



Project PROJIMO: a villager-run rehabilitation program for disabled children in western Mexico.

PROJECT PIAXTLA: a villager-run health care network in the mountains of western Mexico.

THE HESPERIAN FOUNDATION: a small group committed to health education and informed self-care.

Conchita's Story

Concepción Lara de Zamora, with translation by Bruce Hobson

Concepción Lara - Conchita, for short - is a long-time member of the Project PROJIMO team. At the Hesperian board meeting in June, she recounted the personal history that led her to the project and talked about what her involvement with PROJIMO has meant to her. While her story is uniquely her own, it is in many ways typical of the experiences of others who come to PROJIMO for treatment or rehabilitation and end up staying on as workers.

It's been twelve years and five months now since my accident. For a long time afterwards it was very difficult for me to accept my new situation. I had been a happy girl who liked to dance, sing, participate in sports, and study. There wasn't much I didn't like to do. Now I'm in a wheelchair.

For four years after my accident I shut myself up in the back room of our house. I really believed that my life had ended. I refused to see my friends and felt very bad. All I could ask myself was, "Why me?" Because I could neither believe nor accept what had happened to me, I suffered deeply. I wouldn't accept being in a wheelchair.

When my parents took me to clinics I became nearly desperate. And though they took good care of me and worried a lot about me, I cried every day. Once when they were arguing about which of them would take me to a clinic in Mexico City, I screamed for them to do nothing for me. But they continued arguing. So I screamed again and broke both arm supports on my chair. My sister was also crying. She yelled at me, "¡Yo que tu me quitara la vida!" - "If I were you, I'd kill myself!" That I'll remember forever.

It's not that my sister is cruel. It was her way of saying how desperate she too had become. She's a kind person. I love her a lot. But all of this led me to a level of desperation that was intolerable. Twice I tried to kill myself.

Once when I had to go to the hospital my mother had to convince me to go out in my wheelchair. I didn't want to but ended up going anyway. I was embarrassed and angry to see how people looked at me with pity or as if I was strange. All of this made me afraid.

When we first heard about PROJIMO, my parents said that they would take me there. I said that I was sick of clinics and doctors and lies and that I wouldn't go anywhere. Just a few days before I had gone to a chiropractor. After looking me over, he told my parents that I was a liar and had been fooling them about my paralysis. To demonstrate that I was lying he held a hot lamp against my legs until it burnt me. When he saw what he had done, he became very serious and said nothing. That's why I was so afraid of doctors.

I was embarrassed and angry to see how people looked at me with pity or as if I was strange.

So then I went to Ajoya. I've been with PROJIMO for about seven years now and have become a very different person, thanks to all the compañeros at PROJIMO and to David Wemer.

When I arrived at PROJIMO I had two deep pressure sores that were infected. The compañeros began to treat me immediately. It was then that Roberto Fajardo* and other friends said that I might be taken to San Francisco for skin grafts, but that because of damage to my spine I would probably never walk. This was very difficult for me, because doctors had told me that I would be able to walk with therapy and exercise. But, thanks to my friends at PROJIMO and the fact that I came here to the hospital, I've been able to overcome many problems. I was taken to Shriners Hospital in San Francisco and had the skin graft done, and it was there that I began to appreciate myself once again.

When I returned to my family, they couldn't believe that I no longer needed help for anything. They all wanted to keep doing everything for me, but I told them that I could do things for myself. When I told them that I wanted to return to Ajoya, they didn't want me to go alone. They wanted my sisters to go with me, but I insisted that I wanted to go on my own. I said that I wanted to show my friends in Ajoya what I had learned in California. It is now seven years later, and I'm still there.

In my time with PROJIMO I've had much opportunity to help others, mainly women, to regain their sense of self-worth. And not just through physical therapy and exercises, but by recognizing that life can be beautiful almost regardless of the circumstances. There is so much we can do, never mind that we may be disabled.

I've participated in many different aspects of PROJIMO's work: physical therapy; pressure sore treatment; cooking; accounting; a little m doing consultations; talking with people, especially with those coping with recent spinal cord injury; cleanup; diabetes testing; and checking blood pressure of people in the community. I feel now like a very different and a very lucky person when I look back on all the support I've been given and all that I've in turn been able to give to others.

One thing I forgot to mention is that I worked in the Conasupo (a government-sponsored food store) in Ajoya for two years. Roberto Fajardo and some of the directors of the Conasupo arranged an opportunity for us to work at the store. I was chosen to start working there so that I could learn the ropes and teach other people from PROJIMO how to do things. When I saw that the others were getting the hang of it, I left, although sometimes they still ask me back to help out. The idea behind having people from PROJIMO work at the Conasupo was to show that

disabled people were very capable, that they could do all the necessary work and run the store, and also to give people skills that would be helpful in finding a job when they left PROJIMO.



Conchita at PROJIMO

I was 16 years old when my problem started. In the four years I was at home, I thought I'd never get married. I imagined that nobody would notice me or think that I would be capable of it because I was in a wheelchair. But now I've been married for four years and have a little girl of two and a half years. Sometimes my husband and I have problems, but we are basically happy.

In January of this year I became very ill and had to have surgery for gallstones. I spent eight days in the hospital. I couldn't move, bled a lot, and was constantly catheterized. After the first four days I developed serious pressure sores. It's because of this that I'm waiting here now for another surgery on the tenth of this month, God willing. Despite this temporary setback, everything seems to be going well for me now, thanks to all of my compañeros to my parents whom I love very much, and to my husband. This is just a brief part of my history.

Update: Conchita's surgery, which was performed by Interplast (a nonprofit organization based in Palo Alto, California which provides plastic surgery to Third World patients), was a success. Conchita is now back in Ajoya working with PROJIMO).■

Roberto Fajardo has worked with Project Piactla for 17 years, and has been one of its leaders for ten years. He first came to Piactla for treatment for a case of juvenile arthritis that had completely immobilized him. For more information on Roberto, see Newsletter #20.

Visit to Angola: Where Civilians are Disabled as a Tactic of Low-Intensity Conflict

David Werner

The impact of US foreign aid on the war-battered country of Angola, in southern Africa, is immediately apparent to the visitor. On every city block I passed in the eroded capital of Luanda, I saw at least two or three disabled people. Men, women, and children hobble along with the help of wooden poles or crutches. Boys with a missing leg, on makeshift crutches, leap with astounding agility after a 'ball' made of bits of foam plastic and rags stuffed into an old plastic bag. Gaunt young men in army fatigues poke with their crutches through trash heaps, looking for useful bits of wire or wood or string. Stubbornly, resiliently, life goes on.

The most common disabilities of people on the streets are amputation and polio, both the result directly or indirectly - of relentless 'low-intensity conflict' (LIC), the destabilization strategy to which the Angolan people have been subjected ever since Angola gained independence from Portuguese rule in 1975. The amputations result mainly from stepping on US-supplied land mines, which have left Angola with the world's largest per capita population of amputees.* The continuing high incidence of polio is a consequence of the breakdown of health care and immunization coverage in a country where access and services to rural areas have been cut off due to random yet persistent terrorist attacks along roads. Today (even after the supposed 'ceasefire') the only relatively safe travel in Angola is between major cities, by air.

The economy is likewise a disaster, despite a wealth of natural resources (including petroleum, which Gulf Oil continues to exploit profitably, apparently immune to the war). Power failures are frequent, often due to sabotage. Water supply, even in the capital city, is marginal and uncertain. The hotel where I stayed had running water for only about 15 minutes every other day. In view of such shortages, outbreaks of cholera have been on the rise, as have many other diseases of poverty. In Angola as a whole, it is estimated that almost one child in three dies before the age of five.**

Unfortunately, the aid the US government has been providing, overtly and covertly, for more than a decade has not been channeled through the Unrecognized government of Angola (headed by the MPLA, or Popular Move-

ment for the Liberation of Angola). Indeed, Washington has broken diplomatic relations with the regime, cut off all aid, and imposed economic sanctions. In place of such aid, the US has given millions of dollars of assistance - much of it in the form of military hardware, explosives, and training in the tactics of LIC - to UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), the partly mercenary opposition guerrilla force sustained by South Africa.

The huge number of disabled people in Angola is no accident. It is part of the strategy of low-intensity conflict. Leaving people seriously disabled puts a greater economic burden on families and the nation than does killing people outright.

US destabilization tactics in Angola are consistent with those used against other small, impoverished countries that have tried to liberate themselves from neocolonial rule. In Angola, as elsewhere, these tactics range from the most brutal and calculated terrorism to propaganda (usually called "social marketing") aimed at "winning the hearts and minds of the people." Rather than seeking to overthrow the government through a direct military strike, the approach is to erode popular support by undermining the economy, paralyzing public services, and sustaining a constant onslaught of terrorism.

UNITA's attacks are targeted, not only at military and government facilities, but also at civilians. It makes extensive use of land mines - which it plants strategically along paths, roadways, and in fields where villagers grow their crops - In order to restrict the production of food and produce widespread hunger. According to Africa Watch, a Washington based human rights organization, the UNITA rebels deliberately "strangle" villages by encircling them and blocking all incoming food shipments, which "means virtual starvation for the civilians in those areas."

* Cable News Network, "International Report," October 10, 1989.

**UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*, 1990, p 76.

The huge number of disabled people in Angola is no accident. It is part of the strategy of LIC. Leaving people seriously disabled puts a greater economic burden on families and the nation than does killing people outright. It also takes a bigger toll psychologically: disabled persons remain far more visible than dead persons. So leaving a massive number of people disabled is one means of turning people against the government, and especially against the drafting of young men into the military.

This October I was invited to Angola to take part in a workshop to help meet the needs of rural disabled people, especially civilians injured in the war. The two-week workshop was sponsored by the Angolan Ministry of Social Affairs (SEAS) together with the Development Workshop, a Canadian nongovernmental organization active in Angola. Those invited included the heads of the provincial rehabilitation centers, along with a disabled person from each center. Amazingly (in view of the enormous difficulties in arranging air transport), participants showed up from 15 of the 18 provinces. Of the group of 33 participants, 8 were disabled. Outside resource persons, in addition to Allan Cain from Development Workshop, included Pam Zinkin, who runs an international course in community-based rehabilitation in London and has worked for years in Mozambique; Kennett Westmacott, who conducts workshops on appropriate technical aids in Africa and Asia; and Ben Male, from Uganda, who works with Action for Disability and Development (ADD).

Rather than simply discuss how to make do with minimal tools and materials, we decided to actually try to make a variety of aids and appliances.

The workshop was an exciting adventure for us all. The participants came with a wide range of experiences, many questions, and few predetermined solutions. Our challenge was to look at the reality of the needs, resources, and limitations, and to try to work out approaches that would permit disabled people to become self-sufficient, active, integrated members of society. The rehabilitation centers in the provinces had been set up initially as training workshops where disabled persons would learn skills such as leatherwork and carpentry, and then return to their homes and villages. But the constant shortage of materials such as leather, nails, glue, and quality wood meant that the disabled persons in the centers did very little work; nor did they move on. Rather, the centers had become long-term asylums: sheltered workshops with no work.

In the course of our dialogue, everyone, especially the disabled participants, expressed concern about the lack of technical aids. One of the participants had to crawl on hands and knees because he had no wheelchair. Another with paralysis of the lower body moved about laboriously with two sticks because he had no crutches. Another, with a missing leg, got around on crutches because he lacked an artificial limb. The group of disabled people was very interested in exploring possibilities for learning how to make limbs, crutches, wheelchairs, orthopedic appliances, and other aids. But the biggest problem was the shortage of tools and materials.

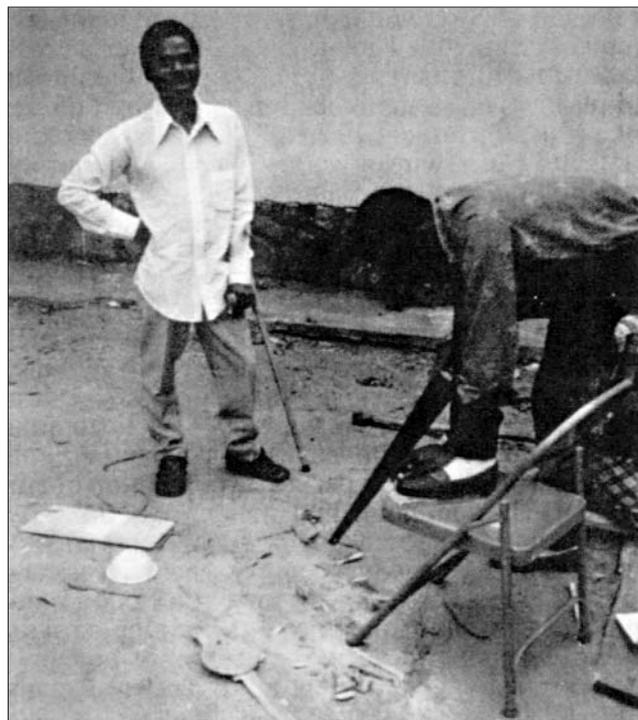


Photo by Allan Cain, Development Workshop

Rather than simply discuss how to make do with minimal tools and materials, we decided to actually try to make a variety of aids and appliances. If disabled persons could master these skills, they could not only help to answer the mobility needs of the vast and growing numbers of disabled people, but would also have important work to do.

We set out to produce what we could with whatever materials we could find. We began by making a trip to the city dump, where we collected bits of wire, broken plastic buckets, blown-out car tires and inner tubes, and bits of metal. About the only wood that was available was from packing crates leftover from international aid shipments, plus branches that could be cut from the few remaining ornamental trees.

To start off, Kennett showed the group how to make a saw by filing teeth into the steel strapping from packing crates, then stretching the blade between a frame of sticks. To get ideas for construction, we went out on the streets and watched the children playing with their home-made toys, such as scooters, pushcarts, and baby carriages with wheels made of wood or with large bearings from junked or bombed trucks. The ingenuity of the street children, inventing games and playthings out of anything at hand, was an inspiration and challenge to all of us.

Altogether, our group managed to create a wide range of devices, including:

- a log scooter-board with wooden wheels
- a folding sitting frame for a disabled child
- a special seat, tray, and toys for a child with cerebral palsy
- a tray suspended by a cord for one-handed transport without spilling
- parallel bars for learning to walk
- an enclosed swing made from an old tire turned inside out
- underarm and elbow crutches made from tree branches
- hand 'shoes' soled with pieces of car tire, for people who have to get around by crawling
- an arm rocker permitting a person with paralyzed arms to feed him- or herself
- ramps for wheelchair access and for exercise
- an orthopedic lift for a sandal, made from an old rubber sandal
- a pair of leg braces, made from a plastic bucket, especially designed for a little girl with a severe, progressive bowing of the knees
- a large wooden wheel with flat wooden spokes, lined with car tire (its design was later adapted for a wheelchair)
- an all-wooden wheelchair, made from old packing crate

Of these various projects, the biggest, most challenging, and most exciting was the wheelchair. We were able to work out a special design adapted to the poor-quality, half-inch-thick planks we had scavenged from packing crates. We even made the large (26-inch) back wheels

from packing crate wood. We put the whole thing together with nails pulled out of the packing crates and straightened. With four ball bearings we found, we mounted the back wheels on an axle made from a length of 3/4inch reinforcing rod. We were also able to obtain a few scraps of Angolan hardwood, so we force-fitted the bearings into inset holes chiseled into square pieces of the wood. We had intended to use ball bearings from old trucks for the small front caster wheels, but at the last minute someone located a couple of old plastic caster wheels and we adapted these. No welding was required for any part of the chair.

By dividing into several small groups that worked simultaneously on various parts of the chair, we managed to complete the project in four days. The result was a remarkably sturdy, functional wheelchair, specially designed to fit the participant who crawled about on his knees. A special rack was fitted to the chair to carry his pole.

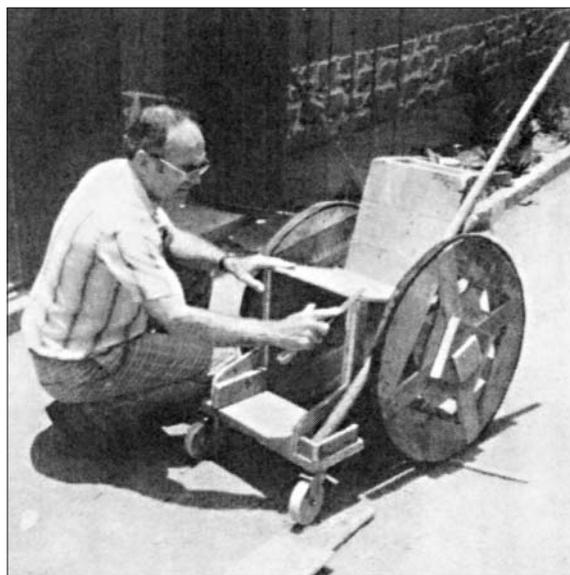


Photo by Allan Cain, Development Workshop

Perhaps the most worthwhile part of the workshop was the growth of understanding and respect that took place among the members of the working group. In the beginning, the heads of the rehab centers were reluctant to take part in the manual work, or to work on an equal footing with the disabled participants, many of whom were more rustic and unschooled. For their part, the disabled persons seemed uncomfortable and unsure of themselves when working alongside the administrators. But in the process of working and solving problems together, everyone began to relax and to appreciate each other's skills. In some areas, such as measurement and interpretation of designs, the officials were more capable. But in much of the actual building and use of tools, the disabled persons were noticeably more skilled. Each group learned from the other, and a sense of camaraderie and self-confidence developed.

What is more, the disabled persons from the different provinces discussed a lot of common concerns, and began to talk about forming some sort of network or association. This was of special significance because to date there is no organization of disabled people in Angola. This may be a beginning.

Among the most needed aids for disabled people in Angola are artificial limbs. We had planned to make a provisional bamboo or PVC limb for the one amputee in our group, and the prosthetic team from the Swedish Red Cross brought to the workshop an ingenious prosthesis they had made from materials obtained in Angola. This consisted of an adjustable leather socket attached to a thin steel tube, which could also be adjusted through a simple telescoping mechanism. On examination of the participant with the missing leg, however, we found that the combination of contractures and muscle weakness in the hip made the use of a simple prosthesis impossible. This led us to explore exercises and bandaging techniques which the participants could teach amputees to practice on a daily basis, so that if and when they were able to obtain artificial limbs, they would be more able to use them without major problems.

We all agreed that there was an enormous need for small, decentralized limb-making workshops in the provinces, preferably with disabled persons themselves as technicians. Today Angola has tens of thousands of young amputees waiting for prostheses. And more amputees are produced every day.



Photo by Allan Cain, Development Workshop

This was our most sobering thought. We realized that for every artificial limb or wheelchair or pair of crutches the members of our workshop produce once they return to their respective provinces, dozens of additional people will become disabled by the continuing war. We all agreed that our rehabilitation efforts for and by disabled persons—although important—do little to resolve the root problem.

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The average American citizen knows very little about Angola or the tragic, pointless devastation that his or her tax dollars have been financing for the last 14 years. Those who follow the scanty news reports on Angola have learned that a `ceasefire' has been declared, and that Cuban and South African troops have pulled out. They are led to believe that progress toward peace and reconciliation is underway. But they don't know that the US government is sabotaging the Angolan peace initiative by continuing its multimillion dollar financing of UNITA. Far from respecting the ceasefire, UNITA has taken advantage of the Cuban withdrawal to step up its attacks. Almost every day that I was in Angola there were new reports of bombings and attacks, many on civilians.

In the past, UNITA did not have quite as bad a record of targeting health workers and health centers as is the case with the Contras in Nicaragua, Renamo in Mozambique, the death squads in El Salvador and Guatemala, the `vigilantes' in the Philippines, and other US- or South Africa-backed terrorist outfits. But since the `ceasefire', the pattern seems to be changing. On October 9 (the day before I left Angola), an article appeared in the International Herald Tribune titled "Massacre of Angolan Civilians Makes Mockery of Ceasefire." The article reported that in the town of Samba Caju, in Angola's central highlands, UNITA guerrillas "not only assaulted unarmed civilians but also sabotaged the community's economic infrastructure." One of their chief targets was a two-room medical clinic, serving 60,00 people, which was completely destroyed. In the raid, said the townspeople, "15 unarmed peasants were killed and at least 40 wounded." Who knows how many of these persons lost limbs or may remain permanently disabled?

These terrorist attacks have left a huge number of orphans. Traditionally, African societies have never needed orphanages. When something happens to a child's parents, the extended family or neighbors take the child in. But the continuing terrorism in the countryside has made

this very difficult. Entire villages have been uprooted, with the survivors fleeing in every direction. During the 14 years of siege, the capital city of Luanda has grown from 500,000 to triple that size, and now contains nearly a million refugees. There are thousands of lost and abandoned children. No one feels that orphanages are the best place for them, but trying to locate their families will remain very difficult as long as UNITA's terrorist attacks prevent travel to isolated communities.

I returned from Angola convinced that the biggest changes regarding the disabled community there need to be made in South Africa and here in the US.

Finding foster homes for so many displaced children is not easy—especially for those children that are severely disabled. So, for the meantime, orphanages maybe the only alternative. On my last day in Angola, I visited the Kwzola Orphanage for war displaced children in Luanda, which has been constructed and maintained through aid from Italy. In general, the care provided for the children was excellent. But the disabled children were clearly in need of more attention. One little girl had a broken-down wheelchair without tires. (The disabled participants in our workshop could easily have made tires for it like the ones they attached to the wheelchair they built.)

The child who most caught my attention was a five-year-old boy named Geraldo. He was from a village in southern Angola which had been raided by UNITA two years before. The terrorists had gunned down his whole family. His parents died from their wounds. Although shot through the spine, Geraldo miraculously survived. He was taken to the provincial hospital and finally to Luanda, where he was hospitalized for six months. Today he lives in the Kwzola Orphanage. He has the best wheelchair in the place—but it is a huge, heavy, adult-size chair that he is barely able to move by himself.

Maybe some day, when the US government decides to stop financing UNITA and destabilizing Angola, a search can be made for Geraldo's relatives, and he can be reunited with his extended family. Until then, Geraldo and thousands of children like him will continue to live in orphanages. And many others will continue to become disabled through the ravages of low-intensity conflict designed - according to a 1977 policy-forming "White Paper" of the South African government - as part of a "total strategy ...to keep the neighboring black states dependent and submissive."*

*San Jose Mercury, Oct. 15, 1989

According to the United Nations Commission for Africa, the ongoing war in Angola - sustained by South African and US military aid to their proxy forces - cost the country 30 billion dollars and took 500,000 lives between 1980 and 1988. The Red Cross has so far counted 55,000 people disabled by the war, but the true figure is probably much larger. At least half of those killed or disabled have been women and children. If we add the number of children who have died or become disabled because of malnutrition, disrupted water supply, aborted immunization campaigns, displacement of families, and emotional trauma, the figures become even more staggering.

I was invited to Angola to help disabled persons meet their needs. In the workshop, we tinkered enthusiastically with a few appropriate technologies and other alternatives. But what we accomplished was merely a finger in the dike.

I returned from Angola convinced that the biggest changes regarding the disabled community there need to be made in South Africa and here in the US. The US government must stop supporting terrorists who strategically disable individuals, communities, and nations. It is up to the people of the US to bring our government's behavior into line with international law and common human decency.



Plante, The Chattanooga Times

The first step is to educate ourselves so as to overcome the systematic disinformation we are being fed by Washington and much of the mainstream media. It is imperative that more Americans learn about what is going on in Angola and the role that our government is playing there. Once we have become as well-informed as possible, we must share what we have learned with others. Then we need to begin writing letters to the press. And to our Congresspersons: Demand that we get out! ■

From Heads to TOES: the Other Economic Summit

David Werner

Who should make the decisions about the future of humanity and the planet?

Last July, in Houston Texas, the heads of the Group of Seven powerful nations - the US, Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, and Canada gathered to plan the world's future economic policies, trade practices, and other global matters over which the 'G7' wields or hoes to wield its control. The event was given extensive coverage by the major US media, which reported on everything from the extravagant banquet menus (including alligator tail) to the exchange of costly gifts (including the luxurious handmade riding boots that President Bush gave to the other heads of state).

At almost the same time that the Economic Summit of the G7 convened, another strategic international meeting was taking place, also in Houston. Although this counter-summit was potentially far more important to the well-being of the world's people, in marked contrast to the G7 Summit it received almost no coverage by the major US media.

The Other Economic Summit - TOES for short was an epic gathering of nearly a thousand 'spokespersons for disadvantaged people' from all over the world. Significantly, representatives from the 'Group of Seven' poorest countries were given a special forum to express their grievances and hopes.

Present at the TOES conference were representatives from people's movements ranging from the Frente Sandinista in Nicaragua and the guerrilla forces in El Salvador to the African National Congress in South Africa. Also present were the 'poor people's presidential candidates' from Latin America's two biggest countries, Luiz Ignacio da Silva (or, as he is popularly known, "Lula") from Brazil and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas from México. Both would probably have won the last national elections in their countries, had it not been for foul play at the polls. (Washington worked as hard to undermine the chances for a truly democratic process in the Brazilian election as it did in that held last February in Nicaragua.)

In his presentation at TOES, Cárdenas made it clear that the policies already pursued by the G7 have led to "a drastic decline in living standards in some countries to levels comparable to those existing 40 years ago." Da Silva—referring to the approaching 500-year anniversary of Columbus's voyage to the Americas—argued that it

was high time, after half a millennium, for the richest states to stop treating the poorest nations as their de facto colonies.

Martin Khor Kok Peng from Malaysia, coordinator of the World Rainforest Movement, spoke out against GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), which was a major theme at both summits. The G7 has been pushing to lift certain government controls over international business and trade. Khor warned that such deregulation would lead to even greater dominance by multinational corporations, not only over marketing, but also over Third World banking, insurance, and communications sectors. Khor linked this dominance from the North and the consequent increasing outflow of wealth and natural resources from poor countries to rich -to the rampant destruction of rainforests and the accelerating Greenhouse Effect.

Reforms of North-South economic relations are an essential prerequisite to alleviating the Greenhouse Effect.

The 'Greenhouse Effect' was a focal issue of both summits, but from very different perspectives. On the opening day of the G7 conference, White House Chief of Staff John Sununu shocked environmentalists by claiming that 94% of global warming is produced by natural causes! Sununu's contention was not refuted at the rich countries' summit. In fact, efforts by the other six nations to reach an agreement on launching a coordinated initiative to reduce carbon dioxide emissions resulting from human activity (the real cause of the Greenhouse Effect) were systematically blocked by the US.

At the TOES conference, environmentalists stressed that reforms of North-South economic relations are an essential prerequisite to alleviating the Greenhouse Effect. As Khor pointed out, debt stricken countries are destroying their forests and converting grasslands into deserts just to keep pace with their giant interest payments to Northern banks. The Greenhouse Effect and other environmental degradation can be effectively contained only when poor countries get out from under the yoke of massive foreign debt, fairer trade policies are initiated, and wealth stops flowing from the poor countries to the rich (now at a net of \$50 billion a year). Given the fact that arresting the Greenhouse Effect is ultimately contingent upon shifting from a growth-oriented to an equity-oriented

model for human and economic development, it is not surprising—that the Northern powers cannot agree upon effective action. But in the long run everyone will lose, rich and poor alike.

I (David Werner) was grateful to have been invited to participate in The Other Economic Summit (to present a paper on the politics of health). I must admit that I came away from the conference with my head spinning. TOES was a profound experience, both exciting and distressing. Exciting because it was clear that if some of the clear-thinking, socially committed, and politically astute speakers at TOS were given equal footing with the G7 heads of state and allowed to represent the 'silent majority' at the planning table of global policies, humanity could move quickly toward a more sensible, equitable, and ecologically viable society. And distressing because our existing power structure is so successful at keeping these alternative strategists and spokespersons for the poor muted. What a service it would have been if the New York Times had given as full coverage to the sensible, practical, globally essential measures proposed at TOES as it gave to the dinner parties of the G7!

What excited and upset me more than anything else at the TOES meeting was the wealth of knowledge and plausible suggestions relevant to solving the biggest problems threatening both humanity and the planet. *Sensible, economical, humane, and extremely feasible solutions are at hand—if only our leaders would open their hands to take them.*

One of the most mind-boggling presentations was that given by Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute. Lovins talked about energy consumption, its causal relationship to the Greenhouse Effect, and very pragmatic possibilities for dramatically reducing both. Although he discussed global implications, his primary focus was on what could be done in the United States. This focus is only logical, since the US, with just six percent of the world's population, consumes 25 percent of its energy and nonrenewable resources, and thus makes an equally disproportionate contribution to the Greenhouse Effect. Lovins presented extensive evidence showing that the technologies already exist to reduce US energy consumption to one quarter of the present level with no sacrifice in people's present lifestyle or standard of living.

For example, lighting uses 20 percent of the electric supply in the US. It could be made vastly more efficient simply by using new, low-energy bulbs. An energy-efficient eight watt bulb (already on the market) provides as much light as a standard 75 watt bulb. The initial cost, although higher than standard light bulbs, is more than made up for by the longer life of the energy-efficient alternative - apart from the huge savings in electric bills.

Similarly, prototypes for motor cars already exist which yield 75 to 80 miles per gallon with no reduction in power. And designs for energy-efficient housing can drastically reduce heating and air-conditioning costs.

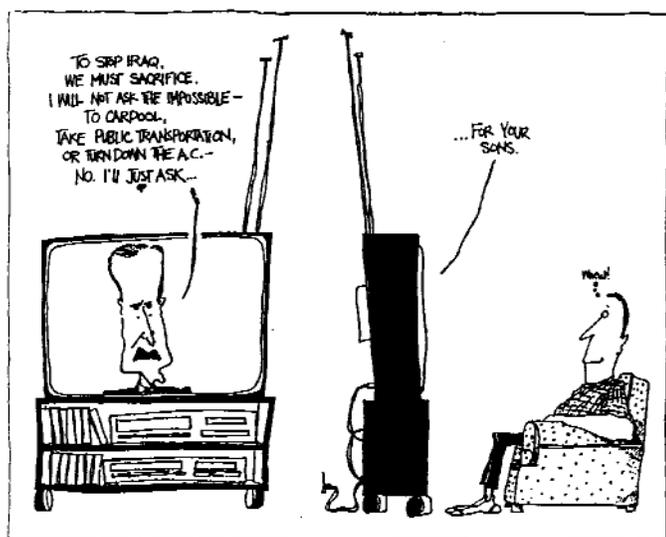
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The list of energy-saving alternatives for which technologies already exist goes on and on. The clinching argument for these alternatives is that over time they can save, not only natural resources, but also vast amounts of money. Lovins pointed out that the US has already, through a few modest energy saving measures introduced since 1973, reduced its annual energy bill by \$150 billion, a savings comparable to the Federal budget deficit. And this is only a fraction of what is possible. If the US were now as energy-efficient as Europe and Japan, our nation would be saving an additional \$200 billion per year. But the energy-, money-, and environment-saving potential is much, much greater.

According to Lovins, simply promoting such energy-conserving measures for the rest of this century could yield a cumulative net saving of several trillion dollars, enough to pay off the entire national debt. This would also reduce the nation's need for nuclear power, its nonrenewable fuel requirements, and its output of carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide, thus alleviating both the Greenhouse Effect and acid rain. All this could be accomplished not merely at low cost, but at astronomical savings to both the government and the people.

The advantages this strategy would generate in terms of a healthier physical and social environment don't stop there. Highly efficient energy use would so dramatically cut down on the need for crude oil that no more imports would be necessary, either from Alaska or the Middle East. Massive oil spills would be a thing of the past. Even more important for global survival, the US would no longer have to worry about maintaining its economic and political dominance in the Persian Gulf. With the US having attained energy self-sufficiency, much of the paranoia about 'national security' could be laid to rest. The military which directly and indirectly accounts for over half the US government budget - would lose one of its strongest current arguments against urgently needed cutbacks. Substantial cutbacks within the massive arms industry could in turn reduce energy consumption and carbon dioxide emission even further.

So why aren't we implementing these measures? The reasons are complex. For one, the mainstream paradigm for national prosperity and progress - the 'Great American Dream' - is one of never-ending growth, not of conservation. But the single most important reason relates to the power and influence wielded by the oil industry, as reflected in its ability to buy votes and dictate government policy. It comes down to the free-market ethic of putting profit before people -- stockholders must have maximum short-term gains, even if this compromises the well-being of the people and the planet. From the long-teen perspective, of course, losses will be astronomical, even for the stockholders (or at least their children).



Wilkinson

We saw that at the G7 Summit, the US government once again put corporate interests before global wellbeing. It stubbornly blocked an international accord to put timelines on measures to forestall the Greenhouse Effect. Using its standard tactic of disinformation, the White House has also come out with an estimate that the steps required to substantially reduce the US contribution to the Greenhouse effect would cost the nation approximately three trillion dollars by the turn of the century. Lovins says that this estimate is more or less correct-except that they forgot the minus sign! Reducing the Greenhouse Effect through more efficient energy use would save, rather than cost, the nation two to three trillion dollars by the end of the century.

As regards enemy consumption in the Third World, Lovins pointed out that, while underdeveloped countries consume far less energy per capita than the industrialized countries, their present use of energy is much less efficient. The energy saving potential for the Third World is therefore still greater than that for the North. Even allowing for a doubling of the population and a substantial

raise in the standard of living, Third World energy consumption and contribution to the Greenhouse Effect could be significantly decreased.

Reducing the Greenhouse Effect through more efficient energy use would save the nation two to three trillion dollars by the end of the century.

But this would require some radical reforms of trade policies. Today the rich industrialized countries tend to export their outdated, least energy efficient motors, equipment, and electrical goods to the Third World. The same kind of restrictions are needed to prevent multinationals from exporting environmentally dangerous, energy-consuming goods to poor countries as are needed to stop them from dumping toxic waste, unsafe medicines, hazardous pesticides, and other products which have been or should be banned in their parent countries.

Clearly, the biggest obstacles to the energy saving, environment-protecting strategies recommended by Lovins are not technological, but political. Unfortunately, those who frame our national and global policies have their own agenda. They did not invite Amory Lovins to contribute to the G7's discussion on global warming. Nor, apparently, do their analysts even look at his well-documented writings. If they did, perhaps they would realize that their shortsighted policies threaten to plunge the powerful and powerless alike into ruin.

The Other Economic Summit provided an abundance of ideas and strategies from which the world's leaders might have learned-ones that could go a long way toward resolving humanity's biggest problems. But the G7 were not interested. Nor, for that matter, was the mainstream media.

It thus should come as no surprise that the participants in TOES concluded that the far-reaching changes needed for a healthier and saner society must come from the bottom up, through a worldwide coalition of grassroots movements, activists, disadvantaged groups, environmentalists, human rights advocates, and all of us who are concerned for the well-being of the planet and its people. Those in positions of power will listen to the voice of reason only when their constituents leave them no choice.

Note: If you are interested in learning more about practical ways to save energy, contain the Greenhouse Effect, and reduce the national debt through the money these measures could save, write to the Rocky Mountain Institute, 1739 Snowmass Creek Road, Snowmass, Colorado 81654-9199, USA. ■

The Third World in Crisis: Excerpts from an Interview with Medea Benjamin

These are highlights from an interview that Steve Babb of the Hesperian staff conducted with Medea Benjamin this past March. Medea is executive director of the San Francisco-based non-profit organization Global Exchange, which sponsors educational programs concerning Third World issues and promotes the growing "citizen diplomacy" /internationalist movement. She is also the coauthor of Don't be Afraid, Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart and No Free Lunch: Food and Revolution in Cuba Today. If you would like more information on this important new group, you can write them at 2141 Mission Street, Room 202, San Francisco, CA 94110, or give them a call at (415) 255-7296.

Q: What lessons do you think the changes going on in the Eastern Bloc hold for progressive movements in the Third World?

A: Communism as it has been practiced in Eastern Europe has been an extremely statist, top-down, Stalinist system that is certainly not the kind of system that people in the Third World are struggling for. One of the issues that I'm most concerned about is how the changes in the Eastern Bloc are being perceived by people in the capitalist First World. What you see on the part of the US government, for example, is a sense of triumphalism, of, "We told you all along that capitalism is a better system and now that has been proven true," even to the point of declaring that "History has ended." That's very dangerous, because what it doesn't take into consideration is what capitalism has done throughout the Third World. And capitalism has been an absolute disaster in the Third World. In many Third World countries, the living standards today are worse than those of twenty years ago.

When we talk about the triumph of a system, we need to look at the whole world, and acknowledge that neither capitalism nor Communism as they're being practiced today has worked for the majority of the people in this world.

When we talk about the triumph of a system, we need to look at the whole world, and acknowledge that neither capitalism nor Communism as they're being practiced today has worked for the majority of the people in this world. If there's one lesson to draw from all this, it's that we need to be creative, we need to be flexible, we need to be non-dogmatic, and we need to look for hybrids of different kinds of systems that will work in different societies. It's not an either/or situation.

Q: Some people argue that now that the Soviet Union is receding as a threat, this will deprive Washington of a justification for intervening in Third World countries. Others

say that the US government will find substitute enemies or threats, for instance the drug threat in the case of Panama, and that the effect of the changes in the Soviet Union on US foreign policy will be negative, removing a check on Washington's power. Which of these positions do you think is more accurate?

The US is taking advantage of the thaw in the Cold War to impose its policies more blatantly than ever before.

A: In the long run, the potential for peace is much greater than it ever has been, and that's an incredible challenge and an incredible opportunity for us. But, in the short run, the US is taking advantage of the situation to impose its policies more blatantly than ever before. We saw that no sooner did relations with the Soviet Union improve than the US invaded Panama. And we're seeing that US policy towards Central America is not changing at all. I just got back this week from a trip to Cuba, and it was clear that Cuba feels more threatened than it has for a long time by the US, and feels that without the Soviet Union there as a buffer, Washington is smelling blood and is being extremely aggressive. So I think that in the short run there's a great danger of increased US interventionism in the Third World.

Our job as responsible citizens is to force our government to respond in kind to the changes going on in the Soviet Union, to the Soviets' pulling back from their interventionism overseas, so that the opportunity that has opened for detente and for a more peaceful world is actually realized.

Q: Many analysts are predicting that the US will lose its position as the world's dominant economic power to a united Europe in the near future. Do you think that the transition period while this happens may be especially dangerous, with the US feeling a need to reassert its power, and the Third World providing the most convenient stage on which to do so?

A: I think it's definitely a dangerous period. When you look at the kind of justifications Washington used for the invasion of Manama, it could use those justifications for invading any number of countries that are involved in drug production and trade: Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, a number of Asian countries. A country in the throes of decline - and I think the US really is in the throes of decline - tends to kick and scream a lot.



Wuerker, Z Magazine, October 1990

Q: One of the perennial challenges to progressive movements in the Third World, or for that matter anywhere, is how to combine socioeconomic democracy with political democracy. What lessons can we learn from recent events about how to reconcile these two different sorts of democracy?

A: I feel more negative about the possibilities of reconciling them than I have ever felt before, because I see the tremendous power that the US government has to sway political processes in its favor. If you look at the Nicaraguan Revolution, I think that for many progressives throughout the world it was an example of a movement that wanted to combine the two, that wanted to have more open political and economic systems while at the same time working for economic and social justice. After the first three or four years, that experiment was systematically destroyed by the US, and the result was that the Nicaraguan people became so war-weary and economically deprived that they voted against the Sandinistas. But for those three or four years, from 1979 to about 1983, there was a real flowering of the two forms of democracy together, and that does give me hope that the two can go together were we able to keep the US off a country's back.

We haven't had one case yet where a Third World country has been allowed to carry out a revolutionary change in its system in peace. So I do believe that in the best of all possible worlds those two sorts of democracy can go together, but not unless we stop the US from shutting off the possibility.

Q: The debt crisis appears to be one of the most desperate situations confronting the Third World, with little hope in sight. It also appears to be a hard issue to organize the US public around, since it's relatively intangible. How do you think people in the US can be made more aware of the tragic human toll the debt crisis is taking in the Third World? How do you feel the crisis can be resolved?

A: I think the debt crisis is going to get a lot worse before it gets better. I think that the changes in Eastern Europe are going to exacerbate the Third World debt crisis even more. A lot of the little bit of money in both economic aid and investments that had been going into the Third World is now being shifted to Eastern Europe. The economic aid that the US has promised to Poland and Hungary - two countries! is about the equivalent of the economic aid it is giving to all of sub-Saharan Africa. So the Third World's situation is becoming more and more hopeless in terms of getting any kind of economic aid or any kind of investment, either from government or private sources.

In the years to come there's going to be an absolute draining of the Third World, and a growing dichotomy between North and South.

In the years to come there's going to be an absolute draining of the Third World, and I think we're going to see a growing dichotomy, not between East and West any more, but between North and South. The result of all this is that it's going to become clear that it's absolutely impossible for Third World countries to repay the debt. The coming crisis is going to force some kind of moratorium on the repayment of the debt.

The mobilization on this issue is going to come, not from the US, but from the Third World. It's going to come in the form of riots - more bread riots like those we're seeing now and have been seeing for the last five years, and more upheaval. This is what is finally going to push people in the US to get more involved in the debt issue, and this is what is finally going to push the IMF and the World Bank to change their policies. But there's going to be a lot of upheaval before that happens. ■