



3 THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The patterns of global development draw more and more nations into some form of direct or indirect relationship. For example, even those which choose to follow their own solitary path cannot avoid the environmental concerns which are now emerging. Other nations, less intent on a policy of separation, find their national economies and national structures increasingly influenced and determined by a wider set of relationships. These relationships help form the national conditions under which young people live, and within which they need to be understood.

There is no easy or quick way to characterise international relations. Some nations are more powerful than others, some more influential than others. The less powerful and less influential countries may well feel a threat to their national economies as international trading relations develop and patterns of domination and subordination emerge.

The penetration of national economies by multinational corporations, the growing international indebtedness of many countries, and the increasing awareness of the threat of cultural domination on the part of smaller countries, all form part of the international context. This context will often be crucial in determining conditions for young people in their own countries.

In the case of the young, attention is often focused on the moral dimensions - the threat posed to the moral welfare of the young by the breakdown of traditional forms of moral regulation and control. Less attention is given to the ways in which international developments can affect things like job opportunities, income and wealth, or the availability of education. Yet these are often of more direct importance to young people.

Of course, the traffic is not all one-way. Migration of many years has meant that most countries have benefited from an influx of new peoples, new ideas, new cultures, food, music and life-styles. Not all host nations have found it easy to welcome new arrivals. Racism in one form or another is an enduring feature of many societies today

and profoundly affects the lives of many young people.

In considering the international context it is important not to lose sight of the significance of the reactions against colonialism. If the First World War broke the bounds of the old empires and shifted the centre of world influence across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States, then the Second World War shattered completely the remaining claims to colonial empires. The achievement of political independence by many colonised countries has been a major feature of the last fifty years or so.

Alongside this needs to be considered what many would see as the growing economic dependence of emergent nations on the existing great powers. As far as this is the case, then, there is a general question over what the implications are for the nations concerned, and a specific question about the impact on young people. The answers to these questions are best seen in relation to the structures, systems, and institutions which constitute the national context.