

LANGUAGE, POWER AND THE BREAKDOWN OF MULTILATERAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

Rorden Wilkinson

*Contact details:
Centre for International Politics
School of Social Sciences
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL, UK*

*t: +44(0)161 275 4914
e: rorden.wilkinson@manchester.ac.uk*

Paper presented at the Leverhulme Centre for Research on Globalisation and Political Economy and the Murphy Institute of Political Economy Conference on the 'New Political Economy of Globalization', New Orleans, 20-21 April 2007.

Please note, this is work in progress. Comments are gratefully received.

LANGUAGE, POWER AND THE BREAKDOWN OF MULTILATERAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS*

Rorden Wilkinson

The collapse of the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Doha Development Agenda (DDA) in July 2006 brought with it familiar warnings of an upsurge in protectionist sentiment, the possible breakdown of the multilateral trading system and, in the most doomsday of scenarios, the fragmentation of the global economy. The British *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraphs*, for instance, suggested that the 'events that unfolded in the early hours [of 24 July 2006] ... seem to mark the final nail in the coffin for the World Trade Organization' (Conway, 2006); '[t]hat isolated event could well go down as a major turning point in history ... [W]ith no prospect Doha can be salvaged, we face the outright failure of a multilateral trade deal for the first time since the 1930s ... [and] there is a very real danger the entire multilateral trading system could now unravel' (Halligan, 2006a). The *Financial Times* labelled Doha 'a deal doomed from the beginning' (Beattie, 2006a); and worried that the consequences of the round's failure would encourage bilateral and region solutions at the expense of the multilateral process, endanger the "development package" already on the table' and pass over the opportunity to reform distortions in agricultural trade (Williams and Beattie, 2006; also Beattie, 2006c). Former General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Director-General Peter Sutherland commented that the 'collapse of the talks leaves global multilateralism in a parlous state' and any permanent abandonment of the round would leave the WTO 'damaged' (Sutherland quoted in Beattie, 2006b). *The Australian* likened the 'increasingly desperate attempts to claim that there remains at least some life in the negotiations' to 'Monty Python's dead parrot sketch' (wherein despite abundant evidence to the contrary, the parrot is said to be just 'resting') (Thirlwell, 2006). *The Economist* suggested that '[i]f the wreck is terminal – and after a five-year stalemate, that seems likely – everyone will be the poorer, perhaps gravely so'; and that '[i]t is not just the narrow business of the Doha round (if narrow is a fit adjective for an ambition to lift millions out of poverty, curb rich countries' ruinous farm support and open markets for countless goods and services) that is at stake. In the long run, the lack of commitment to multilateral trade ... will also start to corrode the trading system as a whole' (*The Economist*, 29 July 2006).

These warnings are, of course, far from new. The fear that a breakdown in multilateral trade liberalisation would help bring about a 1930s style retreat into economic autarky has been an intrinsic part of that process since it was first created. What is seldom acknowledged, however, is the role that

* A version of this paper was presented at the 48th Annual International Studies Association Convention, Chicago, 28 February – 3 March 2007.

this language of crisis and collapse – what might be called a ‘crisis discourse’ – has had (and continues to have) on shaping trade negotiations and in maintaining forward momentum in the liberalisation process. This discourse has played a key role in facilitating the kind of institutional development that the GATT/WTO has undergone; helping to push through bargains among GATT contracting parties and WTO members that have been (and remain) deeply asymmetrical; and driving the trade agenda forward at moments when the institution appears deadlocked. It has also played a role in the restart of the DDA in the wake of the negotiations’ July 2006 collapse.

The aim of the paper is to illustrate the role that the crisis discourse plays in driving forward multilateral trade liberalisation and to show how the discourse is currently being deployed. The paper argues that since the GATT was created trade negotiations have proceeded against a backdrop of a perception of the consequences that might result should the negotiations break-down. Moreover, at moments when progress has become lacklustre, when the outcome of trade negotiations appears uncertain, when a blockage occurs, or when a ministerial meeting collapses, an increase in the usage of the language of crisis and collapse occurs. The intensification of this discourse varies depending on the perceived gravity of the ‘crisis’ as does the extent to which the discourse radiates out from a core group of practitioners and public intellectuals involved with, or who have a vested interest in, the negotiations. The effect is nevertheless the same: to encourage behaviour consistent with the conclusion of the negotiations by structuring the realm of possibility. This, in turn, assists in maintaining and perpetuating the unequal relations of power that underpin the trading regime.

The paper does not claim that language alone encourages the behaviour necessary for the conclusion of trade negotiations. Rather, it argues that the crisis discourse is one means among a number that combine to shape behaviour and, in this instance, push forward multilateral trade liberalisation. Other factors influencing the behaviour of participants include: the rules, norms and decision-making procedures governing negotiations, the manner in which negotiations are organised, the development of the institution over time, relations of power that exist among participating states, the influence of externalities (such as the global economic and security climate), as well as those relating to the trade delegations themselves (such as their size, technical capacity, knowledge, proficiency and so on) (for a more complete account see Wilkinson, 2006a).

To make sense of the role the crisis discourse plays in trade negotiations the paper begins by setting out briefly the role language plays in structuring political action. The paper then explores the substance of the crisis discourse (its key phrases, linguistic formations, core metaphors), it examines its primary dynamics and it surveys its key developments. The penultimate section of the paper explores the role

of the crisis discourse in the collapse and resumption of the negotiations in the wake of the WTO's 2005 Hong Kong ministerial meeting. The paper then offers its concluding comments.

Language, power, political action

It has long been acknowledged that language – the words, phrases, metaphors and linguistic constructions that we use and the visual images that they conjure up – is not merely a politically neutral means of communicating or a medium that is separate from social hierarchies and relations of power. Rather, language is a reflection of, and an important tool in shaping, the social, cultural and political make-up of society. Language can contribute to the stabilisation and maintenance of a prevailing power configuration by prescribing particular kinds of behaviour and precluding others; it can also be revolutionary enabling existing ways of behaving to be challenged and subverted by replacing them with alternative ways of operating. As Richard Jackson puts it, 'words are never neutral; they don't just describe the world, they actually help to make the world. As such, they can never be employed in a purely objective sense' (Jackson, 2005: 21).

One way in which language contributes to the maintenance of particular relations of power is through the dissemination of 'common sense' – words and phrases that convey wisdom or suggest particular kinds of behaviour which are 'implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of' and which are 'rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned' (Fairclough, 2001: 64). For Antonio Gramsci, common sense is the 'traditional popular conception of the world', produced by a particular historically determined set of power relationships but which had come to be treated as 'instinct' (Gramsci, 1998: 198-9). Edward Said's account of how images of the orient were transmitted through accounts of, literature on and art depicting the Islamic world illustrates well how ideas of difference and otherness are conveyed and become embedded as common sense and how these contributed to preserving European dominance (Said, [1978] 1995).

Common sense is particularly important in understanding how language contributes to the perpetuation of particular relations of power. Precisely because common sense is held to be 'true' or 'fact' it is seldom challenged. It suggests modes of behaviour that are consistent with the ideas and ideologies that underpin a social order. In so doing, common sense shapes the arena of possibility. Other forms of wisdom and attendant modes of behaviour – ones that may or may not be equally or more appropriate – are either obscured from view, dismissed as uncommon-sensical or else they are rendered plain false. Moreover, the penalties of challenging common sense can be sufficiently high to warn against doing so (as the story of Socrates illustrates – see de Botton, 2000: 14-42). Yet it is precisely because common sense embodies assumptions that treat authority and hierarchy as natural, reflect the

wisdom of dominant ideologies (Fairclough, 2001: 2) and presuppose that particular courses of action or modes of behaviour are the most appropriate that it needs to be critically engaged.

Central to the entrenchment of common sense are those that act to facilitate its spread. Here public intellectuals, or what Gramsci called 'organic intellectuals' (which he took to be the thinking and organising element of a dominant social class – Gramsci, 1998: 5-14), play an important role. In speaking and writing public intellectuals establish the credibility of a language through their role in a social order. Those in a position of authority are able to disseminate wisdom about particular kinds of behaviour precisely because their credibility is established by their role in society; conversely, those lacking social status find it difficult to challenge dominant ideas precisely because they lack the social credibility to support the validity of their claims.

Metaphors play an important role in conveying common sense as well as in structuring action. Metaphors can be deployed not only to disseminate wisdom; they can also be used to alter the way in which events are perceived and understood. This is done by 'replacing' an act, event, instance or attribute with a word or phrase that conveys a particular meaning intended to underline or alter perceptions such that they serve a set of interests. Medical metaphors, for instance, are often used in political discourse to underline the dangers of particular ideologies or courses of action as well as to celebrate others (see Sontag, 2002). During the cold war, for example, the use of the word 'cancer' in association with the spread of communism served not only to reinforce the negative perception of communism by equating it with a disease, it also prescribed (and legitimised) practices consistent with the halting its spread (Hook, 1984: 262). As Glenn Hook explains, the use of the metaphor in this way, 'helps to structure reality by *locating* an issue in a certain *context* calling forth certain *entailments*' (Hook, 1984: 263, emphasis in the original). Likewise, ridicule plays a key role in shaping political action. By ridiculing particular kinds of behaviour, particularly by associating that behaviour with regressive or outmoded tendencies, other courses of action are encouraged and celebrated.

The words, metaphors, phrases and linguistic constructions that convey common sense form part of a wider discourse. At its simplest (and crudest), a discourse refers to a set of linguistic formations *and* social practices to which they are related that prescribe behaviour consistent with a given set of ideas, interests and values (see Fairclough, 2001 for a more extensive treatment). Discourses are organic aspects of a social order. They emerge out of particular historical moments and change with, are reproduced by, and influence the shape of, the orders from which they emerge in a dialectical fashion. Discourses create exclusionary arenas (locking in some kinds of wisdom while crowding out others) by empowering particular individuals to speak. Those that have learnt or have been socialised by a dominant discourse and who use it in communicating (either verbally, in writing or in the production of

symbols) are 'heard', while those who do not use the discourse, or are excluded by it, are silenced. As Jennifer Milliken (following Foucault) puts it, discourses create 'regimes of truth' (Milliken, 1999: 229). Carol Cohn's experience of a year in a life of a defence intellectual shows vividly how this inclusionary/exclusionary dynamic works:

... I found ... that no matter how well-informed or complex my questions were, if I spoke English rather than expert [techno-strategic] jargon, the men responded to me as though I were ignorant, simpleminded, or both ... [So] I adapted my everyday speech to the vocabulary of strategic analysis. I spoke of "escalation dominance," "preemptive strikes," and, one of my favorites, "subholocaust engagements." Using the right phrases opened my way into long, elaborate discussions that taught me a lot about technostrategic reasoning and how to manipulate it (Cohn, 1987: 708)

Yet, it is not just that the discourse acts to exclude; it also has consequences for those that adopt its linguistic formations. Cohn continues:

I found, however, that the better I got at engaging in this discourse, the more impossible it became for me to express my own ideas, my own values. I could adopt the language and gain a wealth of new concepts and reasoning strategies – but at the same time as the language gave me access to things I had been unable to speak about before, it radically excluded others. I could not use the language to express my concerns because it was physically impossible. This language does not allow certain questions to be asked or certain values to be expressed ... I found I could go for days speaking about nuclear weapons without once thinking about the people who would be incinerated by them (Cohn, 1987: 708-9).

Michael Barnett's experience as a political officer at the US Mission to the UN during the Rwandan Genocide produced similar results. Barnett recounts arriving at the Mission knowing little of the language or symbols with which he was to operate. His inability to speak the language or understand the sub-text of conversations left him both confused and alienated (Barnett, 1997: 555). On learning the language, however, Barnett was quickly socialised not only into a way of speaking about issues but also into attendant ways of thinking. As he puts it,

[w]hereas once I was bewildered by my colleagues' logic as they defended or promoted a particular policy, I soon became sympathetic to and supported their positions ... I began to defend the policies of the United States and the potential of the UN not simply because to do otherwise might cause my colleagues to sanction me for disloyalty, but because I came to identify with these organizations (Barnett, 1997: 557-8).

Cohn and Barnett's experiences illustrate one means by which discourses and attendant ways of operating are reproduced – that is, through a process of socialisation wherein new entrants 'learn' how to behave by adopting a dominant way of communicating and of thinking. But discourses are seldom static. They are reproduced and mutate through usage as well as change in response to challenges.

They also notably intensify at some moments and fall into relative abeyance at others. In so doing, they assist in perpetuating their underlying interests and power relationships.

What we know, then, is that language shapes behaviour. We know that language develops and is deployed in a wider social context. As such, it reflects those hierarchies and power relationships that are prevalent at any given moment in time. We know that behaviour is shaped not just through direction instructions, but also by the received wisdom embodied in common sense (whether it is through stock phrases, metaphors, euphemisms or other linguistic constructions). We know that the use of a particular language creates some possibilities for action (consistent with the ideas and interests that underpin a discourse) while crowding out others. We know that it matters who speaks a language; and that by speaking a language voices are heard. We know that at moments wherein threats to the interests and power relationships underpinning a discourse emerge, an intensification in the density of a discourse as well as extension of its scale can occur; moreover, in those instances when challenges to dominant interests occur, subtle (and sometimes dramatic) changes in the substance of a discourse can occur. With these conceptual markers in mind, the paper now turns to explore the specifics of the crisis discourse.

The crisis discourse

The crisis discourse – itself part of a wider discourse of liberalisation – comprises a core story, set of common sense phrases, metaphors and attendant images, and other linguistic constructions that combine to structure political behaviour by warning against what might transpire should the multilateral trade liberalisation process be interrupted. The dominant version of the crisis discourse warns that the breakdown of multilateral liberalisation will enable protectionist sentiments to flourish and/or it will lead states to seek to satisfy their trade objectives bilaterally and regionally. Either way, the concern is that greater protectionism and/or bilateral/regional trade will concentrate commercial interaction – and potentially other interaction – among and between groups of states. This, in turn, may lead to the increasing fragmentation of the world economy. This growing insularity will not only harm economic growth, it will also reduce the amount of general interaction between states. In turn, (and in the most doomsday of scenarios) this is likely to decrease co-operation and understanding and has the potential, in certain circumstances, to encourage hostility and conflict. In describing what the fate of the multilateral trading system might be, the language of crisis and collapse conjures up a set of images that reinforce the message. These include memories of the interwar depression and of the economic and political nationalism of the era.

Clair Wilcox's account of the case for multilateral trade liberalisation in the immediate post-war period captures perfectly this core story:

During the century that preceded the First World War, goods moved with relative freedom between the nations of the world. The traders of one country sold to those of another and bought from those of a third. No effort was made to achieve a balance in the trade between any pair of states ... A world-wide economy, built on the foundations of political and economic freedom, was preserved through a century of relative stability and peace.

The foundations of economic liberalism were shaken by the First World War. The economy of Europe was disorganized; productive facilities were destroyed; channels of trade were broken; heavy debts were incurred. Nationalism and protectionism were stimulated by the revision of boundaries and the creation of new states. Economic and political uncertainty weakened devotion to principles that were once unquestioned ...

Efforts were made, during the decade that followed the [First World] war, to repair the structure of the world's economy ... But the League of Nations, in its Covenant, did no more than recognize the desirability of equitable treatment in world trade. And the economic conferences, most of them held under its auspices, were uniformly disappointing in their results ...

In this record of failure, our own country [the US] was not without responsibility. On the one hand, we insisted that our allies repay the loans that had enabled them to fight the war. On the other, we raised our tariff, thus obstructing payment in the only way in which it could be made ... If we had pursued a different course – canceling the war debts, reducing our tariff, and cooperating fully in the reconstruction of the world economy – the efforts of the twenties might have borne fruit.

The foundations of economic liberalism, badly shaken by the First World War, were all but demolished by the Great Depression. The gold standard disappeared; currencies were thrown into chaos; exchanges were subjected to national controls. There was a sharp contraction in the volume of the world's trade. The attention of governments turned inward ... where national and international interests came into conflict, internationalism gave way. The world was unprepared to face adversity; each for himself and the devil take the hindmost became the general rule ...

In May 1930, the United States enacted the Hawley-Smoot tariff, raising duties to the highest level in its history. More than a thousand American economists protested this action, warning that it would “plainly invite other nations to compete with us in raising further barriers to trade,” and all the major trading nations of the world informed our government that irrevocable damage would be done. The accuracy of these predictions was demonstrated in the next few months ...

Intensive economic nationalism marked the rest of the decade. Exports were forced; imports were curtailed. All of the weapons of commercial warfare were brought into play ... Economic nationalism found its most complete expression in Nazi Germany under the leadership of Dr. Hjalmar Schacht. There the instruments of restriction and discrimination were perfected and put to work in the development of military power ... [and] [t]he end of the road down which restrictionism leads was reached, under Hitler, by Nazi Germany ...

The return of war, with its necessities and its compulsions, tightened the hold of governments on the world's trade. The channels of trade were broken by hostilities; where they were not broken, they were altered to meet the requirements of war. The United States, as other countries, engaged in economic warfare as a supplement to military warfare: we bought goods we didn't need to keep our enemies from getting them; we supplied

goods to other countries to obtain from them the things we did need and to insure ourselves of their support; we denied goods to other countries to penalize them for not cooperating with us and to prevent them from aiding our enemies. The vast quantities of goods that moved across our borders were designed, in large part, for military use. International trade, throughout the world, became an instrument of war.

The Second World War was far more serious in its consequences than the First ... Economic disorganization spelled financial instability, inflation, and chaos in exchange relationships ... As in any epidemic, disease spread[s] from centers of infection and healthy organisms were attacked ...

What can be done about it? The first step ... is the promotion of reconstruction and recovery in Western Europe, the center, before the war, of half of international trade ... The second step is the conclusion of agreements committing nations to return, as soon as possible, to liberal principles and the establishment of an institutional structure under which trade can flourish and individual enterprise, throughout the world, can take a new lease of life in more normal times. For it is only by subjecting them to international control that we can really be assured that restrictionism and discrimination, even though rendered unnecessary, will not, in fact, continue to clog the channels of world trade (Wilcox, 1949: 3-10, 12-13).

Wilcox's account – one of the very earliest examples of the crisis discourse – contains all of the discourse's core elements. It warns of the consequences of not pursuing *multilateral* trade liberalisation; it clearly associates the consequences of not pursuing liberalisation with economic destitution and political extremism (in this case Nazism); it links the pursuit of liberalisation with the continuation of the 'progress' and realisation of the 'freedoms' of the nineteenth century; it makes use of disease as a metaphor; it conjures up images of destitution and immiseration, and liberty and prosperity to support its message; it proposes a core course of action for both the US (as architect of, and the state with the biggest vested interest in, the post-war order) and the other participating countries; and, most importantly, it framed the first post-war round of trade negotiations in terms of building peace and was in part responsible for ensuring that a mechanism for multilateral liberalisation (in the form of the GATT) survived the still-birth of the International Trade Organisation.

Yet it is not just *what* Wilcox said that is important, it is *who* he was. It is precisely because of his role in the American polity and academy (and others like him, such as University of Chicago and Princeton Economics Professor and sometime advisor to the US Treasury Jacob Viner; William Adams Brown, a contemporary of Wilcox's during the ITO negotiations and at Swarthmore; and Wilcox's student William Diebold – see Viner, 1947; Brown, 1950; Diebold, 1952) that this version of how events gained credibility. Wilcox was a professor in the Economics Department (and, for 37 years, its Chair) at Swarthmore college from 1927-1968, he co-authored (with Paul Douglas – a University of Chicago economist and later Democratic Senator for Illinois) the aforementioned petition against the Smoot-Hawley tariff (signed by 1,028 economists), he led the Office of International Trade Policy at the State

Department from 1945-1948 (the competencies of which were later transferred over to form part of the interagency Office of the US Trade Representative, as it became, in 1962), he was head of the US delegation to the London Conference on the Charter for the International Trade Organisation (ITO), and he was vice-chairman of the US delegation to the Havana Conference on Trade and Employment (which concluded the ITO Charter). Wilcox was thus the quintessential public intellectual whose credentials lent credibility to the crisis discourse and whose efforts began the process of embedding the discourse as common sense.

Wilcox's account of the risks of not pursuing multilateral trade liberalisation was intended for two audiences. The first was a domestic audience opposed to a liberal internationalist US foreign policy (see Diebold, 1952; Zeiler, 1999: 75-104). The second were US wartime allies who were either preoccupied with post-war reconstruction, concerned with relations with their former and current colonies, had differing economic interests or were succumbing to growing socialist influence to share the US's vision for a new world order. Both of these audiences represented challenges to core US industrial interests and thus threatened the consolidation of US power in the wake of the war.

The point here is that the pursuit of multilateral trade liberalisation was central to US post-war interests and underpinned the maintenance and extension of US power in the post-war era. Support for trade liberalisation was not, however, adequately forthcoming either domestically or internationally. This meant that an argument had to be made in support of liberalisation and it had to be made by those with the credibility to deliver the 'facts' of the matter and establish liberalisation as a common sense pursuit. The response was the development of a core story that warned against the follies of not liberalising trade married to a strong vision of what would result. This story was then disseminated domestically and internationally by a core of public intellectuals. Their efforts, in turn, helped secure the necessary support for multilateral trade liberalisation to begin under the GATT.

The dynamics of the crisis discourse

Although the crisis discourse has acted as a general frame for trade negotiations, the language of crisis and collapse has also varied in intensity with the extent of the degree of intransigence perceived in trade negotiations. Only moderate references are made to consequences that might ensue were progress in trade liberalisation to be allowed to stall in instances where negotiations are moving forward but wherein only minor problems exist. At the other end of the spectrum, at times when trade negotiations have broken down, or when significant barriers exist to the launch of a new trade round, the discourse is at its most intensive.

A second dynamic of the crisis discourse is the extent to which its common sense has radiated out from a core community of trade practitioners, economists lawyers and press to wider political, media and intellectual communities over time *and* during moments of heightened political contestation in trade negotiations. As the liberalisation process continued through successive GATT rounds, the perception that a fundamental crisis might result should trade liberalisation be allowed to stall found growing purchase among those involved in trade negotiations. Moreover, as this received wisdom gained greater traction, it was disseminated outside of a core community of trade practitioners, economists, lawyers and press to wider political, media and intellectual communities. The result has been to generate a widespread belief in the wisdom of the crisis discourse and for core and non-core communities to consistently deploy key elements of the language of crisis at moments when trade negotiations appear to be in trouble (we need only refer to the mixture of practitioner and press commentary cited at the start of the paper for evidence of this). Thus, much like the way the intensity of the discourse increases in line with the perceived seriousness of the problem, the community involved in the dissemination of the discourse also expands. At moments when the obstacle blocking movement forward in a round is quite small, the community involved in utilising the crisis discourse will be relatively small, often confined to the core community involved in the negotiations. At times when a more significant problem exists, the crisis discourse will spread beyond the core community into the wider media. In combination this produces an irrefutable consensus on the necessity of overcoming the deadlock at moments when the liberalisation process is in crisis. This in turn has created pressure to conclude a round – often despite well known and widely acknowledge asymmetries – because to do so is common sense and the only credible course of action.

The way the crisis discourse oscillates in accordance with the degree of crisis perceived in multilateral trade liberalisation has a number of consequences. First, it further secures the notion that any interruption of the multilateral process will have a deleterious effect. Second, in so doing, it encourages behaviour consistent with maintaining the creditability and integrity of the process. Third, it reinforces the disciplinary aspects of the discourse in terms of the blame that would be attributed to those seen to be playing a blocking role. Fourth, it has so far helped to ensure that asymmetrical trade bargains have been negotiated as the outcome of trade rounds (see Ostry, 1997; Wilkinson, 2006a). Fifth, it helps maintain a set of trade relations (as well as wider power relations) among participating states. And sixth, it assists in ensuring that groups with a vested interest in liberalisation within states are able to maintain their interests.

The bicycle metaphor

The most familiar turn of phrase in the crisis discourse is the bicycle metaphor. At its simplest, the bicycle metaphor encourages us to believe that trade liberalisation, like the forward motion required to

keep a bicycle moving, needs to be in a state of perpetual motion. If that motion were to cease, the process (like the bicycle) would collapse and cause injury to the global economy/the bicycle's rider. This metaphor serves, at one and the same time, to simplify, clarify and intensify the mental image constructed by the crisis discourse of what would happen if the multilateral process were allowed to stall. The metaphor was not, however, part of the original crisis discourse. It emerged only after serious impediments to further liberalisation began to emerge in the early 1970s. GATT negotiations became progressively harder to conclude because of increases in the size of the membership (which posed logistical as well as political problems especially because of a growing militancy among newly-independent states), the growing depth and extent of the trade agenda, mounting tensions between the EEC and the US (and a perception in the latter that GATT negotiations were disproportionately favouring Europe producers – see Lee, 2001), a worsening international economic environment, and growing protectionist sentiment in the US and Europe. Indeed, by 1970-1 a perception prevailed that the GATT had 'virtually collapsed' (Bergsten, 1975: 97).

Attributed to C. Fred Bergsten, the bicycle metaphor replaced the rather lengthy core story at the heart of the crisis discourse.¹ In so doing it made common-sensical the notion that unless the trade bicycle continually moved forward it would topple over. As Bergsten put it, the '[s]teady movement toward trade liberalization is necessary to halt the acceleration of the trend toward increasing trade restrictions' (Bergsten, 1973: 280; also 1975). The use of a bicycle as a metaphor quickly and simply conveyed the message of lengthier and more involved core story to a domestic and international public and polity that was nearly 30 years removed from the end of the Second World War, nearly 40 years from the inter-war depression, and had enjoyed (at least in the US) two decades of unrivalled prosperity. It did not require recipients of this received wisdom to understand the intricacies of what had caused the depression, but the necessity of maintaining forward motion was nevertheless tied to the pursuit of US geo-strategic interests to ensure that support for further liberalisation would be forthcoming. As Bergsten put it,

... it was the foreign policy case which provided the real impetus for liberal trade policies in the United States in the postwar period. Expanded exports were an essential component of the reconstruction of Europe and Japan, and a liberal U.S. trade policy was therefore an essential corollary to Marshal Plan aid. Later, freeing of trade was seen as a key to forging an Atlantic partnership between the United States and Europe, thereby to contain communism. Our interest in keeping the lower-income countries free from communism, and their obvious need for increased markets required liberal trade policies (Bergsten, 1975: 195; also see 1971).

¹ Bergsten didn't actually use the term 'bicycle' at first. He is, nevertheless, credited with putting forward the idea. Jagdish Bhagwati is credited with coining the term 'bicycle theory'. See Bhagwati, 1988: 41.

Since the idea of perpetual forward motion first gained purchase, the bicycle metaphor has become a staple of trade politics and is used freely in academic, practitioner and popular debate and treated uncritically as inalienable truth. It is widely known and frequently used by: trade ministers; negotiators; personnel in the WTO, UNCTAD, ILO, World Bank, IMF, OECD and myriad other international organisations; the financial and broadsheet press; people working in non-governmental organisations with interests related to trade; academics; students; as well as critics of the liberalisation process. In this way, the dissemination of the metaphor by and among these individuals and communities serves to reproduce and entrench the crisis discourse and to encourage the behaviour it prescribes.

The following excerpt illustrates perfectly how the bicycle metaphor is an organic part of the crisis discourse. Not only does it set out more completely the contents of the metaphor, it contains within it the constitutive aspects of the crisis discourse set out above and demonstrates amply its domestic and international application. Moreover, the excerpt comes from the writings of another key public intellectual: James Bacchus. Bacchus is the founding chair of the WTO's appellate body (1995-2003), former Democrat Member of the US Congress (Florida), former Special Assistant to the US Trade Representative (USTR – 1979-1981), Professor of International Trade Law at Vanderbilt University, Member of the Council on Foreign Relations and author of *Trade and Freedom*, (Bacchus, 2004).

I am the only American who has had the privilege thus far [2003] of serving on the Appellate Body of the WTO. Thus, I am uniquely placed to affirm the American interest in the future of the WTO.

This interest can be illustrated by a bicycle. We all know about the bicycle. We all talk about it every time we talk about the future of the WTO. We all ride it every time we try to make the case for the future of the WTO ...

The bicycle, of course, is simply a way of describing the trading system that is served by the WTO. It is simply a way of referring to the WTO-based, treaty-based, multilateral world trading system. And the “bicycle theory,” of course, is simply that like a bicycle, the world trading system must always go forward. For, if it ever stops going forward, it will surely fail.

According to the “bicycle theory,” the history of trade, and of trade policymaking, teaches us that a failure to move steadily forward toward freer trade condemns the world trading system to topple over and fall due to the accumulating pressures of protectionism. According to the theory, we must move steadily, gradually, incrementally forward on the bicycle, because, if we do not, the world will be overwhelmed by all the many reactionary forces that would have the nations of the world retreat from trade. If we do not, the world will turn away from growing economic integration, turn away from the mutual prosperity of growing economic interdependence, and turn inward toward all the self-deceiving illusions and the self-defeating delusions of an isolating and enervating economic autarky. According to the theory, we must keep lowering the barriers to trade or we will risk losing all the many gains from trade.

Thus, whatever the pressures, whatever the economic happenstances, and whatever the political circumstances, we must always keep the bicycle we call the “world trading system” going forward by making ever more progress toward ever freer trade. We must keep pedalling. We must pedal neither too fast nor too slow. We just steer carefully. We must go straight ahead. We must avoid all the wrong turns. And, above all, we must never, never stop.

It has never been easy riding this bicycle. It took many centuries to get to the point where the world even had a bicycle. It took half a century of riding and eight long rounds of pedalling through all the many complications of seemingly endless multilateral trade negotiations to create the mutual international endeavour called the WTO. No doubt it will take many more years of hard pedalling to make the WTO all that so many nations of the world and so many billions of people in the world so much need it to be ...

The bicycle today is even harder to steer than in the past because our bicycle ... has bells and whistles, gears and speeds it did not have in the past ...

Bacchus’ description is presented simultaneously as ‘theory’ (note that it is now more than just metaphor) and ‘fact’. We know that according to bicycle ‘theory’ we must continue to act in a particular fashion, and that history ‘teaches’ us such (of course, the claim that an interruption in multilateral trade liberalisation caused the crisis of the 1930s is entirely spurious, but the myth that it did is now common sense). To underline his point further, Bacchus then situates the bicycle metaphor, and the crisis discourse, within the history of enlightenment. In so doing, he entwines, as Wilcox did 50 years previously, the necessity of proceeding with multilateral trade liberalisation with ideas of progress and civilisation.

In the next section, Baccus exemplifies the international and domestic uses to which the bicycle metaphor is put. In so doing, he rekindles images of multilateralism as America’s gift to a war-ravaged world thereby firmly associating the metaphor and the need to move forward with trade liberalisation with America’s destiny and its values. His final message is directed towards his national counterparts that do not share his commitment to multilateralism.

But a corollary, if you will, to the “bicycle theory” is this. As the largest trading nation in the world, the United States of America must help the other Members of the WTO in a shared effort to steer the bicycle in the right direction. However many countries may be sharing in the steering, our country must always be one country with a firm grip on the handlebars of the bicycle. And we Americans must be willing to do our fair share of the pedalling.

Worldwide, there are many adherents to the “bicycle theory” and to this corollary. Worldwide, there are many who agree that the bicycle must keep going forward, and that the United States must help with the steering and with the pedalling. Worldwide, there are many members and many chapters of what might be called “The Bicycle Club.” ...

[N]o other chapter of “The Bicycle Club” is the focus of more of the world’s attention today than the chapter in Washington. The chapter of the club in the capital of the United States is a focus of the world’s attention today because there is increasing concern throughout the world that the United States may be on the verge of loosening its grip on the handlebars, lifting its feet from the pedals, and letting the bicycle tip and fall.

All of those who are members in good standing of the Washington chapter of “The Bicycle Club” fully understand that keeping the bicycle moving forward is not only in the common international interest of all members of the WTO. It is also very much in the national interest of the United States.

But not everyone in Washington understands this. Not everyone in Washington – or in America – comprehends the compelling American interest in the future of the WTO. Not everyone in our country knows why we Americans must keep riding the bicycle.

And it is time they were told (Bacchus, 2003: 429-431).

What we see in this section is that the use of a bicycle as a metaphor for trade liberalisation is not just a simply and useful way of conveying information. It brings with it a series of assumptions about the nature of trade and trade liberalisation that force the recipient to accept as common sense the necessity of perpetual liberalisation. In so doing, the bicycle metaphor acts as one means by which the vested interests in, and the underlying power structures of, trade liberalisation are maintained. The metaphor has historically assisted in generating the support necessary for further liberalisation at moments when opposition has been forthcoming; and the bicycle metaphor, and the wider discourse of crisis, are again much in evidence in the current round of trade negotiations. Moreover, the bicycle metaphor has become part of the language of trade liberalisation; a language the learning of which is required to engage in discussions of trade politics; but, as Cohn and Barnett’s experiences illustrate above, this language enables speech consistent with its core tenants and not about ideas that challenge it.

Developments in the crisis discourse

The growth of interest in trade liberalisation since the creation of the WTO in 1995 coupled with the spread of, and access to, electronic media have contributed to (i) a greater awareness and entrenchment of the crisis discourse; (ii) the intensification of the use of the crisis discourse at key moments in time (particularly following the collapse of the 1999 Seattle and 2003 Cancun WTO ministerial meetings); and (iii) a considerable expansion in scale of the discourse’s dissemination (wherein the discourse’s dissemination is no longer confined to core and related communities in the leading industrial states, it has become a staple of trade discourse in developing country trade and related communities as well as among the growing number of NGOs interested in trade).

Importantly, the intensification of the crisis discourse in the wake of the collapse of the Seattle ministerial meeting saw the discourse further entrenched as common sense as news media not normally

interested in trade issues, but which had become interested in the WTO because of the protests that took place during the meeting, began to recycle the received wisdom put forward by practitioners, ‘eminent’ commentators, and core trade media. This consequence was not, however, confined solely to the immediate aftermath of Seattle. Rather, this received wisdom was put ‘on file’ and has since been rolled out on those occasions when a problem has been perceived in the liberalisation process – amply illustrated by the media commentary that followed the collapse of the Cancun ministerial meeting. As almost without exception the articles that are rolled out warn against the consequences of interrupting the liberalisation process, this secondary process contributes to maintaining the consensus around trade liberalisation and the need to conclude the negotiations.

Also notable is the manner in which the discourse expanded to include ridicule as a rhetorical device for encouraging support for trade liberalisation in the wake of the collapse of the Seattle ministerial meeting. Thomas Friedman’s 1 December 1999 *New York Times* column – ‘Senseless in Seattle’ – perfectly exemplifies this development. In his column Friedman argued that:

Is there anything more ridiculous in the news today than the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle? I doubt it. These anti-W.T.O. protestors – who are a Noah’s ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions and yuppies looking for their 1960s fix – are protesting against the wrong target with wrong tools. Here’s why:

What unites the anti-W.T.O. crowd is their realization that we now live in a world without walls. The cold-war system we just emerged from was built around division and walls; the globalization system that we are now in is built around integration and webs. In this new system, jobs, cultures, environmental problems and labor standards can much more easily flow back and forth.

The ridiculous thing about the protestors is that they find fault with this, and blame the W.T.O. The W.T.O. is not the cause of this world without walls, it’s the effect. The more countries trade with one another, the more they need an institution to set the basic rules of trade, and that is all the W.T.O. does ...

Because some countries try to use their own rules to erect new walls against trade, the W.T.O. adjudicates such cases. For instance, there was the famous “Flipper vs. GATTzilla” dispute. (The W.T.O. used to be known as GATT.) America has rules against catching tuna in nets that might also snare dolphins; other countries don’t, and those other countries took the U.S. before a GATT tribunal and charged that our insistence on Flipper-free tuna was a trade barrier. The anti-W.T.O. protestors extrapolate from such narrow cases that the W.T.O. is going to become a Big Brother and tell us how to live generally. Nonsense.

What’s crazy is that the protestors want the W.T.O. to become precisely what they accuse it of already being – a global government. They want it to set more rules – their rules, which would impose our labor and environmental standards on everyone else. I’m for such higher standards, and over time the W.T.O. may be a vehicle to enforce them, but it’s not the main vehicle to achieve them. And they are certainly not going to be achieved by putting up new trade walls (Friedman, 1999).

Friedman's op-ed is important for at least four reasons. First, it firmly associates opposition to the WTO (and, in extension, liberalisation) with opposition to progress and social advancement and does so through the use of ridicule as a rhetorical device thereby adding to the perception that to oppose liberalisation and the WTO is to be regressive. Second, Friedman's piece attempts to paint the WTO as a passive entity, a mere consequence of growing global integration (rather than a member driven institution driving forward global integration through the pursuit of reduction in barriers to trade), and the wrong target of opposition. Third, Friedman's piece attempts to make the interests of the US firmly synonymous with rule making activity in the WTO thereby speaking to sceptical elements in the US public and polity. And fourth, the article warns against the dangers of putting up trade barriers. The association here is again with a regressive tendency in this instance exemplified by the state of the world during the cold war (also see Freidman, 2000; for a critique of Freidman see Mark Rupert's website <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/merupert/Anti-Friedman.htm>; also Rupert, 2000).

It is also important to note that the collapse of the Seattle ministerial meeting encouraged the production of a range of books defending liberalisation and warning of the consequences should the process be interrupted. These ranged from book length populist treatments such as Freidman's *Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000), to accounts by notable practitioners such as former WTO Director-General Mike Moore's *A World without Walls: freedom, development, free trade and global governance* (2003) and scholars such as Columbia University Professor and member of the WTO Advisory Panel Jagdish Bhagwati's *In Defense of Globalization* (2004). All, however, contributed to the general discourse of trade liberalisation and reinforced the perception of what might result were the liberalisation process to be interrupted.

The crisis discourse, the Hong Kong ministerial and the July 2006 suspension of the DDA

The crisis discourse has played a key role in encouraging forward momentum in the negotiations as well as in their recommencement following the DDA was suspended in July 2006. Three distinct phases are notable in this regard. In each, various aspects of the crisis discourse described above have played a role, with some featuring more than others at key moments. These phases are: (i) the run-up to the 2005 Hong Kong ministerial meeting; (ii) the period following the Hong Kong ministerial meeting encompassing the failure to reach agreement on negotiating modalities in April 2006 and July 2006; and (iii) the period following the July 2006 decision to suspend the negotiations and the period leading up to the decision to recommence negotiations following the January 2007 Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The run-up to the WTO's December 2005 Hong Kong ministerial meeting saw the crisis discourse steadily increase in intensity. Despite an agreement having been reached in July 2004 moving the

negotiations forward in the wake of the collapse of the Cancun ministerial meeting, significant opposition (particularly among developing countries) to further progress in the negotiations remained. In an attempt to overcome this opposition, warnings again emerged of the consequences for the world economy should the DDA fail. These warnings began with those key protagonists at the core of the international trade community and steadily radiated out through the trade media to the general news media, popular commentators and the NGO community. The result was to produce a seemingly universal consensus on the necessity to keep the negotiations moving forward. This was enough for member states to agree to roll back expectations ahead of the Hong Kong meeting to ensure that the ministerial would prove successful. Then WTO Director-General Supachai Panitchpakdi's 8 July 2005 statement to an informal meeting of the Heads of Trade Delegations illustrates this steady intensification. As he put it:

I would like to start by recalling the numerous warnings I have issued ... about the state of play in the negotiations since the beginning of the year [2005]. In March, I sounded a note of caution — that we were not yet in a crisis mode, but that we certainly needed more sense of urgency. This message did not seem to be heeded, so in April, I warned that we were very close to a crisis. I said that, at the current pace, we were not going to make it by July, and possibly not by December. I said I was still not pushing the alarm button, but that my finger was hovering over it. I asked you all to prove me wrong ... So where have we got to since then? ... I regret to say that the progress up until today remains far from sufficient, and I regret even more that my earlier warnings seem more valid than ever ... I am afraid we have to face the facts. These negotiations are in trouble. Very little of the political support which has been shown at successive Ministerial meetings has been turned into concrete progress in the negotiating groups ... So we need to change gear in the negotiations, but even more to change our mindset and our approach. The time is long overdue to pass from identifying to solving problems; from the technical to the political level; and from generalities to specifics ... The crisis that threatens is all the more menacing because it is not a crisis of dramatic divergences or headline-grabbing conflict — it is a crisis of immobility. I think there is still a slender chance of averting it, but every hour must be made to count (Supachai, 2005).

Supachai's warnings were widely disseminated and found purchase in, and were picked up by, not only the trade and non-trade news media but also in national politics (such as, for instance, the US Government Accountability Office – see US GAO, 2006). Incoming WTO Director General Pascal Lamy added his voice to those increasingly concerned about the state of the round. Speaking to the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC – a committee comprising 24 representatives of IMF member states usually at the rank of ministers of finance or governors of central banks) of the IMF Lamy set out the dangers of allowing the round to collapse but did so in a manner that reflected a growing (rather than an absolute) urgency. He argued:

Hong Kong is not just another checkpoint in the negotiations. It is our last and best chance to move this Round to a successful conclusion by the end of 2006 ... It is difficult to

exaggerate the importance of this Round. Its huge potential for contributing to global growth, correcting imbalances, and promoting development is obvious. Just as important, a successful Round would provide a bulwark against protectionism — and make no mistake, signs of resurgent protectionism are all too evident. Last but not least, a breakthrough in the Round, after so many disappointments, would send a much needed message of confidence, that we remain committed to open markets and multilateral rules, and that the foundations of the global economy are reinforced ... The world economy will not come to an end if Hong Kong fails and the Round drifts. But it will be left significantly weaker, perhaps more so than we can envisage today ... We are not attempting to do the impossible. On the contrary, success is entirely within reach. Anyone who remembers the Uruguay Round knows that it went through numerous crises and set backs only to pull together spectacularly in the final months. The challenge is less technical, than political. It is about leadership, about compromise, about countries recognizing their common interest in success, and the collective costs of failure. As in other Rounds, US-EU leadership is indispensable. Unlike previous Rounds, leadership from key emerging players and ownership by developing countries is now just as important (Lamy, 2005a).

In a specially prepared issue of *Foreign Affairs* published immediately prior to the Hong Kong meeting and made widely available to trade and NGO delegates alike during the ministerial, leading public trade intellectuals presented their views on the state of the negotiations.² Almost without exception, each of the authors warned of what might occur should the DDA be allowed falter. Jagdish Bhagwati, in addressing the threat of bilateral and regional trade agreements to the multilateral process, deployed both medical metaphor and ridicule towards those that held different views in his statement that: ‘With over 300 such preferential trade agreements in place already, and more coming down the road, nearly all first-rate economists have now begun to tire of them and consider them to be a pox on the trading system ... [T]he disease began in Europe ... the United States [has] joined in, and now Asia is following suit. We now have a pandemic’ (Bhagwati, 2005: 8). Using a more traditional variation of the crisis story, C. Fred Bergsten warned that,

The Doha Round may ... become the first major multilateral trade negotiation to fail since the 1930s. The collapse could even take place, or be clearly heralded, at the ministerial meeting in Hong Kong. Such an outcome could mark a historic reversal in the irregular but steady progress toward liberalizing world trade over the past sixty years. Since history clearly shows that trade policy must move forward continuously or risk sliding backward into protectionism and mercantilism ... the consequences of Doha’s failure for international security as well as economic relations around the world could be enormous (Bergsten, 2005: 15-16).

² The special issue comprises pieces from Columbia University Professor of Economics and Law and Senior Fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations Jagdish Bhagwati; Director of the Institute for International Economics, former Assistant Secretary of the US Treasury for International Affairs and Assistant for International Economic Affairs to the US National Security Council C. Fred Bergsten; Chief Executive Officer of Hills and Company and former US Trade Representative during the George H. W. Bush Administration Carla Hills; Senior International Partner at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr and former US Trade Representative during the Clinton Administration Charlene Barshefsky; Chairman of British Petroleum, Chairman of the Advisory Board on the Future of the World Trade Organisation, former Director-General of the GATT and founding Director-General of the WTO Peter Sutherland; Columbia University Professor of Economics Arvind Panagariya; and Senior Fellow at the Institute for International Economics and the Centre for Global Development William Cline.

What is interesting about Bergsten's warning is that he firmly links progress in trade liberalisation to the pursuit of international security. But rather than the link to the fight against communism and Soviet expansionism that was evident in his earlier work, this time the issue is with the war on terror. Former USTR Carla Hills added that 'there is a significant risk that [the negotiations] could collapse or achieve only a fraction of their potential' (Hills, 2005: 25). Former USTR Charlene Barshefsky warned of the contribution of 'prosperity' to global unity and the political, economic and security dangers of allowing regions of the world to drift apart and of a decline in US leadership (see Barshefsky, 2005). And former GATT Director-General Peter Sutherland reminded negotiators that 'a failure of the Doha round would do much damage' both to economic growth and development as well as to 'the notion of multilateralism' (Sutherland, 2005: 46). These public intellectuals were joined by a host of others. Business leaders, for instance, suggested that little time remained to 'save' the DDA and that the 'great hopes for global economic growth and development promised by this trade round are now at serious risk' (*Financial Times*, 6 September 2005). The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) November 2005 Valletta Statement on Multilateral Trade expressed deep concern 'about the pace of the negotiations' (CHOGM, 2005, paragraph 6).

There was, however, a notable change in the content and focus of the crisis discourse in the run-up to the Hong Kong ministerial meeting. Because developing countries were seen to be the principal spoilers of any deal that might be struck (a consequence of developing country hostility to the liberalisation agenda since the idea of a new round was raised in the run-up to the Seattle meeting) the crisis discourse began to be tailored towards what the consequences might be for them were the round to fail. World Bank President, Paul Wolfowitz's pre-ministerial statement provides one example of this. Wolfowitz argued that

The stakes are too high – not just for the poor, but also for the global economy – to let the trade talks conclude without real progress. The Doha Round presents an opportunity to rewrite the rules of an unfair trading system that holds back the potential of the poorest people ... [I]f Doha fails it's the world's poor ... who will suffer most' (Wolfowitz, 2005).

Likewise, in a speech to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy warned that 'Hong Kong is not just another checkpoint in the negotiations. It is our best chance to move this Round to a successful conclusion by the end of 2006 ... If we fail, we would all have lost a unique opportunity to rebalance the world trading system to the interests of developing countries' (Lamy, 2005b).

The intensification of the crisis discourse in the run-up to Hong Kong was enough to ensure that despite continuing tensions an agreement was reached (see Wilkinson, 2006b). This involved an agreement to scale back expectations for the ministerial ahead of the meeting and to focus instead on what was widely held to be ‘deliverable’. The scaling back of expectation in the run-up to Hong Kong and the content of the agreement reached at the ministerial itself, however, failed to secure progress in the round. This, in turn, led to a resurgence in the crisis discourse in the ministerial’s wake. One aspect of this saw the increasing usage of an alternative metaphor in the crisis discourse: this time of a train.³ This metaphor was used both as a general frame for a discussion of the Hong Kong outcome (using phrases such as ‘At least the train has been kept on the rails’ – see Heydon, 2005: 3) and as a device for assign whether the ministerial meeting had managed to avoid a ‘train wreck’ (see Drache, 2006). Three aspects of the train metaphor are noteworthy. First, central to the train metaphor are the rails/tracks on which a train runs. The emphasis is not only on keep the train ‘on track’ but also of a clearly determined direction in which the tracks run (that is, in the direction of further trade liberalisation) (see, for instance, Mankiw and Swagel, 2005; also Sally, 2006: 319). Second, the idea of a ‘train wreck’ is more potent and less passive than a bicycle toppling over. It conveys more forcefully the consequences of what might happen were the train to be derailed (with a train wreck being treated as a synonym the impact on the world economy of an interruption in the liberalisation process). Third, the momentum of a train moving forward, of the effort to get it moving in the first place, and to stop it, is significantly greater than a bicycle. Moreover, because of the association of the train with industrialisation and of industrialisation with development and progress, the implication is that the train must be moved forward. The train metaphor has found purchase not only among those at the core of the trade community (see, for example, Deputy Director of the of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Trade Directorate Ken Heydon’s usage of the train metaphor – Heydon, 2005) but also among those seeking to evaluate progress in the Doha round (see Drache, 2006) as well as among the NGO community. Mariama Williams’ work exemplifies the latter. In commenting on the WTO’s fourth ministerial meeting in Doha she notes: ‘While the Ministerial was successful in getting the rapid trade liberalization train back on track, it steamed rolled over democracy and participation and shunted development onto a convenient sidetrack’ (Williams, 2002: 1).

It quickly became apparent that the deadlines set in Hong Kong were indeed going to be missed. As pressure increased for the agreement of negotiating modalities in agriculture and industrial goods by 30 April 2006 statements by key people at the core of trade community shifted from praising the movement that had been made in Hong Kong to warning of the consequences should the round falter.

³ The train metaphor has actually been used in trade circles for a while. However, its usage had previously been confined to critics of the WTO. For instance, Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas said during the Cancun ministerial meeting he hoped that the WTO’s ‘train of globalisation’ would be derailed. See Vidal, 2003.

Yet, despite widespread acknowledgement that the US and EU's intransigence was the primary cause of the lack of movement forward in the round, the crisis discourse highlighted the losses that developing countries would incur from a failed DDA. As Lamy put it in a speech to the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade on 23 March 2006:

As you know, the end date for the Round is soon approaching – it is the end of this year as a matter of fact [2006] ... Our membership is conscious of the fact that if this deadline were to be missed, trade liberalization on the scale envisaged by the Doha Round would become impossible to achieve in the near future. And who would be the main losers? ... First would be the developing world. It is a well known fact that the main aim of this Round is 'development' – in other words, its main objective is to redress the existing imbalances in multilateral trade relations. Were this Round to fail, developing countries would pay the highest price. Next would be the smallest and weakest economies, for which the multilateral process acts as an 'insurance policy' against the pressures exerted by the strong in bilateral trade accords. The biggest loser, however, would undoubtedly be the WTO. In other words, the system that has served the collective interests of 150 different members, and that has ensured a trade opening that is adapted to changing realities and that is based on a consensus between us all ...we have no more time to lose (Lamy, 2006a)..

Lamy then repeated the same warning to the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations on 6 April 2006 (see Lamy, 2006b). His warnings were not enough, however, and the April deadline was missed with a *de facto* extension in the negotiations being agreed for the end of July 2006. Inevitably, as the 31 July deadline loomed, the crisis discourse again intensified. Lead articles in the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* warned that 'the fall-out from indefinite postponement of the talks would be highly unattractive. The EU would set off for East Asia with a shopping trolley of bilateral trade deals to sell, further increasing the complexity of overlapping trade regimes. [And] farmers in America would push for another farm bill as lavish as the last one (*Financial Times*, 30 June 2006). Jeffrey Schott suggested that unless the DDA created 'new opportunities for trade and investment' the consequences would be dire and at least six-fold:

The first loss would be foregone welfare gains from new WTO reforms ... The second cost would be systemic erosion. The World Trade Organization would not implode, but rather begin a slow descent into oblivion. The poorest and weakest members, who benefit the most from a strong multilateral rules-based system, would be the most disadvantaged ... The third cost would be increased regionalism, pursued in a way highly corrosive to the WTO system. Leading trading nations would refocus their negotiating efforts on bilateral and regional trade agreements, and the number of such initiatives would proliferate. Even worse, the trade of developing countries could be severely impaired by preferential pacts between the world's richest countries ... The fourth cost would be increased protectionism ... Fifth, the breakdown of the trade talks would likely precipitate adverse shocks in financial markets. ... Finally, and often ignored, is the opportunity cost for developing countries, particularly the least developed, of not being able to use the carrot and stick of multilateral trade negotiations to catalyse their own domestic economic reform (Schott, 2006).

However, member states were again unable to reach agreement and the negotiations were suspended. This decision brought with it a final flurry of crisis discourse before negotiations moved behind the scenes with a view to resuscitating the negotiations after a period of reflection. Deploying a medical metaphor Indian Trade Minister Kamal Nath described the negotiations as somewhere ‘between intensive care and the crematorium’ (quoted in *Bridges*, 26 July 2006). Alan Beattie and Frances Williams described the suspension as ‘one of the darkest days [for] the WTO since its creation’ (Beattie and Williams, 2006). Inventor of the bicycle metaphor, former US Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs and Director of the Institute for International Economics C. Fred Bergsten suggested that,

[t]he indefinite suspension of the Doha round of world trade talks creates big risks for the world economy. A new explosion of discriminatory bilateral and regional agreements is likely to substitute for global liberalization. This will inevitably erode the multilateral rules-based system of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The backlash against globalization will generate more protectionism in the vacuum left as momentum toward wide-ranging reduction of barriers ceases, especially as the world economy slows and global trade imbalances continue to rise (Bergsten, 2006a; also Bergsten, 2006b).

EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson warned that ‘A failure of Doha would strengthen those who want to turn their backs on globalisation and retreat into protectionism. It would undermine the WTO system, which has brought stability and predictability to the global economy’ (Mandelson, 2006). Alan Beattie commented that ‘The WTO is ... about to see a test of the so-called ‘bicycle’ – theory of trade negotiations – that the multilateral system will fall over unless it keeps moving forward with new deals struck and fresh market access gained’ (Beattie, 2006d). And UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan added his voice to the crisis discourse during his 3 November 2006 address to Ibero-American summit warning that ‘lamentable setbacks have led some to contemplate settling for something less than a true development round – or for no round at all. That must not happen’ (Annan, 2006).

Despite an increasing number of political indications in early 2007 that member states were ready to return to the negotiating table (Callan, 2007) and pressure from various public intellectuals for the US to renew its fast track authority (see Alden, 2007), the crisis discourse again intensified to ensure that support for a resuscitation of the round was forthcoming. Ahead of the January 2007 Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) successive *Financial Times* leaders warned that:

The prospects for rescuing Doha look poor. Informal talks have restarted at the World Trade Organisation in Geneva. Washington, Brussels, Brasilia and elsewhere hoarsely insist that a deal is possible. But negotiating positions still appear inflexible ... This multilateralist vacuum, sadly, is being filled with the pursuit of bilateral and regional trade

deals ... [S]uch agreements have not spurred “competitive liberalisation”. Instead they have sucked time, effort and political will away from the multilateral talks ... Regionals and bilaterals are not a second best. They are not the good of which the best is the enemy. They are not a small move forward. They are, by and large, a step back (*Financial Times*, 3 January; see also Dent, 2006).

Almost everyone loses from the death of Doha, and with it an erosion of the credibility of the World Trade Organisation as a negotiating forum. The alternative is a world filled with bitty bilateral and regional trade deals that will complicate more than they liberalise, providing lots more work for lawyers and negotiators but not much additional actual trade ... As the conventional wisdom correctly has it, developing countries have most to lose ... The US and EU, too, have more to lose than they publicly admit (*Financial Times*, 15 January 2007).

This time political willingness was forthcoming and the negotiations were formally restarted (WTO, 2007).

Conclusion

In his seminal essay, ‘Politics and the English Language’, George Orwell warned of the follies of using language without thinking; of repeating words and phrases simply because their use has become habit. At the root of his warning lay two concerns: the first, with the imprecision that had crept into the English language; the second, with the lack of critical interrogation into the meanings underpinning (and often obscured by) the ways in which language was used. Much of what occupied Orwell in the writing of his essay is applicable to the manner in which the crisis discourse encourages political behaviour consistent with the onward pursuit of trade liberalisation.

The use of this discourse has had several consequences, as the preceding discussion has shown. It has assisted in cajoling participants back to the negotiating table during periods when disagreements have led to the breakdown of negotiations; it has enabled bargains to be struck in the greater good of the multilateral trading system and the global economy that clearly benefit only some of the participating states; it has helped preserve an institutional form and a way of doing trade politics that is hugely inequitable; it has had a hand in shaping the contours of what is considered to be politically possible both in terms of providing solutions to problems perceived as well as in the institutional development of the GATT/WTO; and it has helped secure the continuation of the consensus around trade liberalisation as the most appropriate strategy for economic growth and poverty alleviation.

A second equally worryingly consequence is the effect that this discourse can have on obscuring what is actually going on. While the use of the language of crisis and collapse has concrete political purposes for those with a vested interest in moving a round forward, for the majority of commentators the crisis discourse comprises just a set of stock phrases that make trade politics newsworthy. Given that few

moments of crisis are actually the same, though they may appear to have similar characteristics, it is unlikely that every hiccup in a trade negotiation will lead to the collapse of the negotiations and, potentially, the breakdown of the multilateral trading system. Nevertheless, the slightest sign of trouble prompts commentators – academic, practitioner and journalist alike – to warn of the consequences of letting the trade bicycle stall. This language is seldom chosen because the round is in serious trouble; rather, the words and phrases of crisis are deployed more often than not because they are always used when a trade round appears to get into trouble – as the preceding analysis shows – and because they make trade negotiations newsworthy. As Orwell put it, '[a]s soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house' (Orwell, [1946] 1962: 145). But this use of stock phrases has served to obscure the root causes of the crisis; and it has encouraged participants to focus on how best to get the round on track without first properly diagnosing the causes of the problem.

Yet, it is not just the use of stock phrases every time a trade negotiation wobbles that is worrisome; it is that the phrases used comprise words that convey such a sense of gravity that they compound the sense of crisis. What may have started as a disagreement among trade delegations can quickly become much more significant. The result is to compound the sense of crisis and create a climate amenable to reaching an agreement to take the negotiations forward without first dealing with the root cause of the crisis in the first place. Indeed, the atmosphere created by this discourse can be such that the original issues are themselves either distorted or lost entirely.

Perhaps most worrying of all, is that the knowledge that this discourse is more words than crisis exists and is unevenly distributed. Among the leading trade delegations few actually believe that the irrecoverable breakdown of the multilateral trading system will occur from a collapse in a trade negotiation, though moments of stalemate and inertia are taken seriously; a significant minority – especially those that have involved with trade negotiations in some capacity or another for more than a decade – are aware of uses to which the language of crisis and collapse is often put; and most of those sufficiently close to the core of decision-making know that the capacity of this discourse to obscure what is actually going on among their peers is limited. However, away from the core, among trade delegations that struggle for personnel to attend meetings which boast few people with meaningful experience of trade negotiations, and which rely as much (and sometimes more) on the journalistic, NGO and academic accounts of what is going on in negotiations as well as what the likely outcome might be as they do on their own experience, the capacity of the language of crisis and collapse to structure political action is more pronounced. While it might be the case that many developing world

delegations are willing to protest against and engage in grand coalition formation during ministerial meetings, very few are willing to be seen to be responsible domestically or internationally for the collapse of a trade round. The result is to make the brokering of a deal more likely and to base the agreement on a bargain that is less than equal.

What we can see, then, is that the crisis discourse plays a key role in maintaining momentum in trade liberalisation – to use the discourse’s principal metaphor, it assists in keeping the bicycle moving forward. But precisely because the discourse focuses attention on the necessity for perpetual motion, it serves to obscure the search for solutions to the problems that generate crises in trade negotiations in the first place. A more considerable approach would be to dislocate the crisis discourse from the reality of trade negotiations and to open up space for discussion of alternative approaches (not only to problems raised but also to trade liberalisation as a vehicle for development). Of course, the problem is that the crisis discourse, and the vested interests it serves, is inextricably bound up with the process of trade liberalisation as it is current fashion (and has evolved). This makes divorcing the discourse from the reality a formidable task indeed.

Bibliography

- Alden, Edward (2007), 'Bush is right to push for renewal of his fast track trade policy', *Financial Times* (Asia edition), 31 January.
- Annan, Kofi A. (2006), Address to the ibero-american summit, Montevideo, Uruguay (3 November). Available at: http://www.un.org/News/oss/sg/stories/statments_search_full.asp?statID=31
- Bacchus, James (2003), 'The Bicycle Club: Affirming the American interest in the future of the WTO' *Journal of World Trade*, 37: 3.
- Bacchus, James (2004), *Trade and Freedom*, (London: Cameron May).
- Barnett, Michael N. (1997), 'The UN Security Council, Indifference, and Genocide in Rwanda', *Cultural Anthropology*, 12: 4 (November).
- Barshefsky, Charlene (2005), 'With or without Doha', *Foreign Affairs*, special edition (December).
- Beattie, Alan (2006a), 'A deal doomed from the beginning', *Financial Times*, 24 July.
- Beattie, Alan (2006b), 'WTO faces and uncertain future as its negotiating system seizes up', *Financial Times*, 25 July.
- Beattie, Alan (2006c), 'The rising risk of a backlash against free trade', *Financial Times*, 13 September.
- Beattie, Alan (2006d), 'Prelude to protectionism', *Financial Times*, 2 October.
- Beattie, Alan and Williams, Frances (2006), 'Dark day for WTO as talks collapse in acrimony', *Financial Times*, 25 July 2006.
- Bergsten, C. Fred (1971), 'Crisis in US Trade Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, July.
- Bergsten, C. Fred (1973), 'Trade liberalization in Agricultural Products', *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 55: 2 (May).
- Bergsten, C. Fred (1975), *Toward a New International Economic Order: selected papers of C. Fred Bergsten 1972-1974*, (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books).
- Bergsten, C. Fred (2005), 'Rescuing the Doha Round', *Foreign Affairs*, special edition (December).
- Bergsten, C. Fred (2006a), 'Plan B for World Trade: Go Regional', *Financial Times*, 16 August.
- Bergsten, C. Fred (2006b), 'The Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific Is the Next Step Forward for APEC (and for the World Trading System)', November, available at: <http://www.iie.com/publications/papers/paper.cfm?ResearchID=687>
- Bhagwati, Jagdish (1988), *Protectionism*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Bhagwati, Jagdish (2004), *In Defense of Globalization*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Bhagwati, Jagdish (2005), 'From Seattle to Hong Kong', *Foreign Affairs*, special edition (December).
- Brown, William Adams (1950), *The United States and the Restoration of World Trade*, (Washington: Brookings Institution).
- Callan, Eoin (2007), 'US-EU talks revive hopes for Doha world trade round deal', *Financial Times*, 8 January.
- CHOGM (2005), Valletta Statement on Multilateral Trade, Malta, 26 November.
- Cohn, Carol (1987), 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals', *Signs*, 12: 4 (Summer).
- Conway, Edmund (2006), 'Just like England, Doha talks fade before the final stretch', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 July.
- Davey, William J. (2006), 'The WTO: Looking forwards', *Journal of International Economic Law*, 9: 1.

- de Botton, Alain (2000), *The Consolations of Philosophy*, (London: Penguin).
- Dent, Christopher (2006), 'Put effort into Doha ahead of proliferation of bilateral deals', *Financial Times* (Asia edition), 21 November.
- Diebold Jr., William (1952), 'The End of the ITO', *Essays in International Finance*, 16, International Finance Section, Department of Economics, Princeton University.
- Drache, Daniel (2006), 'Trade, Development and the Doha Round: A sure bet or a train wreck?', *Centre for International Governance Innovation Working Paper*, No. 5 (March). Available at: www.cigionline.org
- Eichengreen, Barry (1992), *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression 1919-1939*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Evans, John W. (1971), *The Kennedy Round in American Trade Policy: the twilight of the GATT?*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Fairclough, Norman (2001), *Language and Power*, (Harlow: Pearson), second edition.
- Friedman, Thomas (1999), 'Senseless in Seattle', *New York Times*, 1 December.
- Friedman, Thomas (2000), *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: understanding globalization*, (New York: Anchor Books).
- Gramsci, Antonio (edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith) (1998), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart).
- Gardner, Richard N. (1956), *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy: Anglo-American collaboration in the reconstruction of multilateral trade*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Halligan, Liam (2006a), 'We should protest about the death of Doha', *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 July.
- Halligan, Liam (2006b), 'Trade talks at risk of "total failure", says head of WTO', *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 December.
- Halligan, Liam (2006c), 'The process of decolonisation is not yet complete – interview with Pascal Lamy', *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 December.
- Heydon, Ken (2005), paper presented to the Groupe d'Economie Mondiale, Sciences-Po, 20 December 2005. Available as Haydon, Ken (2006), 'After the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting: what is at stake?', *OECD Trade Policy Working Paper*, No. 27.
- Hills, Carla A (2005), 'The Stakes of Doha', *Foreign Affairs*, special edition (December).
- Hogan, Michael J. (1987), *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Jackson, Richard (2005), *Writing the War on Terrorism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- Jorgensen, Marianne W. and Phillips, Louise J. (2002), *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, (London: Sage).
- Kindleberger, Charles (1973), *The World in Depression, 1929-1939*, (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Lamy, Pascal (2005a), Remarks to the International Monetary and Financial Committee of the IMF, (24 September). Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/sppl_e/sppl03_e.htm
- Lamy, Pascal (2005b), Speech to UNCTAD, Palais des Nations, Geneva (6 October). Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/sppl_e/sppl05_e.htm
- Lamy, Pascal (2006a), 'Negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda: We Approach the Moment of Truth', speech to the Committee on International Trade, European Parliament, Brussels, 23 March 2006. Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/sppl_e/sppl21_e.htm

- Lamy, Pascal (2006b), 'The WTO and the Doha Round: the way forward', speech to the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, 6 April 2006. Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/sppl_e/sppl23_e.htm
- Lee, Donna (2001), 'Endgame at the Kennedy Round: a case study of multilateral economic diplomacy', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 12: 3 (September).
- Mandelson, Peter (2006), 'A deal can still be salvaged from the ashes', *Financial Times*, 31 July.
- Mankiw, N. Gregory and Swagel, Phillip L. (2005), 'Antidumping: The third rail of trade policy', *Foreign Affairs*, special edition (December).
- Milliken, Jennifer (1999), 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5: 2 (June).
- Moore, Mike (2003), *A World without Walls: freedom, development, free trade and global governance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Orwell, George (1946), 'Politics and the English Language', reprinted in *Inside the Whale and other essays*, (London: Penguin, 1962).
- Ostry, Sylvia (1997), *The Post-Cold War Trading System*, (London: University of Chicago Press).
- Rupert, Mark (2000), *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending visions of a new world order*, (London: Routledge).
- Said, Edward W. ([1978] 1995), *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (London: Penguin).
- Sally, Razeen (2006), 'Free trade agreements and the prospects for regional integration in East Asia', *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 1: 2 (December).
- Schott, Jeffrey (2006), 'Costs of failure of global trade negotiations have been understated', *Financial Times*, 23 June.
- Sontag, Susan (2002), *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*, (London: Penguin Books).
- Supachai, Panitchpakdi (2005), statement to informal meeting at the level of Heads of Delegation, Geneva, 8 July. Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/spsp_e/spsp40_e.htm
- Sutherland, Peter (2005), 'Correcting Misperceptions', *Foreign Affairs*, special edition (December).
- Thirlwell, Mark (2006), 'Doha closes, another opens', *The Australian*, 27 July.
- US GAO (2006), Report to the Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, 'World Trade Organization: Limited progress at Hong Kong Ministerial clouds progress for Doha Agreement', GAO-06-596 (April). Available at: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06596.pdf>
- Vidal, John (2003), 'Farmer commits suicide at protests', *The Guardian*, 11 September.
- Viner, Jacob (1947), 'Conflicts of Principle in Drafting a Trade Charter', *Foreign Affairs*, 25: 4 (July).
- Wade, Robert Hunter (2003), 'What strategies are viable for developing countries today? The World Trade Organization and the shrinking of 'development space'', *Review of International Political Economy*, 10: 4 (November).
- Wilcox, Clair (1949), *A Charter for World Trade*, (New York: Macmillan).
- Wilkinson, Rorden (2006a), *The WTO: Crisis and the Governance of Global Trade*, (London: Routledge).
- Wilkinson, Rorden (2006b), 'The WTO in Hong Kong: what it really means for the Doha Development Agenda', *New Political Economy*, 11: 2, (June).
- Williams, Frances and Beattie, Alan (2006), 'Poor nations left swimming in "spaghetti bowl" of rules', 26 July.
- Williams, Mariama (2002), 'The WTO ministerial meeting at Doha: unraveling the puzzle and the road ahead', *Center Focus*, No. 155 (March).

- Winters, L. Alan (1990), 'The Road to Uruguay', *The Economic Journal*, 100: 403, (December).
- Wolfowitz, Paul (2005), Message from the World Bank President, Paul Wolfowitz, on the Doha Development Round (6 December). Available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/TRADE/EXTTOPHKMIN/0,,contentMDK:20746823~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:1638660,00.html>
- WTO (2007), 'Lamy: we have resumed negotiations fully across the board', News Item, 7 February. Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news07_e/gc_dg_stat_7feb07_e.htm
- Zeiler, Thomas W. (1999), *Free Trade, Free World: the advent of the GATT*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).
- Zoellick, Robert (2006), 'Ditch obstinate posturing to clinch a Doha deal', *Financial Times*, 25 September.