

The World Network of Religious Futurists



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Editorial

We welcome a new regular contributor in this issue. Dr. Moshe Dror is the WNRF officer for Israel and will be writing a regular column on futurism from a Jewish perspective. We also have articles from Judith Hampson about Native Americans, from Parker Rossman about the future of Christian Denominations, and from Jakob von Uexkull about the moral implications of the GATT treaty.

I am pleased to be able to offer such an international group of authors, and look forward to continuing to do so. I welcome articles, letters and other contributions from readers on any aspect of religious futurism. It is my hope that we

will be enriched by this diversity, and inspired to work for the best in the future of religion. Enjoy the magazine.

Gordon Arthur.

The Future of Native Americans

by Judith Hampson, Ph.D.

No man should have a right to go into another culture and erase it. No man should have a right to say: 'Your culture is no good, take mine.'

Alfred Yazzie: Navajo spiritual leader, chanter and healer.

When the first Parliament of World's Religions gathered in Chicago in 1893, the original inhabitants of the Americas were not invited. In August of 1993, when a second Parliament of 6,000 attendees met again, Native People of North America were highly visible. Many delegates, in the corridors and cafes of the opulent Palmer House Hilton, were hailing them as "spiritual heroes" of the conference, a ray of hope for peace and ecological sanity in the next hundred years.

There are over three hundred culturally distinct people and languages in North America, yet they regard themselves as largely invisible to the dominant culture. They welcomed this chance to be seen, to air their grievances, to talk about their pain and to share their spirituality.

There is no word for religion in any Native American language. For those whose culture remains intact, spirituality is simply a way of life. Their church is all around them – the earth, the animals, the water and the sky. These are honored daily in their prayers, celebrations and ceremonies, passed from generation to generation through oral tradition. The earth is seen as Mother, and is protected and held in custody, for the benefit of future generations.

But 500 years of colonialism have taken a heavy toll. The damage is extensive and the wounds are deep. Since "that guy who got lost" (I never heard the name Columbus mentioned) arrived on their shores and "discovered" America, many cultures, thousands of years old, have been desecrated or destroyed. 46 million "Indians", as they were dubbed by the misplaced explorer, were killed between the years 1492 to 1890. A more subtle cultural genocide continues. In the last hundred years, a further 50 million have been assimilated into the dominant culture. They have disappeared. And it's still happening.

A deep collective grieving is going on, and they're ready to make it public. They tell of the "trails of tears" where whole nations were relocated, moved wholesale from their sacred lands (their spiritual lifeblood) to alien reservations hundreds of miles away, of

dispersals of whole communities, the break-up of families.

Children were put into boarding schools by the missionaries, had their hair forcibly cut, were stripped of their given names (which had personal meaning) and forbidden to use their own languages. Many are now seeking to reclaim their history, but for those whose whole communities were destroyed, whose families married out and denied their Indian roots, the search for an identity may be long and painful. Books and video tapes make a poor substitute for community as repository of cultural knowledge and wisdom.

In the twentieth century the First Nations are the only people in the USA who do not enjoy the privileges of the First Amendment, complete freedom to practice their religions. Peyote, used in a number of especially sacred ceremonies, is a controlled substance, which can be used only with permission, and only on reservations. Possession of eagle feathers is controlled by endangered species legislation. Charlotte Black Elk, granddaughter of the legendary Oglala Lakota chief and visionary, was required \$45 for a permit to go and pray in the Dakota Black Hills, the sacred lands of her ancestors.

The greatest irony, some complained, is that while Native Peoples are restricted in the practice of their ancient religions, everyone else seems to be practicing them! At a summit of five hundred representatives from forty different tribes and bands of the Lakota

summer, a "Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality" unanimously condemned the growing upsurge of overnight Shamans and "Plastic Medicine Men" who undermine and degrade their spiritual practices by selling misrepresentations of their ceremonies for profit to New Age Euro-American "Wanabe Indians".

Even this is not the final indignity. Having taken their lands, their language, their history and their sacred ceremonies, "civilized" nations have even taken away their dead people. The bones of their ancestors, along with precious artifacts and sacred medicine bundles meant never to be opened except by the one to which they were given, now lie exposed to public view in glass cases in museums around the world.

A small delegation visited the Chicago Field Museum during the Parliament to negotiate the return of ancestral bones and relics held there to their rightful resting places. They impressed upon a reluctant Curator that it is not merely an ownership question; it is a matter for deep shame and grief that sacred relics and ancestral bones should be viewed as curios. One delegate remarked wryly after the visit: "In this country, people who would be appalled to have one of us in their living rooms, think nothing of going to an auction and bidding on our bones".

The homelands of today's Indians continue to be threatened by damming projects, pollution and toxic dumping.

In some communities pollution is so serious that traditional fisher folk can no longer eat the fish, animals are no longer safe to hunt.

Now the Department of Energy, in its search for a temporary home for the 22,000 tons of nuclear waste it has accumulated since the 1940s, is negotiating with some communities to bury it for fifty years on Indian lands in return for large government grants to build much-needed roads, hospitals, schools and other facilities in the desperately poor Indian communities. They are being told that the high level waste from nuclear reactors is safe and that they, as earth's first ecologists, are the best people to deal with it. A permanent dump is to be built in the Yucca Mountain of Nevada, traditional homeland of the western Shoshone. This is intended to store 70,000 metric tons of nuclear waste for 10,000 years.

Over the last century our society has shown little concern for the plight of the Indian. Now, since the United Nations Year of Indigenous Peoples, attitudes are beginning to change. It is an issue that affects all of us. As Walt Bresette, a Chippewa Treaty Rights activist pointed out, "We have always been the miner's canary. You should be concerned that our communities are sick, and that our ancestors don't rest. We are indicator species for the whole earth.

The central premise of Native American spirituality remains respect for the earth, for all that lives and breathes, and

for all People. The chief objective of the Elders now is to build on what is left, before it is too late. Their message to the Parliament was a positive one. A Declaration of Vision for the next 500 years was drawn up by native delegates of many nations and accepted, without dissent, at the Parliament's final Council Assembly of world spiritual leaders.

It calls for support in maintaining indigenous languages and culture, protection and return of sacred sites and traditional lands, reversal of environmental degradation and repatriation of the ancestors. It calls upon the Roman Catholic community to persuade Pope John Paul II to formally revoke the Inter Cetera Bull of 1493 which authorized the subjugation of Nations and Peoples for the purpose of expanding the Christian Empire and its doctrines, and "for an end to the deafening silence of religious denominations and groups regarding the violations of our peoples' human rights, because this silence implies complicity and tolerance of the effects".

At a private dialogue between religious leaders of many faiths held in the suite of the Native American Host Committee, Dr. Robert Muller, former Deputy Secretary General to the United Nations and Chancellor of the world's first University for Peace in Costa Rica, gave undertakings to further the causes of Indigenous Peoples in any way he could, through the institutions of the UN. His suggestions included a proposal for an annual International Day of Indigenous Peoples, the sending of an In-

digenuous representative from the Parliament to report its findings as a contribution to the Year of Indigenous Peoples

From Denominational Bureaucracy to Network

by Parker Rossman

It is risky to try to predict the future, especially of the Church, since God so often surprises us with the unexpected. Yet we can already see astonishing changes in human society that seem inevitably to transform all human institutions... including denominations and ecumenical agencies.

In the summer of 1994 an IBM executive was given a sophisticated lap-top computer and told to go home and do his work there. The other 250 people at his regional office were told the same, and the company did not renew the lease on their offices at the sky-scraper overlooking the river. Working at home in his bedroom, the executive often does not know where the 42 IBM employees he supervises are - at their homes or out on the road - and it does not matter, for he is in touch with them constantly via his modem which can connect to phones in their cars. Wherever they are, executives or underlings, they can have immediate access to electronic files of all needed records and information, always completely up-to-date.

There was a press announcement the week of October 9, 1994 that a major bank was going to do the same thing. In the future there would be just one or two people in a

branch office, and very few in the national bank office as well. Instead of trying to lure potential customers to the bank, the staff would go out to do business wherever customers are. And all can instantly, via telecommunications, connect to the bank's expert on a topic... however far they are from her or him.

The first international distance education conference, at Pennsylvania State University in June 1994, began with conferees talking (via a huge screen and telecommunications) with speakers in several other states, who participated as if in the same room. What are the implications of such developments for church bureaucrats? For one thing, any pastor or member, wherever in the world they are, can be instantly involved in discussions and decisions. The worldwide Christian community can come alive as never before.

If members are asked to bring to the front of their minds their unconsciously held images of a congregation, some will say the church is like an ark, a shelter from the floods; others may say it is the training base for Christian soldiers who are then supposed to go out in the world to fight evil; others see the congregation as a religious country club, or a spiritual filling station. Some want the "religious country club" to be open more days a week; others now propose that, on the model of the bank, there should indeed be only one or two people at the church throughout the week; that pastors and lay-people are

to be out in the world where the business is.

We report these business developments to illustrate how all the institutions of society are changing in the information age. Alvin Toffler, in *THE THIRD WAVE*, reminded us of similar radical changes in two previous overwhelming times of cultural change in human society.

First, when agriculture began and writing was invented. Nearly everyone then worked in agriculture, as did 95% of people even in the United States in the last century. Now with clever machinery, five per cent of the world's population can do all the necessary agricultural work. One result: many rural churches in the Midwest are not surviving; and only God knows what the upheaval is going to bring to third world societies...

The second great wave of change came with the industrial revolution, when after the explosion of learning that came with the invention of printing, young people left rural communities to go to work in factories and mills. All the institutions of society, Toffler reminds us, such as churches and schools, floundered as if small boats tossed about on great waves in the city. Many worried whether or not the churches could survive, and they had to change radically to do so.

Now we are swamped by the third wave, and are seemingly overwhelmed by drugs and crime, Toffler says, as our schools and churches are again like small boats, tossed on the angry waves of change. We do

not yet know how society and its institutions are going to be changed by the information age, which seems to be upsetting everything, but it seems certain, for example, that the schools - and many Sunday Schools - must abandon the assembly-line model from the factory age.

Some predict that soon about five per cent of the population can do all the office and white-collar work, the same proportion that does all agricultural work. No wonder the electorate is restless and worried. Employers are not only radically re-tooling, as illustrated by the IBM and bank cases, but also find it necessary to abandon the top-down bureaucratic structures that characterized the industrial age.

Influential theologian Robert Lynn, as he retired from the staff of the Lilly Endowment, gave a lecture in which he said that the bureaucratic church died some years ago, although most church leaders have not noticed it; indeed, they are wasting time and resources trying to pump new life back into the corpse. What is replacing bureaucracy in government, educational institutions, business corporations... and churches? The network, which was the form of the earliest church beyond the congregation.

Agencies of government and national and international church agencies can save huge sums now expended for office buildings when they give all staff members a lap-top computer and send them out into the world.

Professor Jay Bolter of the university of North Carolina says: "The network is becoming the favorite structure in the way we organize our lives". In other words, networking (now computer-empowered) is beginning to replace top-down bureaucratic structures. We see denominations down-sizing their national staffs, just as business corporations are; but church leaders are slower to close their offices, give everyone a lap-top computer with a modem and send them out to live with people in congregations.

One of the first glimpses we got of the denomination of the future was on the EIES computer network a decade ago, when the United Church of Christ denomination in Hawaii began doing its committee and board work on that network. It would cost a lot of money to fly people from island to island for committee meetings where it cost very little to conduct those inter-island meetings on a computer network (perhaps one of the instigators of that was John Southworth, a UCC layman who teaches education at the University of Hawaii... because John was already using the EIES network to inter-connect school children scattered around on Pacific Islands).

More recently, John has been heavily involved in the exchange of college courses from continent to continent via telecommunications and computer conferencing. Such work, we suggest, is showing the way for regular joint work and dialog among denominations; and for electronic consortia

that can bring new excellence into smaller theological schools and church colleges, now so often weak and looked down on by the higher education community. They are increasingly short of money, yet they have in their hands the method to challenge the world with exciting new forms of education. How?

Well, for example, legislatures in this time of tax-cutting are providing less money for state universities. So at the University of Missouri, if the school of agriculture can no longer afford to offer a course a student wants, that student takes the course from the University of North Carolina without leaving his or her own campus. Perhaps you know of the NTU, which is a consortium of engineering schools of forty-six major US universities. Together they now offer M.A. and Ph.D. degrees which an engineer located anywhere in North America can take without ever setting foot on one of those campuses. He is connected via telecommunications to the best course available on the needed subject.

We suggest that a similar electronic consortium of theological schools can do the same thing. Where many denominational seminaries are weak now, short of funds and discouraged, an international consortium could regain the respect of the university world by offering a kind of excellence that has never before been possible.

The state of Pennsylvania is now making it possible for any student, in any small rural high school, to take any course she

or he wants - whether advanced calculus or Chinese language - by connecting that student, via two phone lines, to a school or college that offers the course.

There is no reason now why Christian higher education cannot do the same thing, offering any needed continuing clergy education or lay education course to any congregation. Indeed, the Seventh Day Adventists are already beginning to do it... and one of their colleges is sending courses into a prison via computer conferencing.

But the changes in church programs and institutions in the information age are going to be far more than that. Think of the power that came into the lives of individual persons with the invention of writing; the powerful knowledge that was given everyone when printing was invented. But that was nothing compared with the empowerment that is coming with information-age computer managed tools and systems.

The Judson Press book **COMPUTERS: BRIDGES TO THE FUTURE** asked the challenging question: suppose computer-empowered tools should now make it possible to do anything we wished, what should we do? That is a question church people must ask now that God is putting so much power into human hands. We must be clear what our guiding vision for the future is. That question, suppose we could do anything (Jesus spoke of our moving mountains), what should we do? It is an important question for educators, business people, politi-

cians and all; but it is especially crucial for the churches.

Think about this: if Arthur C. Clarke is right that emerging tools are going to make it possible for human beings to do almost anything we can imagine, what should church people do? And how are we going to develop a Christly vision of the future; how are we going to find and train the young people with the creative imagination to make the right use of this power?

We have failed with films and TV, but information age tools are going to give religious institutions another chance. Jesus said it in other words when he said we could move mountains, but he left it up to us to decide which mountains to move. How can we empower our young people to cope with drugs, violence and crime... which mostly we are not yet doing?

In a Seattle suburb, we are told, there is a school district which could not afford the two and a half million dollars it would take to install the fiber-optic cable and technology for the information age - so the high school youngsters did it all themselves. As a result, some of them are now being offered outstanding jobs. Indeed, I have met a high school junior who earns \$40,000 a year, working part-time as a result of early jumping on this personal empowerment bandwagon.

The future shape of congregations and denominations will inevitably be influenced by what is happening in society, the cultural context of change, particularly what is happening

in public education, and by the specific schools which are attended by youngsters of a particular congregation. But of course those youngsters who taught themselves to save millions of dollars by doing the work themselves were given the opportunity to do so. Where is the similar vision in church college, seminaries, congregations, and in ecumenical and denominational agencies?

In the retirement community where I live, when the university extension department installed a computer for residents to connect, via the Internet, with people all over the world... someone asked: "Who is going to teach us to use this equipment?" The reply was amusing: "Our town is full of computer specialists who love to help anyone who asks. Most of them are fourteen to sixteen years of age". That has helped inspire our congregation to establish a computer lab, available to all classes on a rotating basis. When it was time for the first graders to come to the lab for the first time, their leader worried about what to do. He did not need to worry. The children came in, turned on the computers, argued a moment about who got to use the mouse and then proceeded to do their own thing for the full hour as the director of religious education watched in astonishment.

Those children, at school beginning to connect via computer and modem to children in other countries, are still asked by national church curriculum bureaucrats to use a paper map

and crayon for their vision of the world church.

Need we ask why so many children drop out of Sunday School by age thirteen, if not age ten? Need we ask why denominational funds and support is declining? But we need not despair, as God is giving us the networking church... it is happening. "He who has eyes to see, let him see".

Judaism and the future WNRF

by Moshe Dror

Rabbi Moshe Dror is the WNRF officer for Israel, and will be providing a regular column. Here he writes of his first meeting with Richard Kirby

Richard and I have been writing to each other for a few years as both of us seemed to be interested in the same sort of things - what might be the rôle of the spirit as we enter the 21st century?

Then, the Lord seemed to make the rather cordial contact into a powerful energy force. Richard decided to come to Israel to visit me in the small desert town that I live in. WOW, the big guy to come here. So what would/should I do?

As always, the Lord provides! I just got a few back issues of GV and read them all. But one article caught my interest in particular. In the GV of October, 1991 - Earl Brewer writes of his vision quest for religious futures in the desert. That was it!

I was brought up as a city kid (New York, Chicago, Geneva, Miami - nice places, but not sites for the vision quest). I have been living in this small desert town for the past 14 years and have gotten to love the desert, a place of the Divine.

My wife and I met Richard at the Airport in Israel and we drove directly to the desert. She deposited both of us in the desert, left us there for most of the day, and we began our joint vision quest. We invoked the presence and blessing of the Lord, asked for God's guidance, and after four days of deliberations (not all in the desert) this is what we came up with.

In addition to our own work, I arranged for Richard to meet with the following people in Israel:

1. Amos Davidowitz (my son), who is living on a Kibbutz and is working with the Israeli and world Socialist Party to deal with futures in governance issues in the 21st century

2. Denis Weintraub and Prof. Daniel Lasker of Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, who are interested in the area of Jewish values in the future, in an academic setting.

3. Dr. Yitzhak Hayutman, in the Old City of Jerusalem, who is an expert in the inter relation of cyberspace with the Jewish tradition.

Now Richard is in Seattle, WA, USA setting up the WNRF center there. So we will see how all of this actually works itself out. To put this in real terms, how will the Lord work with us in these projects?

My guess is, if we can be wise enough to get out of the way and act as God's partners, all of this will happen in its appointed time.

The basic question we set for ourselves was this: what might the Jewish, and particularly Israeli Jewish, heritage and world view be able to contribute to the joint spiritual journey we are all on? We organized our ideas along these projects. As of March 25, 1995 - this was our thinking.

1. Judaism into the 21st. century (1996, Moshe Dror)

Identify and invite some of the best leading edge Jewish thinkers in the world to lay out the issues of Judaism as we approach the new millennium from the twin perspectives of futures Studies and Jewish religious philosophy.

2. Land of Ancient Futures - Desert vision quest (1997, Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel)

A two week spiritual journey of visioning and creativity in the heart of the desert for emerging leaders in the fields of religion, business, academe, government, communications, and the arts.

3. New Parliament of Religions (1997, Richard Kirby)

Organize and run a post-Chicago WPR that would deal with these Issues.

4. Jewish Futures (1997, Moshe Dror)

Moshe Dror is writing a book on Jewish Futures (21 and Jewish) that is an initial attempt to relate to these ideas.

Perhaps at a later date it will be possible to bring some of the relevant materials to the attention of the professional Futures community.

5. Futures of Governance (1996, Amos Davidowitz, MAPAM)

Future of political governance, and governance within the Israeli Socialist Party, especially in relation to the Kibbutz as a model for cooperative living.

6. Cyber Congregations (1995-1997, Bedell/Dror/Kirby)

Religious and Spiritual congregations and communities of tomorrow using the emerging information super highway technologies.

7. Multi-cultural Peace Education (1995-6, Deb Devir, Kibbutz Gezer)

Developing educational programs to deal with the peace process bridging various cultural contexts.

8. Religions and The Future - A cyber course on the Internet based on the book by Richard Kirby "Temples of Tomorrow" (London, Grey Seal, 1993). (1996, Denis Weintraub, BGU, Moshe Dror)

To design and run an academic cyber course dealing with the issues raised in Kirby's book for a global scale audience.

9. Judaism in the Cyberworld: A cyber course; in cooperation with The Blechner Chair of Jewish Values, BGU. (1995, BGU, Dr. Lasker, Moshe Dror)

A Cyber course on Jewish Values with the leading edge thinkers on Jewish theology and philosophy

10. Religious Art of the Future; Cyber Jewish Art/Amanut (1996 Dr. Mel Alexenberg, Dr. Moshe Dror, Hebrew University Center for Jewish Art Seminar)

A seminar and participatory event on Jewish Cyber Art for the 3,000th anniversary of the City Of Jerusalem

11. Global Resource Directories of the WNRF: Individual Organizations, and Literature (1996-7, Moshe Dror)

A compendium of resources - who is doing what, where and when - in the field of religious futures; in print format and as an electronic ftp/web site.

12. MENSA in Israel: High IQ as a resource for religious futuring (1996, Moshe Dror, Ed Vincent)

To establish a MENSA site in Israel and invite selected members to participate in our research activities.

13. Academy of Jerusalem: Jewish/Jerusalem Cyber Temples (1996-7, Yitzhak Hayutman, Moshe Dror)

To research and design appropriate Jewish cyber religious sites for the future, focusing on a possible cyber Temple for Jerusalem.

14. International Federations of Spiritual Academies (1996, Carol Parrish / Carl Shapley)

15. Health, Medicine and Intelligence in the Future (1995, Ed Vincent/Dr. Colin Lewis)

16. Multimedia Religious Futures Education (1996-7, Parker Rossman/Moshe Dror)

To design and operate appropriate educational software for the Multimedia field in religious futures.

17. Finances of the Future (1995, Richard Kirby)

18. The Children of Tomorrow: The Arts and the Futures of Childhood as a life and death phenomenon (1996, Graham Clinton)

19. ASTRALA in Jerusalem (1997, Richard Kirby, Moshe Dror)

MAY THE LORD BLESS
THE WORK OF OUR
HANDS - AMEN.

**Saving the planet's life-support systems:
It's time for a People's Council for Global Sustainability!**

by Jakob von Uexkull

“Modern industrial civilization, as presently organized, is colliding violently with our planet's ecological system... We must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization. (This) means embarking on an all-out effort to use every policy and program, every law and institution, every treaty and alliance, every tactic and strategy, every plan and course of action - to use, in

short, every means to halt the destruction of the environment and to preserve and nurture our ecological system. Minor shifts in policy, in laws and regulations, rhetoric offered in lieu of genuine change - these are all forms of appeasement, designed to satisfy the public's desire to believe that sacrifice, struggle and a wrenching transformation of society will not be necessary.” (US Vice-President Al Gore).

According to the Council of Europe, “In several sectors the deterioration of the environment has reached a ‘threshold beyond which the damage is irreversible” (Final Declaration, Vienna Conference 1990.) The UNCED publication “In our hands” concludes that for the Third World “to escape from poverty through industrial development may no longer be an option” as the global environment simply will not stand it.

Former British Green party leader Sara Parkin was recently invited to address NATO officers. She told them: “If you consider human security in terms of people already dead, or numbers of people threatened with death, or numbers of people obliged to leave their homeland because it can no longer support them, or even in terms of impact on our emergency and financial services, then it would seem that the state of our environment poses a far greater threat to human security than any enemy army”.

Yet what has been the political response so far to this unique and unprecedented threat? According to one study,

co-authored by a Brundtland commission member, “No government in the world has made any major change in policy designed to convert the unsustainable to the sustainable”. (Holmberg, Bass & Timberlake, “Defending the Future”, 1991). Policies are still pursued which assume that economic space can outgrow biophysical space and that environmental borrowings can somehow be rescheduled or repudiated.

One excuse is that there is still scientific uncertainty. But, as the Ministerial Declaration of the 1990 Bergen intergovernmental conference warned: “Policies must be based on the precautionary principle... Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.” (Interestingly, the lack of scientific consensus never impeded the nuclear arms race!)

Today scientific uncertainties are about details. There is no dispute about the dangers of accumulating nondegradable artificial substances in our bodies, air, water and soil. There is no dispute about the very serious consequences of losing our global forest cover. There is no serious dispute about the basic realities and catastrophic effects of continued global warming. Indeed most of the “dissidents” are even more pessimistic, warning that drastic climate changes might come even sooner and faster. They may be right. A Swedish Government

report in 1987 notes that "soil acidification of the extent we have today could not be foreseen at the end of the 70's. It was not even considered imaginable".

Another excuse for avoiding hard choices is that a healthy environment is a luxury which most people cannot afford. This is nonsense. Not only are environmentally benign activities usually less costly than environmentally malign growth. Also, the costs of such malign growth fall disproportionately on the poor. For them "damage to their environment means damage to their largest single source of income... It profits a country nothing if it cuts down its forests to gain export earnings and extra crop land, only to find that the consequences are soil erosion, shortage of wood for fuel, an increase in floods and damage to fisheries... Economic growth that relies on destroying the environment may enrich the most powerful but impoverishes the weak". (Frances Cairncross, Dräger Foundation UNCED Symposium, 1991).

This is well known to the poor. Thus, the members of "Six S", the largest rural organisation in West Africa, have been found to spend 62% of their time on environmental protection work. And "when we asked teenagers all over the planet what issues concerned them most, environmental problems were at the top of the list - even in the poorest countries visited". (Peter Schwartz, "The Art of the Long View", (1991). To damage the environment and then try to cure it

may (sometimes!) be an affordable but imprudent option for the rich North. For the poor such expensive approaches are simply unaffordable. As the Director of India's Centre for Science and Environment, Anil Agarwal, says: "We cannot allow the Gross National Product to destroy the Gross Nature Product any further. Conserving and recreating nature has become our highest priority."

Once these basic facts are understood much present environmental policy-making takes on an air of unreality. The gap between what urgently needs to be done and what is actually being done and proposed is now so vast as to threaten the legitimacy and credibility of our entire political system. The increasingly unreal efforts to "reform" the moribund Soviet system in the late 80's come to mind.

During the Gulf War the British Chancellor of the Exchequer declared that, whatever the state of the economy, whatever the pressures on public expenditure, Britain would find the money to join the war. No such high-level unconditional commitments to saving the planet's life-support systems have been forthcoming - in the UK or elsewhere. On the contrary, even an ecological tax reform is regarded as acceptable only if it does not upset current competitiveness, tax income, EC harmonisation plans etc.

EC regulations on bidding for public contracts states that price, customer service, delivery time and even aesthetics may be taken into account

when comparing bids - but make no mention of environmental standards. The EC court has decided that waste disposal regulations must not block trade. In its partial rejection of the Danish law demanding returnable drink containers, the court concluded that "There has to be a balancing of interests between the free movement of goods and environmental protection, even if in achieving the balance the high standard of protection sought has to be reduced." The EC's rush to "deregulate" and slowness to raise standards may yet be its downfall as environmental conflicts multiply.

The USA and other industrialized countries adopted positions for UNCED which in some areas (e.g. military waste) fell behind what was agreed in Stockholm in 1972. Demands that TNCs accept environmental responsibilities were defeated. At the final UNCED Prepcom meeting the US delegate even objected to the inclusion in Agenda 21 of a recommendation for "less energy intensive consumption patterns and lifestyles in developed countries" as this would "infringe on personal freedom". References to overconsumption being a cause of environmental degradation were watered down, although, as former World Bank president R. S. McNamara told the UN in 1991, it is "neither morally defensible nor politically acceptable" to avoid the issue of how the rich can "adjust consumption patterns... so as to help assure a sustainable path of development for all the inhabitants of our planet".

While in 1950 the rich had ten times the per capita buying power of the poor, today they have thirty times as much. The issue is not how the poor can imitate the non-sustainable consumption levels of the rich - which must change - but how "Sustainable Livelihood Security" (Robert Chambers, "The Greening of Aid") for all can be achieved.

Yet the present global agenda is very different. While UNCED produced mainly forms of appeasement (to use Al Gore's term), the GATT Uruguay round is revising the rules of the global economy for decades to come.

GATT has no message for the environment. Its objective is to increase world trade by breaking down "restrictions", putting nations with stricter environmental standards at a commercial disadvantage. The GATT environment commission was reactivated in 1991, but its mandate is to investigate the impact of environmental policies and treaties on trade, not the other way around. Both development and environmental policies run the risk of being declared illegal by GATT: the GATT Director General has stated that GATT could challenge international environmental accords as well as stricter national rules. Yet, as Nobel-Prize-winning economist Trygve Haavelmo and his colleague Stein Hansen have noted "The structure of trade... is a curse from the perspective of sustainable development... Much Northern growth is based on depleting Southern resources for a price far below the cost of sustainable exploi-

tation" (in Goodland, Daly & El Serafy, "Environmentally Sustainable Economic Development" World Bank 1991).

GATT could have chosen to provide the authority for setting stringent import standards against goods produced at the expense of health, safety - and the environment, declaring the externalization of such costs to be a hidden trade subsidy. Instead it has chosen to "limit and localise laws for the protection of people and universalise laws for the protection of profits", to quote the Indian ecologist Vandana Shiva.

GATT is incompatible with the precautionary principle called for in the Bergen Ministerial Declaration, for it only permits trade restrictions on substances which have already been scientifically proven harmful. Who decides? The Codex committee which GATT wants to regulate the trade in food has a large membership from multinational food corporations. Codex has set maximum residue levels for pesticides like DDT in fruits and Vegetables which are up to 50 (!) times higher than present US norms.

The current GATT round aims at creating a powerful new global institution, the MTO (Multilateral Trade Organisation). Unlike the original 1947 GATT proposal for an International Trade Organisation the MTO proposal makes no provision for addressing the international commodity crisis, controlling restrictive business practices or protecting labour rights, let alone protection of the environment or fair trade rules for the poor. According

to the draft final text the MTO "shall enjoy in the territories of each of the Members such legal capacity, privileges and immunities as may be necessary for the exercise of its functions". Member states are required to "take all necessary steps, where changes to domestic laws will be required to implement the provisions... to ensure conformity of their laws to these agreements". The stage is set for a global environmental deregulation and standards-lowering competition to attract capital in a world order planned by transnational corporations.

Yet neither democracy nor the market economy will have the credibility to survive an environmental breakdown. The most likely short-term reaction will be "eco-fascism", i.e. an attempt by well-off minorities to protect their privileged access to environmental resources. This will not work, as there is no way of completely excluding the poor from the global environment. An "eco-Stalinist" revolution is likely to follow introducing a dictatorship with strict rationing of resources.

Those concerned with the environmental crisis have preferred to avoid the institutional issue, hoping that existing institutions could be pressured to perform tasks diametrically opposed to those for which they were created. A recent OECD paper pointed to the difficulties of promoting eco-taxes in an organisation set up to persuade members that taxes should not be used to change social behaviour. Those who have been trained to believe

ecology is just a subdiscipline of economics are hardly suitable guides into a world order where the economy has to be seen - if we are to survive - as a subset of the global ecosystem. "Lacking an understanding of the carrying capacity of ecological systems, economic planners are unable to relate demand levels to the health of the natural world" (Worldwatch Institute). Indeed World Bank chief economist Laurence Summers - who has described the Third World as "vastly under-polluted" - still believes "There are no ... limits to the carrying capacity of the earth that are likely to bind any time in the foreseeable future. The idea that we should put limits on growth because of some natural limit is a profound error." (The Guardian, 22.5.92).

Just as different organisations represent us in our roles as citizens, producers, consumers etc. we need a strong voice which acts for us as members of the planetary ecosystem. I Propose a Peoples' Council for Global Sustainability. Such an institution would set the boundaries within which politics and entrepreneurship can again function. For no sensible political or social debate can ultimately take place, nor goals and priorities be set when all have increasingly to compete and be weighed against the threat of an impending collapse of the planet's life-support systems.

To acquire the necessary legitimacy the Council should be directly elected. For practical reasons this would mean an assembly elected by some

form of proportional representation which would itself elect the Council members. Such elections could take place region by region or continent by continent. They could be held today in Europe to elect a European Sustainability Council which in its turn would send delegates to the Global Council. Similar elections could be organized in North and South America, Australia and the Pacific and probably in Africa without many problems. In Asia, it is realistic to envisage several regional Councils. The prospect of being excluded or offered only a reduced role should act as a powerful impetus towards democratic reforms in countries where these are still outstanding.

In the spirit of global interdependence, candidates for election would not have to be nationals nor should purely national lists be allowed. Candidates would need to obtain a minimum number of signatures in several countries to qualify. Considering our children's stake in an undamaged environment and the extent to which their interests have been "externalized", it seems only fair to lower the voting age limit for these elections. The Council's term of office should exceed that of national parliaments to enable it to take a longer-term view. To fulfil its tasks, it will require independent financial resources, e.g. the right to levy certain taxes on pollutants and armaments.

The new Council should become part of the UN "family", which has so far been missing a much-needed "third

leg" based on people, next to the existing "legs" based on nation states (General Assembly, Security Council, Special Agencies) and on wealth (World Bank, IMF etc.). The campaign for such a Council could unite those in the South and North who want to reform and democratise the UN System and global governance as well as all those working for global sustainability and fairness. UN Organisations already active in this field, especially UNEP and UNDP, could be linked to the Council, providing expertise and experience, as could the new Commission on Sustainable Development.

A number of objections are certain to be raised, e.g.

1) "We don't need yet another international organisation."

This objection, usually from representatives of the Northern elites, is not raised against the MTO or any of the other organisations they have created, but comes up as soon as a proposal is made which would upset the present global power structure. But this objection is also heard from some Northern NGOs. They believe no international organisation can offer democratic and participatory opportunities. This is defeatist and perpetuates the present institutional world order.

Vandana Shiva argues that "Democratising the 'global' is the next step ... An earth democracy cannot be realised with the global domination by undemocratic structures." ("Third World Resurgence", No 14-15, 1991,) because "The global is not the democratic

distillation of all local and national concerns worldwide. It is the imposition on a world scale of a narrow group of interests from a handful of nations." ("The Ecologist", Nov.-Dec. 1992).

2) "Nobody will want to give up sovereignty to such an organisation".

Much power has already been ceded to various supra-national bodies, such as the EC, GATT etc. - and to TNCs - without concern for the popular will. Opinion polls show that the environment is the one issue where large majorities recognize that national sovereignty is illusory and are prepared to support a strong international organisation for to quote Mrs. Brundtland, "Today we do not have global institutional tools that are strong enough to set new directions or to implement effective global policies." (Dräger Symposium, 1991).

3) "Such an organisation would create new conflicts".

It would simply bring into the open existing conflicts which at present are either not dealt with or solved at the expense of the weaker players, i.e. the poor, the environment and future generations. It would certainly represent a power shift, giving these players a strong voice of their own for the first time. But the alternative will abolish the future for rich and poor

4) "The Council would require a massive army to enforce its rulings".

Certainly the Council would need enforcement powers. An international "Green Police has been proposed by the former Norwegian conservative Prime Minister. The EC competition laws can be directly enforced against individual companies in the member states. There is no reason why the Council could not have similar powers e.g. to defend environmental property rights. GATT offers an example of a powerful international institution which does not rely on armed force. Amnesty International and Greenpeace have shown what moral pressure can achieve even in difficult situations when national prestige is involved.

We face tumultuous times. But most human beings care for the environment and have a sense of fairness. An organisation which is democratically elected and which is seen to act fairly to the best of its ability to achieve a transition for the common good will not have to be built on force alone. What would be the alternative? In a recent debate the Chief Inspector of the German Army stated that, to protect global oxygen reserves, Germany might have to invade Brazil to stop deforestation ... (Der Spiegel, 32/1992.)

5) "The poor majority will simply outvote the North and strip it of everything".

In the global power structure the North will still retain a massive advantage. Although formal veto powers should be avoided a successful transition will require a broad consensus and participation. The Peoples'

Council would be no world government. While its decisions would be felt in many areas, its powers would be more akin to those of an independent central bank set up to ensure economic rectitude. It could be made subject to jurisdiction by the Hague Court, for example, in case of complaints that it had overstepped its powers.

But interference would no longer be a one-way street. If the South is to save its forests to protect the global environment, then why should it not be able to tell the North to stop motorway construction for the same reason?

6) "How do you know the new Council will not become corrupt and controlled by reactionary forces?"

All the evidence points the other way. The environment is a top concern in polls in almost every country. The awareness that "luxury environmentalism", ignoring the poor, is simply not an option - as they would be forced to take a path which would destroy everyone's future - is also widespread. It is likely that the elected Council would have a considerably more "green" profile than, say, national parliaments. For, just as only a part of the electorate votes, only a part of each voter's preferences can be voted. The Council elections will enable another - vital but often suppressed - part of us to express our caring for our earth and for future generations.

7) "What about subsidiarity?"

Subsidiarity demands that decisions be taken by or as close as possible to those affected by them. Local, regional and national sustainability councils would be welcome. But the global Council is crucial to balance the existing global power structure which interferes on all levels and has shown itself incapable of giving survival issues their due weight. As Vandana Shiva argues "Democratising international interests is essential if democracy is to exist at the local and national level." (The Ecologist, op cit).

The main task of the Council would be to codify and enforce existing treaties and conventions embodying environmental rights. The 1972 Stockholm Declaration, signed by the participating governments, prohibits activities which damage the environment of other nations. The Shared Resources Declaration (1978) commits the signatories to use natural resources sustainably, as does the UN World Charter For Nature (1982), an initiative from the South. The Council could impose fines on members who fail to implement their commitments. Often the desire to avoid negative publicity may be sufficient. An independent court could be set up under the auspices of the Council to try crimes against ecological security.

The Council could mandate a crash programme of energy efficiency which would free capital for other urgent uses. Simply mandating European efficiency standards for US cars would save oil equivalent

to the total consumption of Africa, China and India.

The Council would have another crucial task. The North has chosen the cheapest development path, using up more than its fair share of global environmental resources and "sinks". The South has the right to be compensated for foregoing this path in the interests of all of us. One proposal, by Sir James Goldsmith, is that those agreeing to preserve forests - and other valuable natural habitats - be paid, as farmers are compensated for taking land out of production. Forcing the South to choose between environmentally destructive exports and starving the minds and bodies of its children to pay its "debts" to the rich is indeed "the antithesis of all civilized behaviour. Nothing can justify it. And it shames and diminishes us all." (The State of the world's Children, UNICEF, 1989). Without fair compensation all talk of the 'global commons' or the 'common heritage' of mankind will be seen by the poor as another attempt to expropriate their resources.

The Council will come about through the pressure of public opinion. Any person or group can initiate and work to multiply this pressure. Any nation or group of nations can take the initiative by announcing support for the Council and calling a conference to draft its Constitution.

We have long been prepared to make exceptional arrangements in wartime. Our war against nature is the most lethal war humanity has ever fought: "The greatest dying of

species in 65 million years" (Der Spiegel 18/92). Considering how many sacrifices we have been prepared to make in the name of national security, it is not too much to ask that we now do what needs to be done in the name of global security before it is too late. Or will, in the words of the philosopher Ernst Bloch, the great moment encounter too small a people?

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