

The rich have met

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The world's richest countries met in Brisbane, Australia, last week-end for their annual summit. They are only 20 in the exclusive Group of Twenty or, G20, as it is called, but their economies represent over 80 percent of the world's GDP and three-quarters of the world trade. In addition, the G20 engage with 'everybody who counts', organizations and guest countries, and more. Over 4000 delegates were in Brisbane, and no less than 2500 media representatives. The Pope, too, sent his letter, warning against 'market fundamentalism' and drawing attention to social inclusion issues. The results of the meeting are not always impressive, but its role and function as a forum and meeting place for world leaders to discuss issues, is defended.

This year's host, the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said that this was the most important meeting his country had ever hosted. Maybe not quite correct, but still an enthusiastic sentiment, expressed by one of the world's staunchest conservative leaders, protective of the upper classes, either they are countries, economies, or peoples.

Since the 'old world' countries don't always have the economic growth they wish they had, they give special attention to cooperation with countries with growth, such as India and China where the current growth rates are 5-6 percent. And everlasting growth is a prerequisite of capitalism, it seems, and for peace and stability to prevail. Let us hope, though, that now when the 'old world' countries only experience minimal growth, they may seek new ways to find sustainable development without economic growth. They should focus on social and cultural factors, including greater equality among people, groups and individuals.

Since the 'old world' countries have aging populations, as opposed to the emerging countries' youthful outlook, there is a challenge to create meaningful and productive lives for old people without economic growth. Economic growth is not an end in itself; it is a means for other purposes, notably better and more meaningful lives for the people. In future, 'development' must be much less about material and economic development in countries which already have enough. It must be about 'real development', probably within a more regulated capitalism.

For the G20 leaders, it is still too difficult to address such issues, as they are living in the old model, worried about how to increase growth and recover after the recession. They cannot afford to question the capitalist model – although most others do.

The rich 'old world' countries have for several decades had large influxes of immigrants from poorer countries. They help keep their economies going, yes, even growing. In future, there are major immigration issues that must be solved, indeed cultural and religious issues. There are many ways and degrees of integration, assimilation and multiculturalism.

Since many rich 'old world' countries are sparsely populated, as opposed to the poorer countries, larger south-north migration may be both likely and need. In addition, it would also be a moral responsibility to open the borders. Russia and Canada are examples of lands with huge territories and large unexploited natural resources. Their population density, with less than ten people per square kilometer can and should be increased; the same goes for the small Nordic countries.

The G20 leader should have discussed immigration and other forced and voluntary migration issues, with open mind to unorthodox models. Alas, they didn't. Few politicians in the West do – yet. That is worrying since it is one of the most dividing fields in European and American politics; just recall the last election in France, the recent Swedish election, and the current debate in USA, where the president seems to use executive order to get

needed legislation. The World Trade Organization (WTO) allowed free movement of goods and capital, but not of people. Now, that must be debated, albeit belatedly.

The G20 meeting this year seems to have been more ideological than usual, defending its members' privileges. I hope that in future, the G20 leader can discuss ideology in a more philosophical way, admitting that they don't have all answer at the outset. It would be good for all if the G20 leaders could discuss their doubts about development. Obviously, when the TV cameras are switched off, they all have doubts about the many complicated issues that face our world, such as the lack of international, national and local equality. Also, extremism and the lack of balanced views have to do with inequality; if we have broader awareness in religious, social, cultural and economic fields, we will not be extreme, but be balanced.

At this year's G20 meeting, there was open season for 'Putin bashing', at least by Western leaders as reported by the Western media at least. The conservative Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper broke with diplomatic etiquette and rules of good behavior his mother surely taught him when he met Putin, saying: 'I guess I'll shake your hand but I have only one thing to say to: You need to get out of Ukraine.'

That draws attention to an important aspect of international discussion and dialogue: How can we talk in order to learn and understand, rather than just telling off those we disagree with, and portray ourselves as righteous? Maybe politician can only be honest after they have retired, evidenced a few weeks ago, when two 83-year old retired leaders warned against further hawkish and hostile policies against Russia. The ex-leaders were Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union when it was dissolved, and Thorvald Stoltenberg, a former long-term Norwegian minister of defense and foreign affairs, and the father of the fresh NATO chief, Jens Stoltenberg. Thanks for telling us what you think!

Wise leaders base decisions and advice on knowledge, experience and independence. They exchange their views with the people and other leaders. Next year, when the G20 leaders meet in Turkey, they must feel free to take the risk of discussing openly the difficult issues of our time, and that of future generation. Yes, they talked about climate change in Brisbane, although the Australian chair had said that he didn't want the agenda to be 'cluttered' by subjects that would distract from economic growth. Somebody should have helped him with his homework.

I believe that the G20 can become a more important forum, to benefit the leaders and the world if they discuss the many difficult and uncertain questions that face humanity. The 'old world' would become stronger, and the whole world better – perhaps even with a few grains of betterment trickling down to ordinary men and women in Pakistan, too.

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