from equality. Wealthy areas (and classes and individuals) have tended to become disproportionately wealthier. An increasing polarisation is driving spatially deeper wedges between rich and poor, fragmenting communities to the point where, in some city locations, over half of all households are deemed to be ‘breadline poor’.<sup>5</sup>

- In the USA, tens of millions of families survive only because mothers seek employment to cover the cost of the mortgage. Real wages have been falling since about 1975. This decline in material standards is reflected in the erosion in the American citizen’s constitutional ‘right’ to happiness.<sup>6</sup>

According to one estimate, between 1979 and 2004 the pre-tax incomes of the top 1% of Americans had increased by \$664bn (\$600,000 per family), an increase of 43%. The lower 80% of families were worse off by \$7,000 in income

per family (a 14% loss) – with the trend continuing to widen the gap.<sup>7</sup>

We can see that the capitalist model does not provide for sustainable growth; nor does it deliver equity between individuals or classes. But the problem that we wish to highlight is this: the material deprivation index fails to capture the full horror that follows the separation of people from their natural environment.

Pauperisation can be observed in the way that some indigenous peoples find themselves marooned on modern versions of reservations. Their culture began to implode the moment they were separated from ancient land rights. Their lives ruptured from traditional cultural forms of activity, they seek solace in drugs, alcohol and other self-destructive behaviour. The material welfare made available by government is no protection against the trauma that results from personal and group detachment from their ecological niche. Poverty slides into the pauperisation of personality and community.

According to the UN, we would all benefit from a general mobilisation in favour of ‘human security’,

by responding to the threat of global poverty travelling across international borders in the form of drugs, HIV/AIDS, climate change, illegal migration and terrorism.<sup>8</sup>

But the UN’s notion of human security fails to address the process of pauperisation. Furthermore, even the need for security cannot be achieved if we do not restore the role of land in our lives.

Pauperisation encompasses material, psychic and spiritual

forms of deprivation. A country's *per capita* income can rise – suggesting it is reducing poverty – while at the same time the welfare of the population may deteriorate. The growth in national income can be associated (as we have seen most-tragically in post-Soviet Russia) with a desperate deterioration in the quality of people's lives.

The concept of *potential* is crucial to a consideration of what we mean by pauperisation. It is the measure of achievements unrealised. It reminds us of how we could all enjoy peace and the economics of abundance. But abundance does not allude to material satiation. It refers to that contentment which comes with the state of liberty – of not being subjected to arbitrary restraints imposed by others, and of being equipped to challenge oneself to achieve personal goals.

The UN's notion of human security is underpinned by a doctrine of 'human rights' that pauperises people in the rich as well as in the poor regions of the world. In England and Wales, for example, one in three children still live in poverty.<sup>9</sup> This is relative poverty: it is impossible to compare the poor children of England to the poor children of Malawi. But this poverty contributes to the collective sense of a pervasive social malaise which is now spawning acts of desperation. These include the self-destructive acts of suicide bombers who are reared in families that do not lack material resources, but who experience a profound sense of deprivation and alienation.

We do not claim that fiscal reform will be the instant answer to religious fanatics or corporate bullies. We do claim that the agenda set out in Part 3 provides the framework for a new sense of justice in our relationships both with each

other and with Earth. This fiscal agenda assumes critical importance when we realise that narrowly defined poverty, by itself, cannot explain the global crises that are converging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The billion people who suffer the \$1-a-day material deprivation constitute but one of four inter-related global challenges. The other three are:

- **Terrorism.** No corner on earth is free of this brand of violence, which is used as a tool of politics by other means. *Is force really the optimum way to address the causes that inspire what President George W Bush called "the axis of evil"?*
- **The eco-crisis.** All nations agree that nature *is*, now, about to wreak revenge on humanity. We will all be, affected by climatic shifts. *Should we allow the polluters to set the terms for reducing that damage?*
- **International trade.** When two billion people from the ex-socialist East arrived in the market economy, the demand for protectionism was resurrected in the West. That demand will be heightened as the global economy dives into a recession.<sup>10</sup> *Should trade be framed to suit the corporate rent-seekers?*

The correct reforms will not be adopted without a full understanding of the facts by people with open minds. The price of failure is beyond our present comprehension.