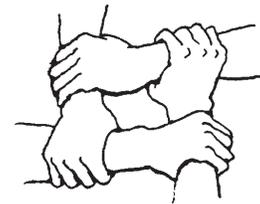




Newsletter from the Sierra Madre #31

May 1995



Project PROJIMO: a program run by and for disabled young persons in western Mexico

HEALTHRIGHTS
Workgroup for People's Health and Rights

Project Piaxtla: a villager-run health care network in the mountains of western Mexico

If there is a common theme running through this newsletter, it is the ethical imperative of giving people who are at a disadvantage a fair chance. We start with the story of a multiply disabled child in Mexico, and the way village rehabilitation workers at PROJIMO used Child-to-Child methods to help his classmates become more understanding and helpful. Then we look at dire events in Mexico as a whole, and how the North American Free Trade Agreement has contributed to the country's economic collapse, with devastating effects on the poor. Next we explore the evolving struggles of disabled people for their rights in Russia, where the All Russia Society of the Disabled has translated the handbook developed at PROJIMO: Disabled Village Children. Finally, we visit the World Social Summit in Copenhagen, where debate polarized between greed-based and need-based development. In Russia, in Mexico, and worldwide it is clear that the greed-based paradigm now holds the upper hand. But growing numbers of people from all social strata are beginning to join together to build a society based more on caring and sharing.

CLASSMATES HELP A DISABLED CHILD STAY IN SCHOOL

— David Werner —

In January, 1995, PROJIMO (Program of Rehabilitation Organized by Disabled Youth of Western Mexico) hosted a four-day workshop to discuss the organization and problems of small community-based programs. Participants came from 13 different programs in Mexico and one in Nicaragua. One afternoon the lively workshop, held under a giant laurel tree, was interrupted by one of the disabled children staying at PROJIMO. Jesus rolled up to the study group in his wheelchair asking for Conchita, one of PROJIMO's coordinators who was participating in the workshop. The boy was obviously distraught.

"This is the last day I'm going to school!" declared Jesus.

"Why?" Asked Conchita, rolling over to him in her own wheelchair.

"Because the teacher is mean to me," said Jesus. "When I ask her what is written on the blackboard, she gets angry and says I'm disturbing the class."



"Doesn't your teacher know you can't see?" asked one of the workshop participants, herself blind.

"I've told her, but it's like she doesn't hear me. Or doesn't believe me," said Jesus. "She treats me as if it were my fault I can't see well!"

Jesus, who is 13 years old, is multiply disabled. His life has not been easy. He was born with spina bifida, a defect of the spinal cord which causes partial paralysis and reduced feeling in the lower extremities. With a lot of help from his parents, at

age three Jesus did learn to walk, although awkwardly. Then, at age six, he fell, hit his head, and developed meningitis. This left him nearly blind and with muscle stiffness (spasticity) that reduced control of his movements, including in his arms and hands. The stiffness gradually diminished, and with great effort the boy finally learned to walk again, using crutches and dragging his feet. But lacking feeling in his feet, he developed a deep sore on his foot. This led to a

chronic, spreading bone infection which resulted, at age seven, in amputation of his right leg above the knee. Jesus went back to crawling and gradually developed flexion contractures of his hips and knee. And from spending long periods of time sitting on his insensate buttocks, he developed large chronic pressure sores, down to the bone. His lack of urine and bowel control (also caused by the spina bifida) made the sores difficult to keep clean, and the condition gradually worsened, year after year.

At age 13 his mother brought Jesus from Mazatlan, where the family lives, to PROJIMO (in the foothills of the Sierra Madre, about 100 miles away). On examining Jesus, the PROJIMO team thought that he could learn to walk again if he were fitted with a prosthetic limb. But first his hip and knee contractures needed to be corrected. This would require weeks or possibly months of gradual stretching on a wheeled

he was going to drop out of school, the whole group began to discuss what they might do to help the child gain the will and courage to continue. Three of the workshop participants were from a program for visually impaired persons in the state capital, and one of them herself was partially blind. They suggested a number of ideas for helping Jesus learn more easily, and offered to talk with his teacher.

tation work, Ramona has actively involved school-aged and disabled children in a variety of Child-to-Child activities.

Most of the workshop participants had been unfamiliar with the concept of Child-to-Child, but on hearing Ramona speak of it, they wanted to learn more. Those working with blind persons were especially eager to take part in a Child-to-Child activity with Jesus' class. The PROJIMO coordinators obtained permission from the school Director and second grade teacher to conduct the activity the next afternoon.



The Child-to-Child activity

Ramona led the Child-to-Child activity, and her spry, enthusiastic manner at once captured the children's attention. She started by explaining a bit about Child-to-Child, introduced the visitors, and then told the children she wanted to explore with them what it was like to be blind, or partially blind, like Jesus. When she said this, all the children looked at Jesus, who sat in his wheelchair at the side of the classroom. Sensing their attention, he sat up importantly and smiled back at them.

Then Ramona, the participant from Nicaragua, had an excellent idea. "Why don't we try a Child-to-Child activity with the second grade children, to help both his classmates and the teacher understand Jesus' visual problem better and figure out ways to assist him with his studies?"

gurney. Lying face down on the gurney would also take the pressure off his backside, and allow the large pressure sores to gradually heal. So arrangements were made for Jesus to stay at PROJIMO for an extended period.

Jesus' stay in Ajoya provided for his first opportunity to attend school. Although he was frightened at the idea of being away from home, the challenge of going to school excited him. His mother and older sister had already taught him to read the letters of the alphabet. He could read them if they were drawn very large and he held them two or three inches from his face. So Jesus was eager to go to school and improve his reading skills. He started with enthusiasm, attending at first on his wheeled gurney.

Child-to-Child is an international initiative whereby school-aged children, through discovery-based activities, learn ways to help protect the health of other children or otherwise assist them, especially those who are younger, sick, or have special needs. Many of the early Child-to-Child activities and ideas were developed in Project Piactla, the villager-run primary health care program that gave birth to PROJIMO. One of the local villagers, Martin Reyes, who for over two decades worked as a



health and rehabilitation worker with Projects Piactla and PROJIMO, now works with CISAS in Nicaragua, promoting Child-to-Child throughout much of Latin America. Four years ago he and David Werner helped conduct a Child-to-Child training program in Managua in which Ramona, the current workshop participant from Nicaragua, had taken part. A year later (in 1991) Ramona, who has one leg paralyzed by polio, went to Mexico to apprentice in community based rehabilitation skills at PROJIMO. On returning to Nicaragua, she launched a program for disabled persons in her home town in Nicaragua. And as a part of her rehabili-

Ramona called for volunteers to take part in a role play. Two children played the role of blind pupils. Two others took turns playing the role of a visually impaired pupil like Jesus. And two others played the role of school teacher. The two "blind" children had bandanas tied tightly over their eyes, and could see nothing. They tried to find their way around the classroom and follow instructions of the "teacher." These children bumped into things and got confused. They said it was like trying to find their way in a dark room at night.

Jesus is obviously very bright, and has an inquisitive mind. In spite of his visual impairment he learned so quickly that within the first few weeks he was advanced to the second grade. Unfortunately, however, the second grade teacher had little understanding of his special needs and regarded the disabled boy more as nuisance than a challenge. Unable to read either the blackboard or his books, Jesus little by little grew discouraged.

"It's no use," complained Jesus. "I'm going to drop out of school. I want to go home." When, in front of the workshop participants, Jesus announced to Conchita that

The other children helped by giving them clues or by guiding them. They also

played a trick on one of the “blind” boys. The “teacher” asked the boy to find a girl named Eliza and bring her to the front of the class. Feeling his way, the blindfolded boy made his way to Eliza’s seat. But as he approached, Eliza quickly swapped seats with the girl next to her. The blindfolded boy took the other girl by the hand, led her forward, and presented her to the teacher. “Here is Eliza,” he said. “Are you sure that is Eliza?” asked the child playing the teacher. “Yes!” said the boy. “Take off your blindfold and have a look,” said the “teacher.” The boy took it off and stared dumbfounded at the girl he thought had been Eliza. “They tricked me!” he exclaimed. The entire class burst into laughter.

With another child playing teacher, the next role play involved a visually disabled child. To simulate the visual disability, the child had a cotton shirt draped over his head. (The facilitators had experimented with different cloths until they found one which limited vision similar to Jesus’ impairment.) The “teacher” asked the child to read from her book, and the child, holding the book a couple of inches from his face, could read only the largest letters. Then the “teacher” wrote words on the blackboard, and asked the “visually impaired” child to read them. The child had to go all the way up to the blackboard to read the word. By making the letters much bigger and darker, the class learned that the child could read the word from a little farther away. But she still needed to be very close to the blackboard.



After this role play with simulated visual impairment, another “pretend teacher” asked Jesus to read a word on the blackboard. Jesus rolled forward, and to read the word had to grip the armrests of his wheelchair and lift himself upright so that his face was almost touching the word, which he read proudly.

After seeing the difficulty Jesus had, both from the blackboard and from his schoolbooks, Ramona asked the school children, “Can you think of ways that you, Jesus’s classmates, can help him understand his lessons and get the most out of school, in spite of his disability?” The children came up with a wide variety of creative sugges-

tions. These included:

- Make sure Jesus sits at the front of the class, near the blackboard.
- Write and draw very large on the blackboard.
- Our teacher or one of us should always read out loud what is written on the blackboard.
- Have Jesus sit next to a classmate who can whisper into his ear what is written on the blackboard.
- One of us could copy into Jesus’ notebook what is written on the blackboard.
- And we should write in his notebook in big, dark, clear letters.
- Maybe Jesus could use an extra big notebook and a black marking pen, so he can read for himself what he writes.
- Would it help if Jesus had a magnifying glass?
- We children could take turns after school, helping Jesus with his homework and reading to him from his books.
- Some of us can also take turns helping to bring him to and from school. (Although Jesus has learned to find his way without trouble, there is a steep slope on the way to school, and Jesus appreciates the assistance and comradery.)

With a little prompting, the children came up with yet other ideas:

- What about a tape recorder? We could record the lessons from his books, and that way he could study them whenever he wants.



- When we are given tests and exams, couldn't Jesus whisper the answers in the teacher's ear? (In other words, take them orally.)

After this discussion, Ramona asked the visually impaired visitor if she had any further ideas. She suggested that in order to make writing easier for Jesus (and the results more legible for the teacher) that Jesus be given special paper with extra dark lines—since for a visually impaired person the very thin pale lines on ordinary lined paper can not be seen at all. If paper with dark, widely separated lines could not be obtained, she suggested, the children could create such paper for Jesus with their rulers and a marking pen.

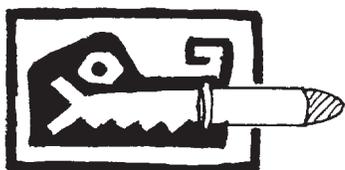
Then the blind visitor made another suggestion that at first totally confused the second graders. She told them that, with a little help, Jesus could learn to read with his fingers. From her folder she pulled a large sheet of braille script, and showed the children how she could read it with her finger tips. She let every child in the class feel the tiny bumps on the paper. And then she let Jesus try it, guiding his finger over the paper. After that she gave Jesus a sheet with the Braille alphabet. Next to each Braille letter a large, dark letter was written, so that Jesus could begin to learn Braille. The children were enthralled and



Jesus was so excited he trembled. The visitor explained that the Braille system had been invented many years ago by a blind schoolboy in France. Judging from the response of the school children, this Child-to-Child activity was a great success. Jesus decided to stay in school, the teacher agreed to have Jesus sit next to a mischievous little boy who had come up with many of the suggestions of how to help Jesus with his learning. A small group of Jesus' classmates began accompanying him to and from school. Some of the children help him with his homework. And now Jesus has both a magnifying glass and a small tape recorder, and one of the girls at PROJIMO, who also has spina bifida and an amputated leg and now walks with a prosthesis, has offered to help tape his lessons.

Clearly, not all the problems are solved. The other children, rather than helping Jesus to do his homework, at first tended to do it for him. But the whole Child-to-Child process has been a rewarding learning experience for everyone. Both Jesus and his classmates are learning far more than just their lessons. They are learning the joy that comes from bridging barriers to understanding, from creative problem-solving, and from helping one another.

Jesus will probably finish the school year in Ajoaya, where he is learning a degree of self-confidence and independence. His mother is now convinced that he can attend a local school in Mazatlan next school year. The PROJIMO team will try to make arrangements for Jesus to join Los Pargos, an organization of disabled children and their parents in Mazatlan. At Los Pargos Jesus will have the opportunity to study Braille under the tutelage of a young man with muscular dystrophy, named Sosimo. Sosimo, now in his twenties and severely disabled, has been active in Los Pargos since he was a young child and has since become one of the program's leaders. He studied Braille in order to be able to teach it to visually impaired young people. Jesus could not have a better teacher—nor a better role model.



THE HIDDEN COSTS OF FREE TRADE: MEXICO BITES THE BULLET

—David Werner and Jason Weston —



"We thought we were on the path to the first world and suddenly something went wrong. One minute the World Bank and IMF were saying Mexico was the best example. Now we are the worst example.... We are losing control. If we don't find another type of development, we are finished. We surrender."

—Enrique del Val Blanco, Mexico's
Human Service Ministry

"The speed at which international markets have evolved has been much faster than the capacity of governments or international organizations to cope . . . We have to start thinking about a global arrangement that would prevent the sort of thing we are now enduring."

—Ernesto Zedillo, President of Mexico
(NY Times March 3, 1995)

Recently a member of the PROJIMO team—while on a trip to the city of Mazatlan—paid a visit to the mother of Jesus, the boy with spina bifida and visual impairment who is currently receiving rehabilitation at the village program (see page 1). He told Jesus' mother that her son was concerned because weeks had passed

since she had visited him. The boy's mother sadly explained why she had not made the 100 mile bus trip to visit her son:

"Tell him I'm sorry" she said. "I miss him and very much want to visit him. But now I just can't! For one thing, I don't have the money. As you know, since the drop in the

peso, the cost of everything has gone up. Bus fares have doubled. But my wages are still the same. I can barely feed my other children."

Jesus' mother works as a maid in a hotel, and earns about \$3.00 a day. "Another reason I can't visit him," she said, "is that now

I don't dare ask for a day off from work. As you know, since the crash of the peso businesses are laying off workers in droves. They look for any excuse to sack you. If I ask for a day off to visit my son, or even if I say I'm sick, I could lose my job." She made a gesture of frustration and fatigue. "So please tell Jesus I love him and I miss him, but that right now I just can't go to see him. He's a good boy. He'll understand."

The hidden costs of free trade

In Newsletter from the Sierra Madre #29 (June 1994) and other issues before it, we predicted that NAFTA—the North American Free Trade Agreement—would bring increased poverty, lower wages, unemployment, crime, and social deterioration to Mexico. We described how Mexico had been obliged to change its Constitution in preparation for NAFTA, annulling land reform policies that had protected small farmers, so that giant US agribusiness could buy up Mexican land and employ peasant workers at slave wages. We explained how the lifting of tariffs allowed the US to flood Mexico with low-cost surplus grain and cattle, driving small Mexican producers into oblivion. And we explained how the flood of newly landless and bankrupt farmers from rural areas into the mushrooming city slums increased the already high levels of unemployment. This in turn has driven more jobless and hungry Mexicans to cross illegally into the United States, looking for work and competing for jobs with American workers, who had also suffered layoffs and wage cuts because of NAFTA.

In Newsletter # 30 (December 1994) we saw how this growing flood of "illegal aliens" was blamed for growing economic difficulties in California, leading to the vote for Proposition 187 which, if declared constitutional, will deny the right of medical care and education to undocumented children.

But while we predicted grim outcomes from NAFTA, no one foresaw the horrendous catastrophe which has suddenly converted Mexico from the success story of trade liberalization into a global economic basket case. To keep the wolf from the door, Mexico has already borrowed billions of dollars, and has a line of credit for billions more. Even if the peso can be kept from slipping further—and so far there is no certainty of this—the burden of repaying the debt, along with the hardships of the devaluation itself, will fall largely on the backs of the poor, whose real wages continue to plummet.

To pay off these loans, Mexico will have to escalate its austerity measures (similar to those often demanded by the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs, see page 10). In other words, the Mexican people can expect further reductions in public services, further reductions in real wages, increased taxation, and more user fees for health and other social services. Already this has involved a huge increase in the price of oil (35%) and basic goods, while wages have been frozen. Meanwhile, federal sales tax on most goods was raised from 10% to 15%. If Jesus's mother had a hard time making ends meet before these latest austerity measures, what will her situation be now?

When systems begin to fail, their patrons look for a scapegoat, trying to place blame on faulty individuals rather than faulty structures. In the case of Mexico's "Meltdown," blame is being thrust upon ex-President Carlos Salinas. Salinas, who until the end of 1994 was lauded by International Financial Institutions and had been nominated by the White House to head the new World Trade Organization, was suddenly transmuted from golden boy to boogie-man. No doubt Salinas did contribute to the crisis by propping up Mexico's image of prosperity and stability until his hand-picked successor was elected in November. But surely economists in both Mexico and the US knew the Mexican economy was living on borrowed time and money. In order to maintain the trade euphoria of NAFTA and keep the flow of speculative investment pouring into the Mexican market, the Mexican government made huge amounts of high-interest short-term loans (called tesobonos). Reserves fell so low that it had no possibility of paying back these loans unless speculators continued to invest billions in their southern trading partner. As Mexico's trade deficit grew by leaps and bounds in response to deregulation through NAFTA, Mexico had little choice but to de-value the peso in the hopes of increasing exports. It postponed the move too long, and when the peso was finally devalued, US investors panicked. A vicious spiral followed: as US speculators pulled their money out of Mexico, the peso plummeted even more.

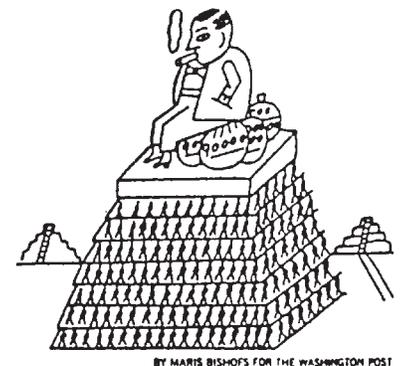
Yes, Salinas was partly to blame. He was to blame for listening to the World Bank, to US Presidents Bush and then Clinton, and to the money-hungry big-business community both north and south of the border (those who put their own economic growth

before more basic human and environmental needs). He was to blame for not listening to the ordinary people, the peasant farmers and urban workers and students who demonstrated by the thousands against the signing of NAFTA. He was to blame for not listening to the Zapatistas in Chiapas, who strategically launched their uprising on January 1, 1994, the day NAFTA was put into effect.

But much more to blame than Salinas or the Mexican government is the global market system, manipulated by powerful interests that try to increase their wealth by wheeling and dealing on an international scale, rather than by productive labor. Salinas, Bush, Clinton, Gingrich, and Helms—whether they try to resist or simply go with the flow—are still but pawns in the system.

Whether Bill Clinton's multi-billion dollar attempted bailout of the Mexican economy was an act of courage, cunning, or cowardice is hard to say. But it is certainly a response to the powerful business interests that helped put him in office. Clinton, in his own way, is as much at the mercy of global greed as are Salinas and Zedillo.

One thing is certain. Sufficient wealth exists in Mexico to rescue the nation's economy—if only it were more fairly distributed. While the real earnings of workers have dropped over 40% in the past decade, a handful of people have profited enormously. In 1991 Mexico had only 2 billionaires. Today it has 28. Reportedly, one of these billionaires, Carlos Slim, controls as much wealth as 17 million of his poor compatriots.



Crushing the Zapatistas to restore investor confidence

If anyone has a clear vision of what is needed for sustainable development in Mexico, it is perhaps the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas. Although the uprising is small in numbers, the Mexican government has

been unable to crush it because a large sector of the Mexican population—from poor folks to intellectuals—sympathize with the Zapatistas and concur with their humanitarian demands.

The Zapatistas call for the government to respond to the needs of the people. They demand that it respect the Mexican Constitution, reinstate its land reform statutes, and not sell out to the monied class North or South of the border. They demand fair wages, equitable land distribution, universal basic health care, and free universal education. They demand respect for the rights and the needs of women, children, and indigenous peoples. They demand fair and transparent public elections and an end to fraud and corruption. They call for a halt to trade agreements that favor the rich at the expense of the poor, with new agreements that protect the economic base and self-determination of the poor. They call for a society based on equity and fairer distribution of resources, with governance that provides full accountability to the people.

With “subversive” demands such as these, renewed at a time when Mexico’s economic and social stability is in shambles, it is not surprising that powerful interests in both Mexico and the US want to see the Zapatistas silenced. Indeed the new attacks against the Zapatistas and the impoverished indigenous communities that support them may in part have been triggered by the US business community. On January 14, news was leaked that representatives of Merrill Lynch and Goldman Sachs investment firms had told Mexican government officials that it was time to regain investor confidence by wiping out the Zapatistas. An internal memo of Chase Manhattan Bank said “The [Mexican] government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of national territory and security policy.” In the spirit of solidarity (with Northern bankers), two days after Zedillo got the word from Chase Manhattan he issued his now famous order to apprehend Subcomandante Marcos and launched an attack on the indigenous communities of Chiapas where the Zapatistas had their stronghold. Thousands of men, women, and children fled into the Lacandon forest, where they faced hunger and outbreaks of illness. Reports of a “massive Zapatista arms cache” discovered in Vera Cruz (ac-



tually three revolvers and three grenades, plus some ammunition and some Zapatista pamphlets) were used as a pretext to justify the massive invasion. A portion of the money from President Clinton’s bailout fund was reportedly used to purchase helicopters and tanks, and to contract professional torturers from Colombia, Argentina and Texas to the Mexican armed forces in Chiapas.

The Mexican military put up blockades to prevent the press from reporting on the brutal attacks on indigenous towns and villages. However, the Zapatistas managed to get word out about the atrocities, including the deaths of children and torture of civilians. Although the government has denied any wrong-doing, its case is weakened by its refusal to allow human rights observers or the press into the area. It was largely the international protest of the press, charging that the Mexican government and military were violating the Mexican constitutional rights of civilians and freedom of the press, which forced Zedillo to again call back the military, lift the barricades, and reopen negotiations with the Zapatistas. As a result, demonstrations in support of the Zapatistas took place around the world. The Mexican newspaper, *La Jornada* showed photographs of demonstrators inside Chase Manhattan in New York. And it ran articles of demonstrations at Mexican embassies in Madrid, Brussels, Paris, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

This international grassroots response has put the Mexican government at bay. As of this writing, Zedillo has reportedly pulled the military out of the towns and villages that had been supportive of the Zapatistas in order to convince the Zapatistas to resume talks for reconciliation. However, close observation of future elections in Mexico will be vital. Chase Manhattan has proposed that the PRI should steal the vote if necessary. “The Zedillo administration will need to consider carefully whether or not to allow opposition victories if fairly won at the ballot box. To deny legitimate electoral victories by the opposition will be a serious setback in the president’s electoral strategy. But a failure to retain PRI control runs the risk of splitting the government party.”

Social scientists have pointed out that the Zapatista uprising is fundamentally different from popular revolutions of the past. It makes maximum use of modern communication, ethical pragmatism, and international solidarity. The Zapatistas have made it clear that they do not want to take over the government or form a political party. Rather they want to create a broad-based demand for honesty, accountability, and responsibility of the government to the urgent needs of the people.

Mexico was the first country in the Americas to carry out a popular Revolution in the 20th Century. Perhaps it will also lead the way with a new kind of revolution—which in some ways must necessarily be a global revolution—in the 21st Century. One way or another, the Zapatista’s determined stand is part of an awakening to human needs and a demand for basic rights of all people, an awakening that is long overdue.





CHALLENGES OF TRANSITION FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN RUSSIA

— David Werner —



Founded in 1988 during the time of glasnost and perestroika* in the former Soviet Union, the All-Russia Society of the Disabled (ARSD) has been growing rapidly ever since. Today, as a non-government association with 2.2 million members, it is the largest society of people with physical disabilities in the world. It has 78 regional offices and 19,000 affiliated local organizations. ARSD's goal is to "defend the rights and interests of disabled people and to facilitate their integration into society."

Launching *Disabled Village Children* in Russian.

In the early 1990s the ARSD formed a friendly alliance with the World Institute on Disability (WID), a California-based disability action group which now has a regional office in Moscow. One of the leaders of WID's program in Russia is disabled organizer and activist, Bruce Curtis. For 13 years Bruce has been an advisor and peer counselor to PROJIMO, the community rehabilitation program run by disabled villagers in western Mexico where the handbook *Disabled Village Children* was developed. (Translated into many languages, the book is now used throughout the Third World.) In 1992 on a visit to Russia, Bruce Curtis introduced the English edition of *Disabled Village Children* to leaders of ARSD. They at once felt that if translated into Russian it would be an invaluable tool for the parents of disabled children, especially now that so many families cannot afford professional services or commercial equipment.

Some rehabilitation professionals have raised doubts as to whether *Disabled Village Children*—written for rural areas of the Third World—would be useful or appropriate in Russia. However, the Board of ARSD felt strongly that many of the principals of self help, empowerment, and low-cost appropriate technology included in the book could be useful in the current situation in Russia. They point out that since the country's transition to a market economy, the social support system is in

disarray. With the deteriorating economy, 60% of the population now lives below the poverty line. Falling wages and increased unemployment together with the high costs of newly privatized medical and rehabilitation services have made it increasingly hard for ordinary people to meet their needs. Given current constraints in accessing basic services and assistance—which in some ways parallel those in the Third World—ARSD decided that *Disabled Village Children* might provide basic ideas and tools for helping families of disabled persons meet their needs with greater self-determination.

The Russian translation and preliminary production of *Disabled Village Children* was completed by ARSD in record time. Although the team initially (and unrealistically) estimated the cost for the Russian edition at \$5000, the finally cost turned out to be over

\$100,000. Bruce Curtis and ARSD did an incredible job of fund raising, obtaining donations from everyone from UNICEF and Dutch non-government organizations to private businesses. It was marvelous to see so many diverse groups collaborating on the project.

To launch the Russian translation of *Disabled Village Children*, in March, 1995, ARSD invited the book's author, David Werner, to Moscow to help lead a workshop in its use. The two-day workshop, organized with the cooperation of WID and sponsored by a wide range of Russian businesses and international NGOS, was attended by more than 100 participants—mostly disabled persons and parents of disabled children—from all over Russia. For those of us new to the country, the participants' enthusiasm, creativity, and thirst for new ideas was awesome.



Alexander Lomakin, Chairman of the ARSD with Bruce Curtis of the WID.

The Workshop

Held on March 1 and 2 in a conference center an hour from Moscow, the workshop was demonstrative of the energetic popular movements that are emerging throughout Russia in response to the growing polarization between rich and poor. I have attended disability seminars in many countries, but this workshop was unique in terms of the ebullient participation of virtually all those present. Leaders of more than 40 local disability organizations were present from all over Russia, including Siberia.

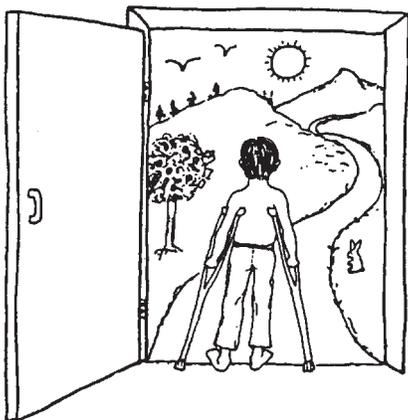
*In the late 1980s, President Gorbachev introduced new policies of glasnost and perestroika. Glasnost was a policy of openness. After decades of suppression of information, Soviet citizens were finally granted freedom of the press and were allowed to organize freely. Perestroika was the restructuring of the Soviet government and state-run businesses that Gorbachev implemented in hopes of saving the country from economic collapse. Although these policies, particularly perestroika, have been controversial and some would argue that they led the way to the collapse of the Soviet Union, they also undeniably paved the way for groups such as the ARSD to form and gain public support.

The workshop was organized jointly by WID and ARSD, and was sponsored by various organizations in Russia, Europe, and the US. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the new Russian translation of *Disabled Village Children* and to explore more participatory approaches for meeting the needs of disabled children in the family and community.

Those attending the workshop were mainly disabled persons and parents of disabled children, along with a few rehabilitation professionals. All felt that the book *Disabled Village Children* was a valuable resource of ideas, skills, and strategies that could help empower families to take more creative responsibility in meeting the needs of their disabled children. However, they agreed that this book should be a starting point toward the development of similar materials created specifically for the needs and possibilities in Russia.

During the workshop, participants considered the range of needs—medical, physical, psycho-social, environmental, and educational—of individual disabled children. They then divided into groups and, using ideas from *Disabled Village Children* as a springboard for creativity, tried to come up with innovative solutions and designs for assistive equipment that are realistic in the current Russian setting.

One of the most important concepts that people said they learned in the workshop was to give disabled children more of a say in defining their own needs, their own aspirations, and in looking for solutions.



Rights and opportunities of disabled people in Russia's recent history

It is both fascinating and disconcerting to compare the evolution of disability rights in the former Soviet Union with that in Western Europe and the United States. In some ways the gains made on the Eastern side of

the so-called Iron Curtain were greater than those in the West, and in other ways the Eastern block lagged behind.

Paradoxically, the greatest gains by disabled people under the Soviet system were made in the area of self-financing achieved through successful disabled person-run business ventures—a process akin to capitalism at its best. By contrast, in the capitalistic West many of the biggest gains were made in the area of public charity and government assistance—advances more in line with Socialism. This paradox may in part be due to the fact that, according to Soviet ideology, all citizens should contribute productively to the state economy. Presumably, this included disabled people with productive potential. Since disabled persons who were able to work were often unemployed, authorities encouraged mechanisms for self employment. As far back as the 1930s, the government began to assign some of its state-owned businesses over to groups of disabled people. With disabled management and a majority of disabled workers, these business ventures proved so successful that the government placed more and more enterprises under control of disabled groups.

By 1955, when this enabling process reached its zenith, close to 85% of employable disabled persons in the USSR were self-supporting. Income from their businesses covered nearly all the costs of non-government rehabilitation and skills-training programs for the disabled. By contrast, in the USA (one of the more advanced Western countries in terms of disability rights) employment levels of disabled persons still range between only 15% and 30% and most programs for the disabled depend heavily on government assistance. Likewise, by running and financing their own programs, disabled leaders in the USSR developed high levels of management skill. Meanwhile, management skills among the disabled community in the West are for the most part regrettably underdeveloped.

By the late 1950s the disabled-run business enterprises in the USSR were so profitable that Chairman Khrushchev decided disabled people were no longer at an economic disadvantage. So the Kremlin began to confiscate many businesses previously assigned to disabled groups for management. As a result, employment of disabled people began to decline.

Although in Russia many disabled persons and programs may have been more economically independent than in the West, in terms of social acceptance they lagged far behind. Disabled Russians had—and still

have—little access into integrated social life of the community. This is due to both physical barriers and deeply ingrained prejudice. A major obstacle to changing this situation was that the central government strongly discouraged organized demands that challenged the status quo. Consequently, when in the late 1950s the government began to confiscate the businesses run by disabled people, there was little organized protest, and employment of disabled business leaders fell precipitously.

In spite of this setback, the self-reliance of

It is important to give disabled children more of a say in defining their own needs, their own aspirations, and in looking for solutions.

disabled groups through business activities still persists to a high degree. A large number of enterprises are still controlled by associations of disabled persons. And the leaders of disabled organizations still have top-notch management and business skills.

During the new political space of glasnost in the late '80s, disabled persons began to organize and demand greater rights. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, one of their biggest successes was to win agreement from the government that businesses managed and operated by disabled persons would not be taxed. This tax benefit has given disabled-run enterprises a substantial economic advantage—so much so that in the current economic crisis many floundering non-disabled businesses, to stay afloat, are negotiating mergers with disabled groups in order to take advantage of the tax privilege. With Russia's structural adjustment program (shift toward a free market economy) which involves privatization of government enterprises, the ARSD has succeeded in obtaining transfer from the state of 170 enterprises in five years. It now has a total of 1,500 enterprises which employ 45,000 people, 18,000 of whom are disabled. These enterprises produce clothing, brushes, electrical equipment, and souvenirs and are also involved in services such as hairdressing, legal consulting, and repair of shoes, furniture, domestic equipment, and even cars.

Through these income-generating businesses ARSD manages to cover a large portion of its program costs, even in the current economic crisis. In 1991, Filanthrop, a division of ARSD, was founded in Moscow. Financed largely through ARSD's enterprises, it provides medical rehabilitation and various social services, works toward accessibility for social and cultural events, and raises public awareness on disability issues. It has conducted management training for disabled persons who want to start their own businesses, and in 1992 created a craft workshop for disabled artists who produce handicrafts of wool, fur, and leather.

“The situation for most of us Russians is worse today than it was at the end of the Second World War.”

Still, the overall situation for disabled people in Russia today is far from rosy. Although ARSD as an organization may have achieved an impressive degree of independence from an economic standpoint, most disabled Russians still have a long way to go before they achieve independent living from a social perspective. During the Soviet era, the state's official statement was that “The USSR has no disabled people.” (For this reason none participated in the Special Olympics.) Even today, significantly disabled people are very rarely seen in public. Wheelchair accessibility, with a few recent exceptions, is almost non-existent. (Among the scores of disabled people at our workshop, apart from Bruce Curtis there was only one wheelchair rider.)

It appears that Russian society as a whole has an attitude that disabled people are a nuisance—especially the assertive folk who try to participate in the mainstream of life. When Bruce Curtis (who is quadriplegic) and I arrived at the Moscow airport, we discovered a huge flight of stairs that had to be descended, and no elevator. Our attempts to get airport officials to find a way get Bruce down the stairs proved futile. In the end, four fellow travelers from Europe and the US volunteered to carry Bruce down. If we had had to depend on the airport functionaries, we might still be waiting at the top of the stairs.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, evidently all the laws protecting the rights of dis-

abled and other persons with special needs became defunct. Those public services that still function do so more as a hang-over from the past, rather than through legislative mandates. In trying to demand their rights, therefore, disabled persons are now in legal limbo. The ARSD has helped develop the draft of a National Law on Social Protection of the Disabled. But while some of the clauses have been passed into law, due to the present economic crisis most remain on paper only.

The current disabling environment

Although organized efforts of disabled people in Russia during the '90s have achieved some gains, it has been an uphill struggle. Indeed, some disability rights are being eroded as government swings further to the right and the economy crumbles. Employment of disabled persons, as of non-disabled persons, is falling. And for the lucky ones who have jobs, real earnings have dropped to subsistence levels. Adding to these hardships, the relentless privatization of public services, including health and education, means that many disabled persons simply cannot get the care or skills training they need.

Compounding these difficulties, a bill currently before the Russian Parliament proposes to withdraw tax privileges for enterprises run by disabled persons. This will make it extremely difficult for these enterprises to sustain the profit margin needed to finance non-government rehabilitation services and skills training. The ARSD is avidly campaigning to convince Parliament not to pass this socially regressive bill.

As in many Third World countries, the Russian government is now a recipient of “development” loans from the World Bank and IMF. As a condition of these loans, Russia is adopting many of the structural adjustment policies designed to bind the country to the global economic order with all its devastating inequities. Most disturbing of all, perhaps, is Russia's adoption of the socioeconomic paradigm spelled out in the World Bank's 1993 report, *Investing in Health* (see Newsletter #30), in which human beings are valued in strictly economic terms (“human capital”). Accordingly to this commodification of humanity, a person is worth what he or she can productively contribute to the national and global economy. From this chillingly mechanistic viewpoint, disabled persons are grievously undervalued; those who lack any economically productive potential are unworthy of public expenditure. Many Russians are awakening to their

losses. As one participant in our Moscow workshop bemoaned, “We as a nation have lost our moral foundations.”

For all their difficulties, however, I was amazed by people's commitment and enthusiasm. Disabled people in Russia and their families have one of the largest and most self-sufficient organizations in the world, and have become leaders in the fight for the rights of all disadvantaged people. Yet the obstacles are enormous.

The downside of Russia's sociopolitical transition

Now that Russia has converted to a market economy, the gulf between the wealthy and the destitute has rapidly widened. As the rewards of honest hard work have diminished, corruption and organized crime have flourished, both in the public and private sectors. Evidently, the combination of the Russian mafia and big business, with complicity of government officials, will stop at nothing to get richer quickly.

By running and financing their own programs, disabled leaders in the USSR developed high levels of management skill.

Political assassinations continue to escalate. One such assassination affected the publicity of our workshop. On the first day of the workshop, Vladislav Listyev, a renowned manager/producer of Russia's most popular independent TV channel, was mysteriously shot to death. This came as a blow to the leaders of the ARSD. Listyev, who was strongly supportive of disability rights, had agreed to provide television coverage to our workshop and to announce the Russian translation of *Disabled Village Children* so that disabled people and their families all over the country could know about it. (Despite Listyev's death, the workshop and book launching were covered on several TV and radio channels as well as in the press.)

No official statement as to why Listyev was murdered has been issued. However, conjectures suggest it was because of his public campaign against organized crime. By

ceasing to work through unscrupulous middlemen in TV program advertising, Listyev had succeeded in turning his program's losses into gains. Bucking the current trend, in his very popular prime-time talk show he often spoke up for the interests of the poor and exploited, calling for accountability of government and big private business. Whatever the reasons, Listyev's voice of dissent was brutally silenced, and millions of Russians mourned. Russian TV journalists, interpreting the assassination as "the ultimate form of censorship" united in protest. Several TV stations stopped broadcasting for the better part of a day, screening only a picture

of Listyev with a succinct condemnation of escalating corruption and crime.

Discontentment in Russia is fast reaching the boiling point. People see clearly that while the shift to a market economy has brought a rapid rise in wealth for a few, for most it has brought rising unemployment and poverty along with the insecurity of growing crime and violence. The economic distress—painfully apparent in the dilapidated houses and deteriorating state of the countryside surrounding Moscow—gives the landscape an impoverished Third World appearance. One workshop participant stated

regretfully, "The situation for most of us Russians is worse today than it was at the end of the Second World War."

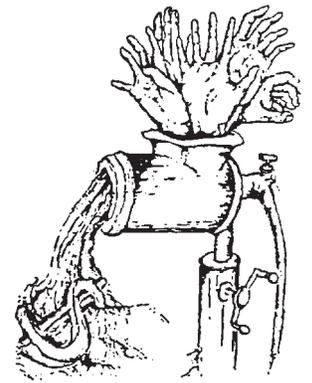
In spite of current adversities, however, the political space and social awakening introduced during glasnost and Perestroika are still alive and fermenting. Various citizens' groups, such as the All Russia Society for the Disabled, are committed to struggle for more human and equitable social structures. Disabled people are realizing that the struggle for their own rights is inseparable from that of all disadvantaged peoples.



HUMANITY AS COMMODITY: The Hidden Agenda of the World Summit for Social Development,

Copenhagen, March, 1995

— David Werner —



"Since the Cold War all we've done is to replace the nuclear bomb with a social one. . . . Security has always been a national issue. But people don't realize that you can have a secure state full of insecure people. . . . Poverty, unemployment, and violence are now our security problems, and you can't apply military concepts to solve them."

— Juan Somavia, Social Summit Chairperson

The World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen, March 2-12, 1995, was hailed by some as a giant step forward for humanity. By others it was deplored as yet another wolf-in-sheep's-clothing. Like the Earth Summit in 1992 and the Population Summit of 1994, the Social Summit of 1995 did address issues of global concern. But because of powerful vested interests the Social Summit, like its predecessors, fell short of viable or democratic solutions.

The main concerns at the Social Summit were "poverty, unemployment, and social disintegration." While the final Declaration of Social Summit sounds beguilingly progressive and egalitarian, many critics feel that it may do more to worsen the hardships of the poor than correct them. In the last analysis, they say, it rubber stamps and legitimizes the same lop-sided development model that has contributed to the pandemic of poverty, unemployment, and social deterioration that it portends to overcome. The following statement by Peggy Antrobus from DAWN, reflects the widespread disillusionment with the Summit.

"The Social Summit in Copenhagen has served mainly to expose the unwillingness of our governments and international institutions to confront . . . current socioeconomic and political structures that are perpetuating poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation everywhere in the world. Some of us dared to dream that this summit might open the door to a recognition that strategies adopted to deal with such problems over the last 30 to 40 years have not worked, and that it is time for a new approach. However . . . we are left with [an official] declaration that— despite progressive rhetoric—promises only a continuation of the neoliberal policies that many of us have come to see as the core of the problem."

—Peggy Antrobus, General Coordinator, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)

The official Summit, hailed as the largest gathering of world leaders in history, was attended by 116 heads of state and thousands of United Nations representatives and government officials. (However, it was revealing that the heads of the USA, UK, and Russia—3 of the 5 nations on the UN Security Council—were conspicuous by their absence.)

Simultaneous with the official Summit was held the so-called "people's summit" or NGO Forum, attended by hundreds of non-government organizations, large and small, from all over the world. By prearrangement, some of the more creditable NGO's were able to enter into the heavily guarded sanctum of the official Summit. In all, the attendance at the combined functions was around 25,000 (a number which made effective coordination, participation, and communication extremely difficult).

The International People's Health Council (IPHC) and the Third World Network participated jointly in the Summit. At the NGO Forum the IPHC gave three presentations on the politics of health. More importantly, perhaps, the IPHC helped to lead the initiative

for, and helped take part in drafting an alternative declaration for the Social Summit (see page 13), criticizing the official Declaration, pointing out the contradictions of its underlying agenda, and suggesting more equitable alternatives. The Copenhagen Alternative Declaration warns that although the official Summit Declaration calls eloquently for a global effort to overcome poverty and unemployment, in fact it subscribes to the same strategies for economic development and structural adjustment that are in large part responsible for the widespread poverty and unemployment in the world today. It points out that the official Declaration fails to address the underlying social causes of deepening poverty. The Alternative Declaration, therefore, rather than advocating "safety nets" to rescue those who have suffered disastrous wage cuts and job loss due to inequitable neoliberal policies, calls for fairer, more equitable social and economic policies. And it enumerates hard hitting recommendations for achieving fairer, more people-friendly policies.

The Copenhagen Alternative Declaration rapidly mushroomed into a rallying point for a wide diversity of NGOs at the Forum. A series of meetings to discuss and modify the draft were attended by increasing numbers of participants. Literally hundreds provided input, making the final document a truly democratic process (with consequential strengths and weaknesses). The Alternative Declaration was endorsed by more than 600 non-government organizations from all corners of the globe—and more are still signing up.

The official Declaration: Putting greed before need

The official Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development frustrated and angered many Summit participants, especially in the NGO Forum. Many feel that by legitimizing harmful macro-economic policies the official Declaration may do more to perpetuate than to alleviate poverty. One of the greatest weaknesses of the document is that in its very selective and superficial analysis of the causes of poverty, it fails to look at power relations. In essence, the document advocates the same reform policies that in recent years have put top-heavy economic growth before human and environmental needs. Embellished with humanitarian-sounding rhetoric, its recipe for social development basically follows the formula for lop-sided development which the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (the so-called Bretton Woods

Institutions) have imposed on poor Third World countries and more recently on Eastern Europe, often with disastrous results.

Some critics suspect that the World Bank and IMF had more than a little influence in determining the underlying agenda of the official Social Summit Declaration. They point out that the Declaration contains the same sort of duplicity of many World Bank documents: the polished art of "double-speak" which methodically promotes the interests of Big Business behind a veil of progressive rhetoric about meeting the needs of the poor on their turf and terms.

Indeed, the international financial institutions, especially the World Bank, had a strong presence in both the official Summit and the NGO Forum. The Bank, slated for at least one major presentation nearly every day of the Forum, expounded on such themes as "The World Bank and Investing in People." However, the Bank was repeatedly challenged from the floor by well-informed critics. Persons from a range of poor countries gave testimony about how World Bank policies have driven countless poor working people into desperate poverty. In one of its scheduled presentations, the Bank spokespersons were interrupted by a large group of protestors chanting "The World Bank causes poverty!" and "50 years is enough!" This latter was the rallying cry of a campaign to expose the pro-wealth/anti-people agenda of the Bretton Woods Institutions, which celebrated their 50th anniversary in 1994. Leaders of the 50 Years Is Enough campaign were present at the NGO Forum and played a leading role in drafting the Alternative Declaration. According to the 50 Years Is Enough summit statement:

"... we are disappointed that the official documents for the ... Summit ... do not commit to correcting two of the greatest impediments to development around the world, structural adjustment programs and the increasing burden of foreign debt. The Social Summit provides a unique opportunity to address the root causes of poverty, unemployment, and social disintegration, and to make the Bretton Woods Institutions more accountable and effective in achieving sustainable development goals. Instead, the ... document to be signed in Copenhagen addresses the symptoms of these problems without challenging the policies that have helped create them."

Structural Adjustment: the solution to poverty, or a cause?

At the heart of the World Bank and IMF's development policy are its so-called Structural Adjustment Programs or SAPs: harsh austerity measures designed to make sure that poor countries in economic straits keep servicing their huge foreign debt. SAPs are imposed on debtor governments as a condition for bailout loans. In order to collect sufficient money to keep up their interests payments, SAPs usually require governments to:

- Slash budgets for public services, including health, education, and food subsidies.
- Privatize government-run enterprises and public utilities, including hospitals (on the grounds that private, competitive enterprises are more cost effective).
- Orient production of food and goods for export rather than for local consumption (to generate dollars for servicing foreign debt, since local currency is unacceptable).
- Devalue local currency (to lower prices on export goods, and thereby increase sales).
- Free local prices while freezing wages (to increase profit margins by paying workers less).
- Provide incentives (such as low wages and deregulation or restrictions) to stimulate foreign investment, which is thought to boost a poor country's economy.

These Structural Adjustment Programs were supposed to lead to economic recovery, and eventually the benefits were supposed to trickle down to the poor. In the vast majority of countries where SAPs have been implemented, however, the result has been economic stagnation, massive unemployment, and worsening poverty. In many seminars at the NGO Forum, representatives from Third World countries explained in heart-rending detail how adjustment had affected their lives: how the hardships of falling wages and lost jobs combined with rising costs of health services and foods had brought hunger, despair, and often death, especially to women and children.

Social scientists, in turn, provided evidence on how, in many countries, indicators of a society's well-being such as child mortality and rates of malnutrition have stopped improving, and in the poorest countries have re-

cently gotten worse. They equated the current resurgence of diseases such as cholera, malaria, and tuberculosis to increased squalor and cut-backs in public health services caused by structural adjustment.

The World Bank and IMF tried hard to counter these argument, often warping facts to do so. As if constant repetition were a form of proof, they kept insisting that, overall, the state of the world and humanity is improving. The Bank's spokespersons presented elegant graphs showing how health, education, and life expectancy have improved over the last 50 years (since the birth of Bretton Woods institutions). But they failed to mention that in the last decade such improvements have ground to a halt and in several nations been reversed.

When pressed to do so, the World Bank and IMF do concede that their structural reforms may have brought some hardships, but argue that in the long run this is for the common good. The following is from a booklet prepared by the IMF for the Social Summit, titled Social Dimensions of the IMF's Policy Dialogue:

"In the short term, reform policies can affect certain poor groups in several ways. Removal of generalized price subsidies on basic necessities or exchange rate devaluation can cause real incomes of domestic consumers, including the poor, to decline in the short term. A reduction of budgetary subsidies to state-owned enterprises and their restructuring [i.e. privatization], a lowering of protection following trade liberalization, and a downsizing of the government may result in job losses. Consequently, IMF-supported programs have sought to include social safety net measures to mitigate adverse short-term effects on vulnerable population groups. . ."

At the summit, critics pointed out that for millions of the most "vulnerable population groups" (especially women and children), the "adverse short-term effects" mean starvation, disease, and death. Clearly, for those who die of the short-term effects, the hypothetical long-term benefits are of little advantage.

Safety nets as a replacement for human rights

Advocacy of safety nets is part of "Adjustment with a Human Face" as promoted by UNICEF. It has subsequently been espoused by the World Bank, and has also been incorporated into the official Declaration of the Social Summit.

But as is so often the case with IMF and Bank interventions, measures that at first glance appear to favor the poor often conceal a hidden agenda designed to benefit the rich at the expense of the poor. As a case in point, provision of safety nets for high risk groups in fact replaces public services which used to be universal. Thus the "safety nets" form a cloak for the cut-backs in government services. Because privatization and cost recovery schemes place basic services outside the reach of the neediest sector of the population, safety nets (in the form of underfunded selective government services assisted by NGOs) are set up for those whose situation is most desperate.

Thus safety nets form part of a socially regressive strategy that shifts the costs of essential services onto the shoulders of those who can least afford them. In many countries these safety nets are replacing more comprehensive and universal services that were previously covered by progressive taxation (meaning those who have more give more to help meet needs of those who have less). By adopting such sly and regressive policies—along with the whole package of big-business-friendly "modernization" of the global economy—the Social Summit provides a stamp of approval and "social responsibility" to the unhealthy policies of the International Financial Institutions and multinational enterprises it represents.

Despite the claims of the financial institutions, globalization of the economy in ways that favor the affluent has doubtlessly contribute to world poverty. As Xabier Gorostiaga, a Jesuit priest and keynote speaker from Mexico pointed out, the richest 20% of the world's population now amass 85% of the world's earnings, up from 70% in 1960. Today the world's 358 billionaires control as much wealth and the poorest 2 billion people, more than a third of the world's popula-

tion. This widening gap between rich and poor is due to what Dr. N. H. Antia, a health activist from India and member of the IPHC, calls "greed-centered development." This he distinguishes from "need-centered development," which is what we must work toward. Unfortunately, the official Declaration of the Summit plays into the hands of the potentates of greed.

An alternative declaration



Unwilling to endorse the official Declaration of the Social Summit, participants in the NGO Forum drafted and endorsed the Alternative Copenhagen Declaration, which outlines a model of development based on equity and a response to all people's basic needs. Should the guidelines laid forth in this document be followed by the world's governments, financial institutions, and the UN, giant strides could be taken toward reducing poverty, restoring peace, and preserving the global environment.

However, short of a global uprising, the alternative declaration is likely to have little impact. Those of us who signed the document know that putting it into action will be an uphill battle. It is unlikely that the more equitable alternatives it recommends will be heeded by those in positions of wealth and power. If social change is to come, it must be spearheaded by a growing global coalition of popular organizations, NGOs and grassroots groups. The NGO forum and the Alternative Copenhagen Declaration are important steps in that direction.

It will be stronger if the Alternative Copenhagen Declaration has a broader base of support. We have printed it in this Newsletter and it is also now on the e-mail network. Further endorsements by NGOs, grassroots groups, and networks, are still being sought. There is talk of a genuine People's Summit in 1996. Ultimately the global coalition needs to grow until governments, big business, and financial institutions become more truly democratic and accountable, not only to their stock holders, but to humanity.

If your organization or network wants to add its name to those endorsing the Copenhagen Alternative Declaration, please contact us.



THE COPENHAGEN ALTERNATIVE DECLARATION

(final draft, 8 March 1995)

This Declaration builds upon efforts emanating from the NGO Development Caucus during the Social Summit preparatory meetings, the Oslo Fjord Declaration, and other national and international citizens' initiatives.

We, the representatives of social movements, NGOs and citizens' groups participating in the NGO Forum during the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), share a common vision of a world which recognizes its essential oneness and interdependence while wholly embracing human diversity in all its racial, ethnic, cultural and religious manifestations, where justice and equity for all its inhabitants is the first priority in all endeavours and enterprises and in which the principles of democracy and popular participation are universally upheld, so that the long-dreamed creation of a peaceful, cooperative and sustainable civilization can at long last be made possible.

In this context, we expected that the Social Summit would address the structural causes of poverty, unemployment and social disintegration, as well as environmental degradation, and would place people at the center of the development process. These include not only economic, political and social causes, but also the cultural structures of gender inequity.

While some progress was achieved in placing critical issues on the table during the Summit negotiation process, we believe that the economic framework adopted in the draft documents is in basic contradiction with the objectives of equitable and sustainable social development. The over-reliance that the documents place on unaccountable "open, free-market forces" as a basis for organizing national and international economies aggravates, rather than alleviates, the current global social crises. This false premise threatens the realization of the stated goals of the Social Summit.

The dominant neo-liberal system as a universal model for development has failed. The current debt burden of dozens of countries is unsustainable, as it is draining them of the resources they need to generate economic and social development. Structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have consistently undermined economic and Social Progress by suppressing wages, undermining the contributions and livelihood of small producers, and placing social services, particularly health care and education, out of reach of the poor. In dismantling basic state services, these programmes have shifted an even greater burden onto women, who care for the nutrition, health, well-being and harmony of the family, as well as community relations. In promoting the rapid exportation of natural resources, deregulating the economy, and pushing increasing numbers of poor people onto marginal lands, adjustment has contributed to the process of ecological degradation.

This system has also resulted in an even greater concentration of economic, political, technological and institutional power and control over food and other critical resources in the hands of a relatively few transnational corporations and financial institutions. A system that places growth above all other goals, including human well-being, wrecks economies rather than regenerates them, exploit-

ing women's time, labour and sexuality. It creates incentives for capital to externalize social and environmental costs. It generates jobless growth, derogates the rights of workers, undermines the role of trade unions. In the process, the system places a disproportionate burden on women and jeopardizes their health and well-being and consequently that of those in their care. Finally, it leads to an unequal distribution in the use of resources between and within countries and generates social apartheid, encourages racism, civil strife and war, and undermines the rights of women and indigenous peoples.

It is for these reasons that we also cannot accept the official documents' endorsement of the new trade order as defined in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round and Articles of Agreement on the establishment of the World Trade Organization. The documents do not consider that trade liberalization through the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and the WTO creates more losers than winners and that the negative impacts will be disastrous for poor countries, and poor and working people within all countries. The interests of local producers, in particular, are undermined in the areas of foreign investment, biodiversity; and intellectual property rights.

We reject the notion of reducing social policy in developing countries to a "social safety net," presented as the "human face" of structural adjustment policies in the WSSD documents. This proposal is predicated on the withdrawal of the State from one of its fundamental responsibilities. The slashing of social expenditures in the North as a means of reducing the budget deficit has also undermined many of the achievements of the welfare state.

Social development can only be achieved if all human rights—civil, political, social and cultural—of all individuals and peoples are fulfilled. We believe that the Summit documents fail to recognize adequately the primacy of human rights as a prerequisite for a participatory and meaningful social development for all sectors of society, especially for children and such marginalized groups as people with disabilities, indigenous people, people in occupied territories, refugees and the displaced. It also fails to note how the undemocratic nature of structural adjustment programmes undermines the rights of citizens and often leads to their repression. In addition, efforts made at the Social Summit to reverse agreements reached in Vienna and Cairo in relation to women's rights represent a further undermining of the possibilities for the kind of fundamental changes required for the creation of just societies.

Finally, we note that militarization creates enormous waste of human, natural and financial resources. It causes further inequality and pauperization, political and social violations against women, and violent conflict that adds to the rising global death toll and the growing number of refugees and displaced people.

In rejecting the prevailing global economic model, we do not suggest the imposition of another universal model. Rather, it is a question of innovating and devising local answers to community needs, promoting the skills and energy of women in full equality with men, and benefitting from valuable traditions, as well as new technologies.

In light of the foregoing, we consider that the following conditions must be fulfilled at the household, community, national and international levels to realize this alternative vision of development:

AT THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL:

- The new vision of development requires the transformation of gender relations, in which women are equal participants in the decision-making process.
- Women and men must share responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Domestic violence in all its forms must not be tolerated.
- Women must be guaranteed sexual and reproductive choice and health.
- Children's rights should be respected and enhanced.

AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL:

- The keys to effective development are equity, participation, self-reliance, sustainability and a holistic approach to community life.
- The capacity of communities to protect their own resource base must be restored.
- Governmental and intergovernmental decisions must be built upon the full participation of social movements, citizens' organizations and communities at all stages in the development process, paying special attention to the equal participation of women.
- Communities must gain control over the activities of all enterprises that affect their well-being, including transnational corporations.
- The political, social and economic empowerment of youth, especially young women, should be fostered.

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:

- All forms of oppression based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, disability and religion must be eliminated.
- Governments must ensure the full and equal participation of civil society in the processes of economic policy-making and other development decision-making, implementation and monitoring.

- Education must be granted as the main instrument to empower youth to take their rightful place in society, enabling them to take control of their lives. Non-formal education should be promoted, drawing on the experiences and skills of non-specialized people.
- Governments must ensure the full and equal participation of women in power structures and decision-making at all levels.
- National accounting systems should be revised to incorporate women's unpaid work.
- Governments must commit themselves to developing national strategies and implementation plans in order to fulfill their responsibilities under the Human Rights covenants. They must regularly report on their progress, in particular their efforts regarding marginalized groups' access to legal procedures. Governments which have not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (WEDAW) should do so. Governments should work for the approval of the Draft Declaration on the Universal Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations.
- Recognition of and respect for ancestral territorial rights of indigenous peoples and their right to self-determination is an imperative in order to ensure their existence as peoples and cultures. Territories that are still colonized should likewise be accorded their right to sovereignty and self-determination.
- Governments must make agrarian reform the basis of sustainable rural economies and ensure access to affordable credit for the poor without discrimination on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity so that people can create their own employment and build their own communities.
- Governments should develop sustainable employment programmes, in full consultation with trade unions and employers' organizations.
- Governments of industrialized countries should reduce their countries' disproportionately large claim on available natural resources by implementing the appropriate mix of incentives, ecological tax reforms, regulations, and environmental accounting systems to achieve sustainable production and consumption patterns.
- Southern governments have the right to protect their people from the effects of deregulated and liberalized trade, especially in areas of food security and domestic production. Moreover, they should be able to regulate the market and take fiscal or legal measures for the purpose of combating inequalities among their peoples. Africa should be given preferential treatment in this respect.

- Governments should commit themselves to reducing military expenditures so that it does not exceed spending on health care and education and increase the conversion of military resources to peaceful purposes. This "peace dividend" should be distributed equally between a national and a global demilitarization fund for social development. There should be a conversion of the military economy to a civilian economy.

AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL:

- A new partnership in South-North relations requires placing the cultures, development options and long-term strategies of developing countries first, and not those of the North.
- It must be recognized that cultural diversity is the principal source of new strength, new actors, new social systems and sustainable development, creating an alternative globalization from below.
- There should be an immediate cancellation of bilateral, multilateral and commercial debts of developing countries without the imposition of structural adjustment conditionality. In the longer term, the international community should institutionalize equitable terms of trade.
- Policy-based lending and the interference of the World Bank and IMF in the internal affairs of sovereign states should be discontinued.
- The Bretton Woods institutions must be made transparent and accountable to civil society in both the South and North. Their policies and programmes should be made people-centered; and participation of social movements and citizens' organizations at all stages in the negotiation of agreements, project implementation and monitoring should be ensured.
- Global macro-economic policy should address the structure of poverty and stimulate the levels of real purchasing power. An alternative macro-economic policy will have to meaningfully address the distribution of income and wealth, both between and within countries, leading to a democratization of consumption. This policy would require curbing lavish luxury-goods economies and redirecting resources towards the production of essential consumer goods and social services.
- Global production and consumption must stay within the limits of the carrying capacity of the earth. Political regulation is mandatory in order to prevent the global market system from continuing to reward irresponsible behaviour that cares nothing for the household, community, nation and humankind.
- Regulatory institutions and instruments of governance and law that are truly democratic and enforceable must be established to prohibit monopolistic structures and behaviour and to ensure that transnational corporations and fi-

ancial institutions respect the fundamental rights of all people. In order to make this possible, TNCs must be reduced in size. Work to complete the Code of Conduct for TNCs should be urgently resumed.

- An international, independent body and accountability mechanism should be set up to monitor, evaluate and effectively regulate the behaviour of transnational corporations and their impact on individual nations, communities, peoples and the environment.
- The international community should enforce the application of a tax on all speculative foreign exchange transactions (Tobin tax) of about 0.5%, the revenue of which should go into a global social development fund with adequate control mechanisms.
- Effective international machinery to promote renewable energy should be installed in the UN system.
- Regional and international organizations should encourage diplomacy, peaceful negotiations and mediation, and promote institutions for research and training in non-violent conflict resolution.
- In the 180 days between the Copenhagen Summit and Beijing Conference, we demand an independent investigation and audit of World Bank and IMF performance. In the aftermath of the financial collapse in Mexico, it is essential that the international community prevent future disasters that result from the refusal of the Bretton Woods institutions to depart from the agenda set by the financial and corporate communities, the U.S. government, and Northern financial ministries.

Existing power relations do not permit the realization of these goals. We, representatives of civil society, call upon governments and political leaders to recognize that the existing system has opened the most dangerous chasm in human history between an affluent, overconsuming minority and an impoverished majority of humankind in the South and also, increasingly, in the North. No nation so dramatically divided has ever remained stable; no frontier or force can withstand the despair and resentment that a failed system is now actively generating.

We do not have much time. We are at the point of leaving to our children a world in which we ourselves would not wish to live. But we do find a tremendous inspiration and hope in the fact that the global NGO community taking part in the Social Summit in such a massive way can forge a common understanding of and strategy for the lasting improvement of humankind and nature. With shared responsibility, we can draw from the present crisis the creativity needed to make a world community that truly works. This is our common commitment as we leave the Copenhagen Summit.

HEALTHWRIGHTS

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

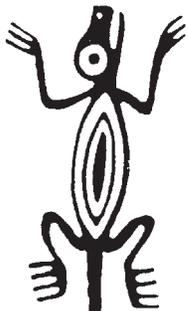


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