



Concluding Comments

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Poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals: From the Local to the Global

The Sixth Peter Townsend Memorial Conference

27-29 April 2021 (online)

Peter Townsend: academic excellence and the passionate pursuit of socially justice

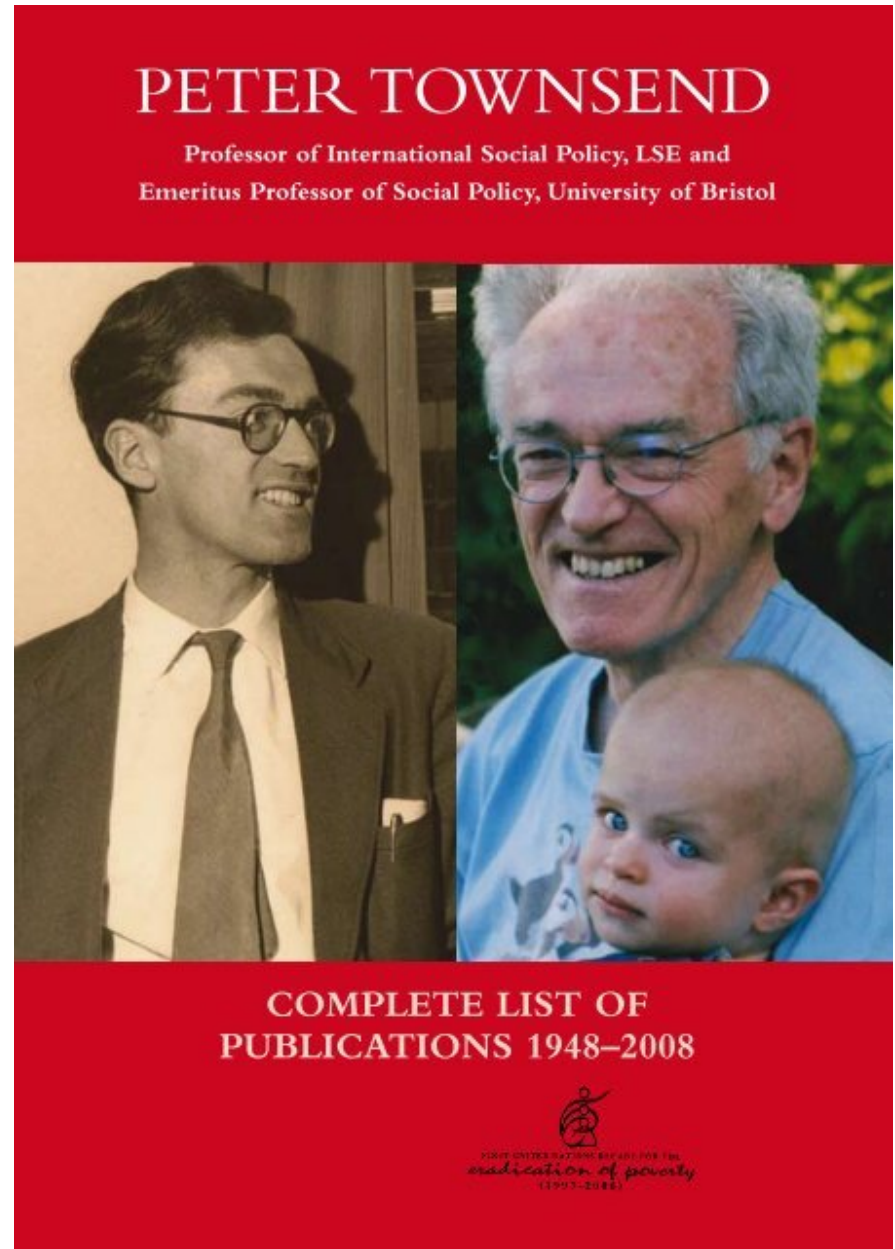
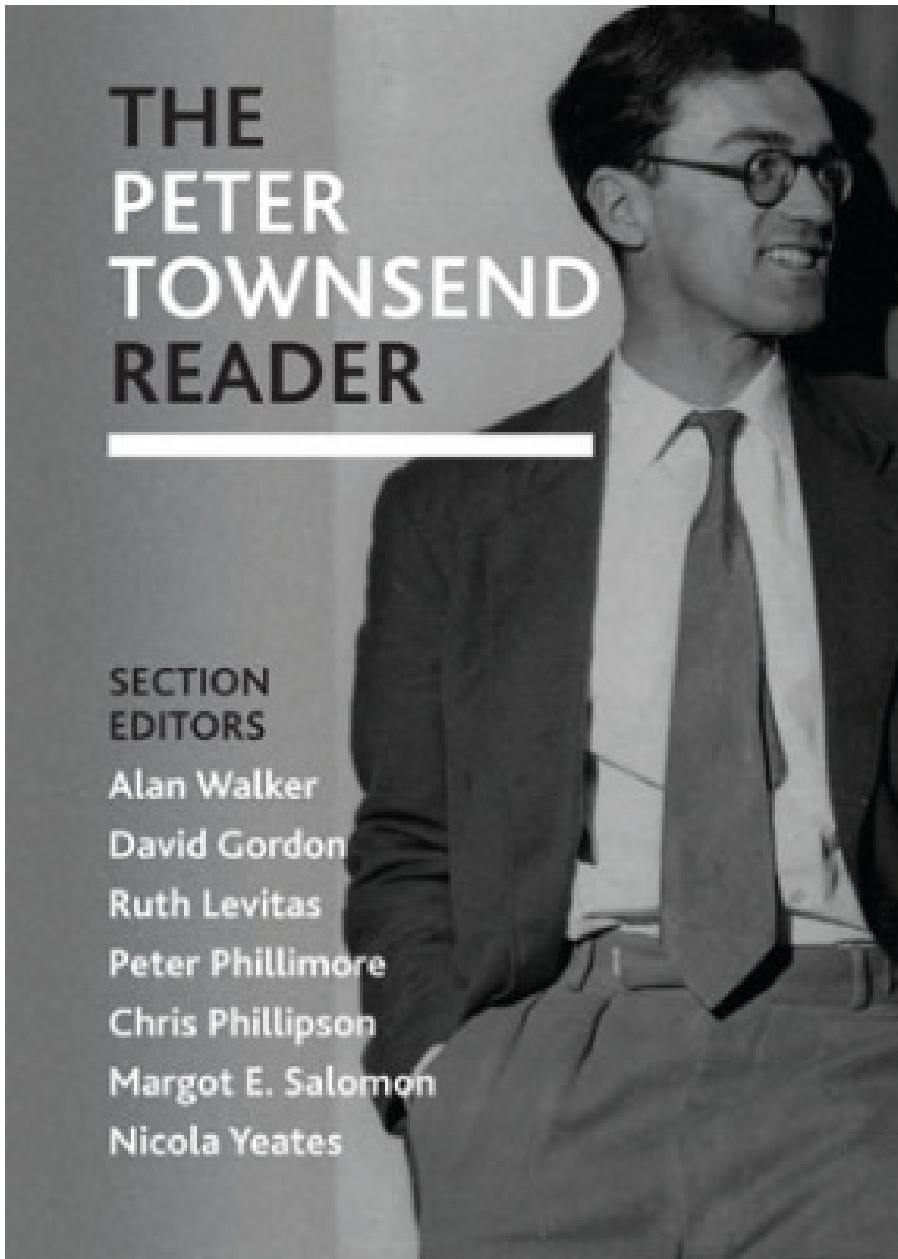
Professor Peter Townsend (1928-2009) was one of Britain's greatest social scientists.

He made seminal contributions to the study of inequalities in health, disability, social care of the elderly, human rights, domestic and international social policy.

He is, however, best known for his lifelong work which revolutionised both the theory and practice of poverty research.

He campaigned tirelessly to try to improve conditions for the most excluded and vulnerable, both nationally and globally, and to create a more equal and socially just society.

UNICEF acknowledged the debt they owed to him with the following tribute: *“Peter Townsend will be missed by UNICEF, but even more by the millions of poor children around the world, who never heard his voice, but whom he never forgot either in his research or in his advocacy, nor, most importantly, in his heart. Yet his voice will echo beyond his lifetime, and continue to influence efforts to end child poverty, in the rich and the poor world.”*



<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/poverty/downloads/background/petertownsendbibliography.pdf>

Poverty and Riches

- Cannot explain poverty in isolation of the distribution of all resources in society.
- There can be no understanding of poverty in a society without studying the rich.
- Townsend continually emphasised that poverty was fundamentally 'a problem of riches' and argued for profound changes in the structures of power and privilege:

" The institutions which create or disadvantage the poor at the same time as they create or advantage the rich are institutions which have to be reconstructed " (1988:59).

The Worst Violation of Human Rights

“Extreme poverty to me is the greatest denial of the exercise of human rights. You don't vote, you don't participate in any political activity, your views aren't listened to, you have no food, you have no shelter, your children are dying of preventable diseases - you don't even have the right to clean water. It's a denial of the dignity and worth of each individual which is what the Universal Declaration proclaims.”

(Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2002, BBC Talking Point -

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/forum/1673034.stm)

Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty & Human Rights 2019

Although the United Kingdom is the world's fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated.

The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos. A booming economy, high employment and a budget surplus have not reversed austerity, a policy pursued more as an ideological than an economic agenda.“

Source: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/112/13/PDF/G1911213.pdf?OpenElement>

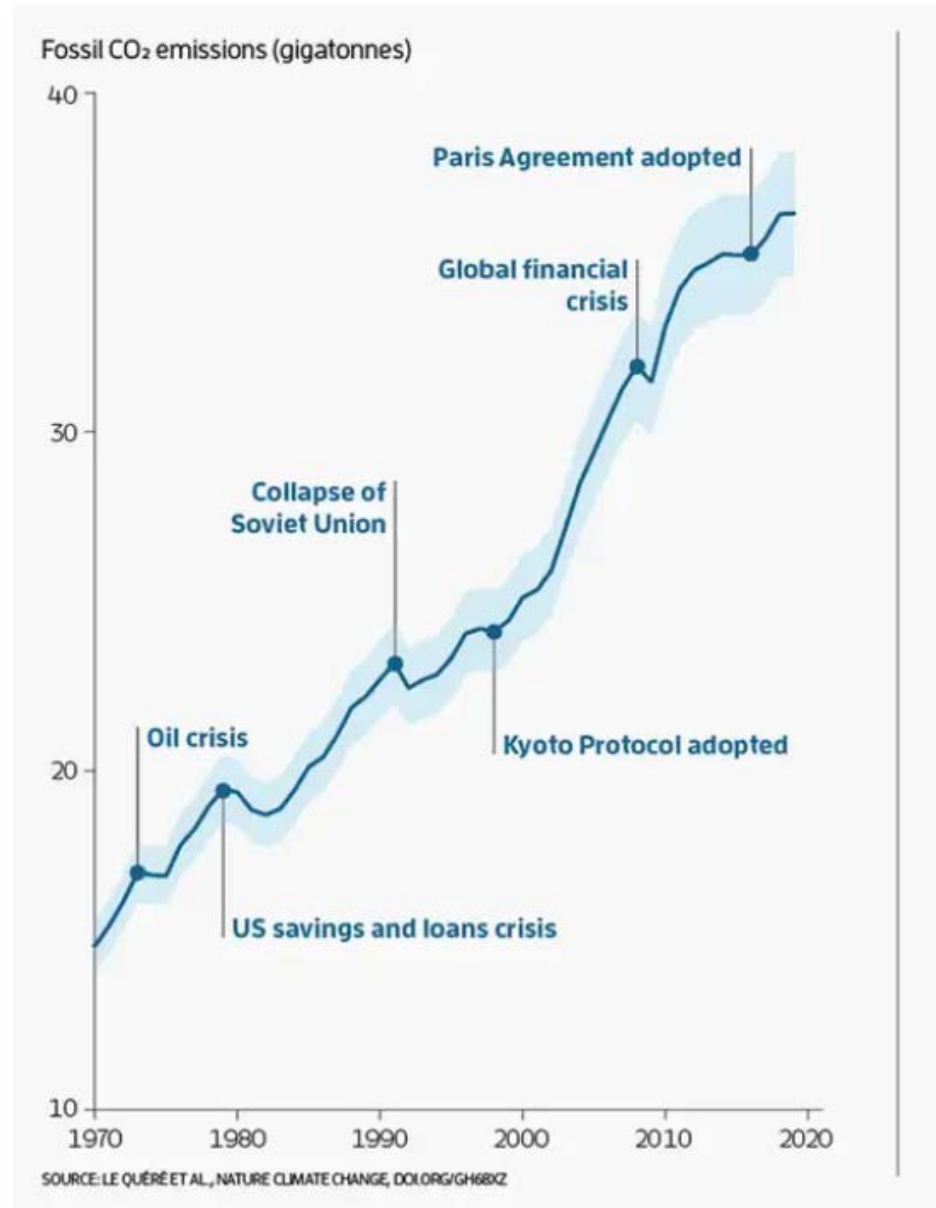
Department of Work & Pensions Fact Check on the UN Special Rapporteur's Report

“We did a fact check of the special rapporteur’s report. He made a lot of good points, it was factually correct...in terms of the facts, in terms of austerity, and cuts to local government funding, in terms of the reliance that we have on the labour market and the risk that we have if there was a recession, all of those things were really good points that we have taken on board, we should take on board.”

Donna Ward, DWP’s Policy Director for Children, Families and Disadvantage evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee 12/6/2019 – 10:13am

<https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/dc8af560-fd77-4196-922b-a80731799097>

Both Poverty and Climate Change are Urgent Post Pandemic Global Problems



Previous crises caused only blips in the trend of rising emissions – and covid-19 may be no different

Poverty: Key Messages from Research

Poverty is not a Behaviour

Since the work of Charles Booth (1902-03), Seebohm Rowntree (1901) and their Victorian and Edwardian contemporaries repeated studies have shown that the primary cause of poverty is not the ‘bad’ behaviour of the poor.

Poverty is primarily caused by structural factors, such as low wages, a lack of jobs, the lack of state provision to adequately compensate those engaged in unpaid work – particularly caring work, etc.

Despite intensive research by often highly partisan researchers, as far as I am aware there are no credible scientific studies which show that any significant group of people are poor as a result of indolent, feckless, skiving or criminal behaviour.

Poverty is not a Disease

Poverty is not like syphilis a curse across the generations, you cannot catch poverty from your parents nor pass it onto your friends, relatives or children. Research has shown that poor adults and children do not have a 'culture of poverty' and tend to have similar aspirations to the rest of the population.

Poor children are of course more likely, than their richer peers, to become poor adults but this is largely due to structural reasons rather than any 'cycle of poverty' or 'transmission' of poverty.

Redistribution is the only Solution to Child Poverty

The economics are very simple and are entirely concerned with redistribution – where sufficient resources are redistributed from adults to children there is no child poverty; where insufficient resources are redistributed from adults to children child poverty is inevitable

Children cannot and should not do paid work to generate the resources they need to escape from poverty. This is the job of adults.

Children should be spending their time playing and learning not working at paid labour.

Child Poverty Eradication Strategy

1. Increasing the income of poor families with children.
2. Ensure that, as far as possible, children living in low income families are not materially and socially deprived.
3. Ensure that children are not malnourished and food insecure.
4. Provide access to safe drinking water, sanitation and electricity.
5. Provide universal health coverage for children, particularly for children under five years old.
6. Reduce the hidden costs of education and provide free school meals.
7. Help young people participate effectively in education and training – including through the provision of special grants where needed to cover education related costs.
8. Promote and facilitate employment for parents in low-income families.
9. Help low-income parents with the skills needed to secure employment and improve agricultural production.
10. Help young people take advantage of employment opportunities. This is of critical importance as increasing numbers of children reach working age.
11. Protect children from harmful work.
12. Support the parenting of children.
13. Encourage children's participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities.
14. Help young people participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their community.
15. Ensure that all children grow up in decent housing.
16. Ensure that all children grow up in safe and cohesive communities.

Effective and Efficient Anti-Poverty Measures

Progressive tax and income policies, with income redistribution from ‘rich’ to ‘poor’ and from men to women. As well as redistribution of income across an individual’s life span by taxing and reducing income levels in middle age balanced with then paying social benefits to increase income during childhood and old age

Active labour market interventions to create high quality jobs. Enforcement of minimum standards on wages and working conditions of the low paid within an international framework.

Universal social insurance and public social services - the ‘basic needs services’ – by introducing internationally agreed minimum levels of benefit – such as International Labour Convention No. 202 concerning Universal Social Protection Floors

Greater accountability and increased social and democratic control over trans-national corporations and international agencies, to remedy the ‘democratic deficit’.