
**Speech to Rights and Humanity
Emergency Meeting
Brendan Barber, TUC General Secretary
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Jobs, justice, climate: why we are marching on 28 March

I want to set out very briefly some thoughts about how we got here, where we are, and how we get out of the mess we're in.

First, the causes of the crisis.

Many profound things have been said about the details of the global credit crunch, toxic debts and so on.

In simple terms, the crisis was caused by a dysfunctional business model. For thirty years, we've been told that:

- state intervention was not just useless, but actively harmful;
- regulations were not just ineffective but downright destructive; and
- equality was not just a pipedream but actually caused economic decline.

And underpinning it all, in trade negotiations and in courts, in countries all over the world, trade unionism was seen as either 'the enemy within' or out of date.

Greed was, officially, good. And growth was positive no matter what it did to people's jobs, people's societies or people's environment.

Eventually, this fundamentally unsustainable system broke down.

So, where are we now?

Many Governments, many commentators, and even a few electorates, have changed their positions enormously over the last few months.

I am glad to see that, unlike in the previous Great Depression of the 1930s, almost everyone has understood immediately that things have changed, and that the nostrums of the 1980s and 1990s are dead.

But generally, state intervention is back in fashion, gross displays of inequality are out, and the G20's leaders are coming to London in five weeks' time to discuss re-regulating the global financial system.

In America, the new President is saying that trade unions aren't part of the problem, we're part of the solution.

These are the positives. Unfortunately, there are a lot of negatives too.

Many workers are feeling more than a pinch. Woolworths has closed down leaving 30,000 redundant. BMW has sacked 800 temporary workers at an hour's notice. Tens of thousands of people are worried about their jobs.

Around the world, similar problems are being experienced. And we know that the crisis will be worse in the poorer countries, just as in the UK it is the poorest who are hardest hit.

Although most people are now heading in the same, positive direction, we aren't getting there fast enough, and some people just don't get it or respond unconsciously in line not with the new realities but by repeating the errors of the past.

A few hundred yards away at Lancaster House, the United National Industrial Development Organisation – UNIDO - has today launched a report on how the poorest countries can industrialise sustainably and escape poverty through trade in goods rather than relying on natural resources.

That's absolutely the right objective. It mirrors the way we became a developed economy, and it provides the scope for decent jobs, green jobs and sustainable jobs.

It is, primarily, the race to the top, not the race to the bottom.

However, one of the UNIDO recommendations is worrying. Evidence yet again that although everything has changed, sometimes the solutions proposed reflect the old ways of thinking.

This is the proposal that we should relax the country of origin principles in world trade. It sounds positive, but trade unions in the textile and other sectors fear it would just lead to increased competition over wages and jobs being leached from poor countries like Bangladesh who need them most.

We need more trade, and we need more aid for that, and more industrialisation. But not at the expense of decent jobs at decent wages. This is not protectionism for the developed countries – when the multi-fibre agreement ended, it wasn't our jobs or wages that were threatened.

It is about protecting people on low wages from seeing them fall even lower, and people in insecure jobs seeing them disappear altogether.

Finally, over all of us, hang the lasting results of the last thirty years of deregulated, unequal, greedy growth: climate change that threatens our future, and global poverty that scars our present.

Because, turning to my third point, these issues are all connected.

We cannot solve the global recession without tackling poverty.

We cannot maintain growth if it doesn't create jobs, raise wages, and if it isn't environmentally safe.

We cannot tackle global poverty without state intervention and public services.

Indeed, creating more green jobs will help us reduce unemployment. Spending more money on overseas aid will stimulate demand faster than any tax cut.

And building stronger public services – health, education and water – is the best route to eradicating poverty.

Last week, the UK House Commons' International Development Committee issued a welcome report which called on G20 nations not to cut back on overseas aid – indeed, they must continue to increase it. On Saturday Irish trade unionists were out demonstrating against, among other things, their Government's decision to cut overseas aid. These are important and timely debates.

The leaders of the G20 need to tackle these issues, but we need more than sticking plasters. We need a new system – a new Bretton Woods.

With more effective financial regulation.

More democratic governance of the international institutions.

And more equality.

In a month's time, just before the G20 Leaders' Summit, British trade unionists will be taking to the streets. They will be joined by development NGOs, climate change campaigners, faith groups and others.

We call our march "Put People First: Jobs, Justice and Climate" because those are the issues we want action on from the G20.

I invite you all to join us.

- Brendan Barber was speaking at the Rights and Humanity Emergency Meeting, "Ubuntu: From Crisis to A Just and Sustainable World Economy" at South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, London