

The Ecologist

Vol 26 No 1 January/February 1996

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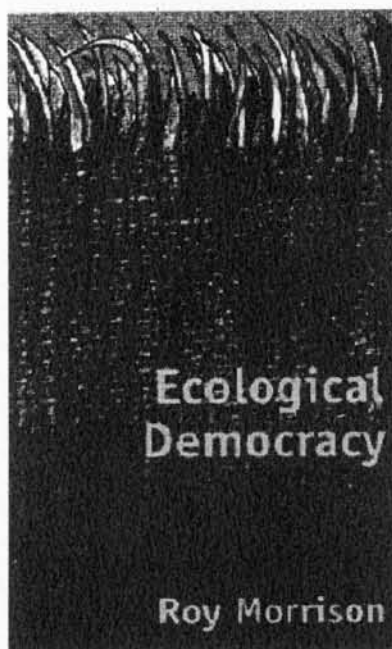


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Britain's Post-War Foreign Policy



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The Ecologist is published by Ecosystems Ltd.

Editorial Office and Back Issues: Agriculture House, Bath Road, Sturminster Newton, Dorset, DT10 1DU, UK.
Tel: (01258) 473476, Fax: (01258) 473748, E-Mail: ecologist@gn.apc.org

Subscriptions: The Ecologist, c/o Cissbury House, Furze View, Five Oaks Road, Slinfold, W. Sussex RH13 7RH, UK
Tel/Fax: (01403) 782644

Retail Distribution: Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN, United Kingdom
Tel: (0181) 986 4854, Fax: (0181) 533 5821

Annual Subscription Rates

£24 (US\$35) for individuals and schools;

£50 (US\$90) for institutions;

£18 (US\$28) concessionary rate
(subscribers in the Third World and Eastern Europe; unwaged—ID required).

Air mail **£11 (US\$19)** extra.

Concessionary rate only available from RED Computing and The MIT Press and not through other subscription agents.

The Ecologist is published bi-monthly. The rates above are for six issues, including postage and annual index.

Subscriptions outside North America payable to The Ecologist and sent to the Subscriptions address above. We welcome payment by UK£ cheque drawn on UK bank, US\$ check drawn on US bank, eurocheque written in UK£, banker's draft payable through a British bank, UK or international postal order, Access, Visa or MasterCard.

North American subscriptions payable by check drawn on US banks in US funds to: MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142. Fax: (617) 258-6779; E-mail: journals-orders@mit.edu

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The Ecologist International Serial Number is: ISSN 0261-3131.

Printed by Penwell Ltd, Station Road, Kelly Bray, Callington, Cornwall, PL17 8ER, UK.
Tel: (01579) 383777

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The Ecologist is available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb St., Ann Arbor, MI, USA

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USAID and other development agencies typically portray Egypt as the narrow valley of the River Nile hemmed in by the desert and crowded with rapidly-multiplying millions of inhabitants, a picture which enables Egypt's poverty to be ascribed to demography and geography. Such an image obscures the political and social inequalities that underlie Egypt's inability to feed itself. It also hides the role that USAID plays in the promotion of policies framed to support US domestic interests.

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Cost-Benefit Analysis

The Problem, Not the Solution

Cost-benefit analysis (CBA) fails an elementary political test: it does not convince. It is proffered by economists to politicians and government officials as a method of making decisions about controversial issues, such as new roads or global warming. But, far from resolving controversy, CBA has itself become a focus of conflict. Why?

On first encounter, it is difficult to understand how such an apparently simple and straightforward method of analysis could provoke hostility. Its essence is contained in its name. The analyst measures the costs and benefits of proceeding with a project and then adds them up to see which is greater — a matter of simple arithmetic.

Advocates of CBA claim that the method is clear and candid. It is offered as a way of making decisions that is objective, systematic, fair, transparent, "green" and democratic. All these supposed virtues, allied to the method's quantitative rigour, lead its proponents to insist that it is a "rational" way of making decisions.

CBA has assumed an important role in environmental debates because of attempts to seek out and embrace "externalities" — the social and environmental consequences of decisions that are not captured by the operation of the market; these can range from the effects of acid rain, traffic noise and oil spills, to the deaths predicted to be caused by global warming.

The British government now proposes to extend CBA beyond its usual of role project assessment to the actual making of environmental policy. Until recently, *policy* has formed the context within which *projects* have been assessed. The Department of Transport, for example, has used CBA (the DoT version is called COBA) for many years to assess its road projects within the framework of a policy of providing sufficient road capacity to meet the unconstrained growth of traffic anticipated by its forecasters. Objectors at public road inquiries who sought to question either COBA or the forecasts have been barred from doing so. They have been told that it is government policy to rely on COBA and the forecasts in making decisions about new roads, and that scrutiny of government policy is the business of Parliament. In 1994, however, the Department of the Environment (DoE) proposed (in *Environmental Appraisal in Government Departments*) that cost-benefit analysis should be used for "the definition and refinement of policy objectives and options."

The failure of CBA to settle disputes about projects suggest that its use for defining policy objectives will increase considerably the scale of the controversies that it fails to resolve, a failure which has three main causes: it attempts the impossible; it is biased; and it entrenches conflict.

Attempting the Impossible

David Pearce, Britain's foremost advocate of cost-benefit analysis, insists that CBA must "reduce all concerns to cash". He adds that "economists would be happy to use any other unit so long as human wants are measured". A popular text on CBA by Richard Layard and Stephen Laister elaborates this point:

"The only basic principle is that we should be willing to assign numerical values to costs and benefits, and arrive at decisions by adding them up and accepting those projects whose benefits exceed their costs. There is absolutely no need for money to be the numeraire (ie. the unit of account) in such valuations. It could equally well be bushels of corn but money is convenient."

The DoE also stresses the *convenience* of money as the numeraire, while at the same time acknowledging that a consensus about the morality of reducing everything to cash has yet to be reached:

"The use of money as a standard is sometimes a barrier to wider acceptance. Most people believe that there are some things which are 'priceless' (in the sense that they cannot conceive of any sensible trade-offs involving these things). It may be considered immoral to place a value on goods such as clean air and water which are generally seen as a right for all. But a monetary standard is a convenient means of expressing the relative values which society places on different uses of resources."

Convenient for whom? Whenever cost-benefit analysts encounter people who say that something is priceless, or that attempting to put a price on it is immoral, they are stuck. Their method requires that *everything* be reduced to cash. The information that the cost-benefit analyst requires about how people value things is locked up inside peoples' heads, and the only way to gain access to it is by asking them. The form of asking is called "contingent valuation"; people are asked how much they would be Willing To Pay (WTP) for the things the analyst is seeking to value if they were for sale. There is now abundant evidence that people cannot, or will not, provide meaningful answers to the contingent valuer's questions. What would you be willing to pay to prevent the extinction of, say, the blue whale?

Bias

Most discussions of the problems of valuation focus on the difficulty of measuring people's willingness to pay for the *benefit* of an improved or preserved environment. But the problems associated with valuing the *costs* of environmental loss and destruction are much more common and much more intractable.

Here, the economist must ascertain the sum of money that would compensate the losers for their losses. The judges of this amount must be the people suffering the losses; the economist cannot answer for them. A German example shows what can happen when the cost-benefit analyst tries to value losses. Under German law, all residents living within a 45 degree angle from the top of a proposed building must give their consent before construction can begin. In Frankfurt, in 1989, one Frau Kraus, who lived within the 45 degree angle of a proposed new skyscraper, discovered that she had in effect a right of veto over the project. She was offered DM1 million, subsequently raised to DM10 million for her consent. She declined, saying; "Not even if they were to offer me

DM20 million would I change my mind. It would block out my sunlight and spoil the place where I was born and bred."

This is dismissed by most economists as an "irrational" answer. But it is accepted by most economists that the sums that people declare that they would be willing to pay to prevent a loss are consistently less than the sum that they report that they would be Willing To Accept (WTA) as compensation for a loss. One obvious reason for this discrepancy is the fact that willingness to pay is constrained by ability to pay, while willingness to accept compensation is unconstrained. Wherever economists encounters losses that are inconsolable by money — serious injury and death are common examples — their methods cannot work.

To salvage their methods, economists routinely resort to asking the wrong question. They ask prospective losers what they would be willing to pay to prevent the loss, and not what they would be willing to accept as compensation. A few economists maintain that there "is no justification within economic theory for choosing between WTP and WTA measures". They go on, somewhat vaguely for advocates of a rigorous "science" to say that "good economic analysis will require good judgement on the question of whether to use willingness-to-pay or willingness-to-accept measures of economic value". But others acknowledge that valuing losses in terms of people's willingness to pay to prevent them is breaking the rules; they accept that "the conceptually correct measure of lost is the minimum amount of compensation that each affected individual would be willing to accept". However, because of their concern that respondents to contingent valuation surveys would give "unrealistically high answers", they prefer the willingness-to-pay measure which they describe as "the conservative choice."

But this is to throw away the theoretical foundation of CBA, the criterion of a Pareto improvement — any change that permits the winners to compensate the losers and still leaves something over is an indisputable improvement. It is a crucially important evasion; it sacrifices the principle, from which cost-benefit analysis derives both its theoretical and moral legitimacy, to expediency. Asking the conceptually-correct willingness-to-accept question does indeed run into the problem that some people place very high values on aspects of their environment, and there is no affordable test of whether people who give "unrealistically" high answers are telling the truth. The choice facing economists in such cases is to abandon their method as unworkable, or to ask the wrong question.

The attempt to apply CBA to global warming provides one of the best examples of the ability of the wrong question to raise the temperature of an argument rather than settle it. The title of one of the papers prepared for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN body charged with assessing the science of climate change in order to provide a basis for international and national policy-making, illustrates the way in which the formulation of a problem can predetermine the result. The paper is called "The social costs of climate change: greenhouse damage and the benefits of control". The prevention of the predicted "damage" caused by global warming is valued as a "benefit" — something that people are expected to pay for.

The paper makes use of estimates of the willingness-to-pay value for the lives that are predicted to be lost as a result of global warming. The main cause of the problem is "development" — CO₂ emissions for which activities in the "developed" world are held mainly responsible — and the costs are borne mainly by the "undeveloped"; of the 229,545 deaths attributed to global warming, the OECD nations account for only 38,205 (17 per cent).

But although we may all be equal in the eyes of the Lord,

we are not all equal in the eyes of the economist; each OECD death is valued at \$1.5 million, while each Chinese, Indian or African death is valued at \$150,000 (a figure subsequently reduced to \$100,000). Thus, although most of the estimated cost of global warming — measured in lives — is borne by the Third World, most of the cost — measured in dollars — is borne by the OECD; of the global "damage from increased mortality" of \$89.3 billion, \$57.3 billion (96.4 per cent) is attributed to damage suffered by OECD countries.

William Nordhaus, one of the foremost practitioners of global cost-benefit analysis, insists that the method requires a common unit of account, but that the use of *monetary* values "is not really critical": the scalar "could be in spotted-owl equivalents." If that is the case, then, as Aubrey Meyer of the Global Commons Institute points out, "if one spotted owl equals one spotted owl, why doesn't one human equal one human?" The answer is that using such a scale would yield radically different results — results which, if taken at face value, would stop most of the industrial world's economic activity. Yet, if one is determined to attempt the impossible and measure everything on a single scale, then, following Plato's advice that "man is the measure of all things", surely lives, not dollars, is the scale that should be used.

Entrenching Conflict

The 1971 Roskill Commission's inquiry into proposals for a third airport for London was the largest CBA ever undertaken in Britain. It recommended that a new airport should be built at Cublington in Buckinghamshire, rather than at Foulness on the coast of Essex. Protesters against this recommendation paraded about with "stick it on Foulness" plac-

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ards. The government rejected the Roskill recommendation in favour of Foulness, the site that came last in Roskill's cost-benefit rankings. It then retreated from this decision to designate Stansted as the third London airport, a decision made without the help of CBA. The Roskill recommendation thus settled nothing. Similarly, in today's debates about roads and global warming, CBA is settling nothing.

The resolution of these debates depends not on capturing values at a moment in time, but on changing values. The defenders of Cublington tended to view their village as of unique historical importance, and Foulness as a mud flat ripe for development. The defenders of Foulness saw it as a naturalist paradise full of endangered species, and Cublington as nothing special. Those opposing a new airport anywhere couched their arguments in terms of "limits to growth" and focused on the blighting effects of tourism. Those in favour of a new airport spoke of the jobs it would generate and the need for Britain to remain competitive in the modern world. The participants in the debate were arguing from irreconcilable positions.

Try Harder?

Before considering alternatives to CBA, it should be noted that there is an influential school of thought that treats all the defects of CBA discussed above as challenges — as difficulties that will yield to more research and hard work. The Department of Transport, for example, has announced its ambition to extend its cost-benefit analyses to embrace more environmental effects, and has identified the monetization of noise as its first target. The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution has also urged the cost-benefit analysts to try harder, because:

"to provide the economic rationale for sustainable development, the costs and benefits involved should be expressed in money terms wherever possible."

It acknowledges the existence of some costs and benefits that "may not" be quantifiable but noise is an effect for which the Commission believes cash valuation is possible. Ironically, by 1994, the Department of Transport had abandoned the goal of monetizing noise and retreated to the goal of monetizing "traffic nuisance", on the grounds that the response to a particular sound level cannot be separated from reactions to the vibration, delay, danger, fumes, dust and dirt that accompany it.

But whether it is noise or nuisance that the cost-benefit analyst seeks to measure, people's reactions will be influenced by their perceptions of the desirability of the activity that causes it. "Noise" is unwanted sound — one person's music is another person's noise. Even if the DoT's consultants succeed — by wriggling around the need to ask willingness-to-accept questions — in producing the *average* cash value that people attach to traffic nuisance, the number will settle no arguments. Whether one considers traffic to be a nuisance or not will depend on one's relation to it. The reaction to traffic of someone who earns a living making cars or selling petrol is unlikely to be the same as that of an environmentalist concerned about pollution or a parent worried about their child getting home safely from school.

Argue, Discuss, Negotiate and Compromise

The nineteenth-century cleric and commentator, the Reverend Sidney Smith, after witnessing a vitriolic exchange of abuse between two women, observed "they'll never agree; they're arguing from different premises." This description

fits well disputes — past and present — between "environmentalists" and "developers." Offers by cost-benefit analysts to serve as neutral mediators in such disputes should be viewed with suspicion. They too argue from premises.

CBA cannot forge agreement between those in Britain who believe more traffic is a benefit and those who believe it is a cost. CBA, which assumes that a society has a single "objective function" on which all citizens agree, and a single metric by which all goods and bads can be measured cannot be reconciled with pluralistic democracy. Wilfredo Pareto, who articulated the criterion on which CBA rests, was hailed by Mussolini as "the founder of fascist theory", but the method that he inspired appeals to central planners of all political colours.

Before computers, and those who feed them with "values", can be useful in making decisions, there must be agreement about what is valuable. In pluralist democracies, complete agreement about the objectives of environmental policy is an unattainable goal. We are stuck with a messy and protracted process of argument, discussion, negotiation and compromise. In Britain this process involves Greenpeace, the nuclear industry, Friends of the Earth, the Department of Transport, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, and countless other developers and environmental protection groups, all arguing their different cases, and altering values in the process.

This is not a new process. Development has been encroaching on nature since before the industrial revolution. The developers and the defenders of nature have long argued from different premises. We can all agree with William Blake that "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees", but we cannot agree who is the fool and who the wise man. The idea that the argument can now be settled by attaching cash values to the benefits of "dark Satanic mills" and to the damage they do to "England's green and pleasant land" will in the light of history look extraordinarily naive.

If there is to be any hope of forging agreement between the warring factions in the environment debate, ways must be found of bringing them to the conference table. It will not be easy. At one extreme are "developers", contemptuous of the scare-mongers blocking the path of progress, and, at the other, are "deep ecologists" warning of the impending environmental Armageddon. On both sides can be found those warning against the dangers of appeasement and deriding the idea of compromise. Between the extremes lies much confusion. Wherever people can be found arguing from different premises, progress towards agreement can only be made if they can be persuaded to examine the foundations of their disagreement and to explore their differences. The skills in shortest supply for this task are not economic, but diplomatic.

John Adams

John Adams is a reader in geography at University College, London. This article is extracted from his report, *Cost Benefit Analysis: Part of the Problem, Not the Solution*, Green College Centre for Environmental Policy and Understanding, Oxford, 1995.

Sources

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The Ambiguities of Power

British Foreign Policy Since 1945

by

Mark Curtis

Since 1945 — and the gradual “decolonization” of its empire — Britain has played a key role in shaping the Third World to suit its own commercial and political objectives. Recently-released official documents reveal that a prime goal of successive UK governments has been to ensure “economic” access to, and control over, the resources of ex-colonies and other Third World countries. To that end, Britain has used its military, political and economic power in support of political elements in those countries who are favourable to the West — regardless of the implications for human rights, democracy or peoples’ welfare.

It is a widely-held assumption that Britain’s foreign policy since the end of the Second World War (and indeed the policy of Western countries in general) is guided as much by a desire to promote peace, democracy, human rights and economic development in the Third World as it is by Britain’s political and economic priorities. There is a tendency to believe that the role of Britain and other Western countries in the world is essentially benign, particularly in relation to states elsewhere.

Assumptions concerning such fundamental benevolence in foreign policy are, unsurprisingly, found among those who have made the policy. According to Michael Stewart, Labour Foreign Secretary in 1965-6:

“British interests could only be protected as part of the general interests of mankind, and one of the chief of these was the preservation of peace . . . Our task, therefore, was to discover how best a nation of our rank could cooperate with others for the general good.”¹

Even of the colonial period, Winston Churchill noted “the reputation of the British empire as a valiant and benignant force in the history of mankind.”² For Harold Macmillan, the empire was “a strong instrument . . . for the preservation of peace and the spread of civilisation throughout a great part of the globe.”³

The assertion of Britain’s basic benevolence, both in motivation and in effect, in foreign policy does not preclude recognition that occasionally “mistakes” are made, ill-considered policies implemented, or even policies pursued that deliberately deviate from the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights and Third World economic development. But rectifications of these occasional “errors” by wayward individual policymakers seem merely to require a degree of reform or oversight of policy and policymakers.

A close scrutiny of Britain’s foreign policy since 1945 presents a very different picture, however. Far from being benevolent, Britain is, in fact, a major and consistent contributor to much of the world’s suffering. Rather than “occasionally”

deviating from the promotion of grand principles, since 1945 British (and US) foreign policy has been systematically opposed to them, irrespective of whether the Conservatives or Labour (or Republicans or Democrats) have been in power. This is not through any desire of government leaders to contribute on purpose to misery for its own sake, nor because individual policy makers are evil; it arises from the economic and political priorities that successive governments have pursued at home and abroad in which the Third World is viewed primarily as a market for investments and exports and as a source of raw materials. The reality of British foreign policy is clearly visible in formerly-secret government planning records.

The Colonial Imperative

Since 1945, ensuring “economic access” to, and control over, the world’s resources — the overall stimulant to European colonialism — has continued to provide the basis for foreign policy. A 1950 Foreign Office document entitled “British overseas obligations: A regional survey” summarizes Britain’s post-war economic interests and priorities in various regions of the world:

“Africa is an important source of raw materials in peace and war . . . These materials are of particular importance now and in the long-term to the United Kingdom as they both earn and save dollars.”

Southeast Asia, meanwhile, was “a substantial economic asset and a net earner of dollars” while of “paramount importance” were the oil resources of the Middle East.⁴ Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary after 1945, observed that:

“it would be necessary to mobilize the resources of Africa in support of West European Union . . . Two great mountains of manganese are in Sierra Leone, etc. [The] US is very barren of essential minerals and in Africa we [sic] have them all.”

Bevin’s aim for the Middle East was to develop “a prosperous producing area to assist the British economy and replace India as an important market for British goods.”⁵ Using colonial

Mark Curtis is a former Research Fellow at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, and author of *The Ambiguities of Power: British Foreign Policy Since 1945*, Zed Books, London and New Jersey, 1995, ISBN 1-85649-348-2, £14.95/\$25.

resources to benefit the British economy was an explicit aim in establishing the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC). The CDC would "promote . . . the production of foodstuffs, raw materials and manufactures where supply to the UK or sale overseas will assist our balance of payments."⁶

The urging of exploitation disguised as "development" was outlined by the British Treasury in 1945. "We have to devise techniques for bringing influence to bear upon other countries' internal decisions," one paper stated. It continued:

"We should be able to exert a very great influence upon the structure of that development . . . We could usefully begin with parts of the world in which we already have great influence — the colonial empire, the Middle East and India."⁷

Under pressure from nationalist elements in the Third World to decolonize, Britain's priority after the Second World War was to "transfer power" in the colonies to elements who could be relied upon to guarantee British access to their economies and raw materials. There was an understanding that, by granting independence, British interests could be even more safely assured since nominal independence could foster collaboration with educated elites, each party working to secure their own interests at the expense of the majority of the Third World people.

Colonialism Under Decolonization

In a 1950 memorandum, the Foreign Office asserted that Britain "must ensure that any major obligations it gives up are taken over by its friends".⁸

The 1947 government plan for decolonization was thus "shrewdly designed to protect and advance British economic and political interests in these changing circumstances"⁹ and "to convert (or reconvert) formal into informal empire as the need arose". Such colonial reform extended the life of colonial control.¹⁰

One way for Britain to guarantee these interests was to use military force to suppress elements who might not be "friendly" towards Britain after independence. Malaya, a British colony until 1957, is a case in point.

Rubber tapping in Malaysia. A prime aim of British policy was to ensure that the post-independence government would be "friendly" towards Britain.



Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

British documents of the time make clear the importance of Malayan economic resources to the British economy. A Colonial Office report stated in 1950: "Malaya possesses . . . valuable minerals — coal, bauxite, tungsten, gold, iron ore, manganese, ilmenite and china clay." Its main riches, however, were rubber and tin. The same report noted that "apart from rubber, the tin mining industry of Malaya is the biggest dollar earner in the British Commonwealth."¹¹ Tin exports constituted around 12–15 per cent of the colony's revenue,¹² whilst "on rubber sales depends 3/4 of the [Malayan] Federation's income."¹³

As a result of colonialism, Malaya was effectively owned by Europe, primarily Britain. The Colonial Office noted that "British capital provides the backing for the bulk of the industrial enterprises in the [Malay] Federation and in Singapore."¹⁴ A large number of the mining companies were registered in Britain,¹⁵ and in the early 1950s, 70 per cent of rubber estate acreage (and 42 per cent of total rubber acreage) was owned by European (primarily British) business interests.¹⁶ As Lord Ogmore noted in a February 1952 House of Lords debate, "what we should do without Malaya, and its earnings in tin and rubber, I do not know."¹⁷ Lord Milverton meanwhile cautioned their lordships not to forget that Malaya was the "greatest material prize in south-east Asia".¹⁸

Insurgency from the late 1940s onwards threatened British control over this "material prize" and disruption of the dollar-earning exports of the rubber and tin industries.¹⁹

Most of the insurgents were disaffected Chinese — some 45 per cent of the population in Malaya was Chinese — who received considerable support from Chinese "squatters" numbering over half a million. The Foreign Office described the squatters in 1952 as:

"The vast majority of the poorer Chinese [who] were employed in the tin mines and on the rubber estates and [who] suffered most from the Japanese occupation of the country . . . During the Japanese occupation, they were deprived both of their normal employment and of the opportunity to return to their homeland . . . Large numbers of Chinese were forced out of useful employment and had no alternative but to follow the example of other distressed Chinese, who in small numbers had been obliged to scratch for a living in the jungle clearings even before the war."²⁰

The British colonial authorities had promoted the dominance of the Malay community over the Chinese. By 1948, Britain was promoting a new federal constitution that would confirm Malay privileges and consign about 90 per cent of Chinese to noncitizenship.²¹

To combat an insurgent force of some 3,000–6,000,²² British military forces were dispatched between 1948 and 1960 to "defend" Malaya from threats to the "stability" of the country. This "emergency" or "counter-insurgency" campaign was Britain's first major military campaign outside Europe since the end of the Second World War. "In its narrower context," the Foreign Office observed, the "war against bandits is very much a war in defence of [the] rubber industry."²³

The counterinsurgency war embarked upon by the "defenders of Malaya"

involved large-scale bombing, dictatorial police measures and the wholesale "resettlement" of hundreds of thousands of "squatters".²⁴ The High Commissioner in Malaya, Gerald Templar, noted that "the hard core of armed communists in this country are fanatics and must be, and will be, exterminated".²⁵

In 1952, a memorandum by the British Defence Secretary stipulated that the insurgents, usually referred to as "bandits", would be officially known as "communist terrorists".²⁶ The significance of communism to the British was not the possibility of military intervention in Malaya by either the USSR or China or their material support to the insurgents, but that the communists were "moving towards an economy and a type of trade in which there will be no place for the foreign manufacturer, the foreign banker or the foreign trader".²⁷

Anticipating US tactics in Vietnam, Britain experimented with the use of chemicals as defoliants and crop destroyers. From June to October 1952, 1,250 acres of roadside vegetation at possible ambush points (an average of 23 1/2 miles of one side of the road per month) were sprayed with defoliant.²⁸ The chemical giant ICI provided its services for this policy of "national importance",²⁹ seeing it, according to the Colonial Office, as "a lucrative field for experiment".³⁰

Britain achieved all its main aims in Malaya: the insurgents were defeated and, with independence in 1957, the country set upon a course of political and economic development in which Britain's economic interests were essentially preserved. The Imperial Affairs committee of the British Conservative Party urged that Singapore, one part of the Malayan Federation, would "remain autonomous as far ahead as one cares to look, under direct British control, held in trust for the military and economic defence of the Commonwealth and free world — like Gibraltar, or Panama by the USA".³¹

In practice, "independence brought no significant reduction in the degree of foreign control over the economy", which remained "closely tied to foreign interests" into the 1960s and 1970s. By 1971, 80 per cent of mining, 62 per cent of manufacturing and 58 per cent of construction were foreign-owned, mainly by Britain.³² The established order had been protected.

The Irrelevance of Human Rights

"Maintaining the established order" in the ex-colonies has involved support to local elements who provide favourable conditions for their country to act as a market for British investments and exports and as a source of raw materials, irrespective of how repressive such elements are. Britain's support of South African governments since the formalization of apartheid in 1948 illustrates the systematic links between this policy, on the one hand, and the violations of the rights of those who impede its pursuit, on the other.

In 1990, Oxfam and the Catholic Institute for International Relations detailed the effects of apartheid: the overall average infant mortality rate was 95 per thousand, one of the world's



Police keep guard as council workers destroy illegal squatter shacks in Cape Town during an early morning raid. Britain was a consistent economic and political supporter of the apartheid regimes.

Eric Miller/Panos Pictures

highest; per capita spending on health care was R597 for whites, R138 for urban blacks and R88 for rural blacks; life expectancy for whites was 72 years, for blacks 59; 1.6 per cent of whites lived below the poverty line, compared with 53 per cent of blacks; whites, comprising one sixth of the population, accounted for two-thirds of all incomes; blacks, comprising three-quarters of the population, accounted for one quarter of all incomes.³³

Britain was by far South Africa's most important international economic supporter. As apartheid was further enforced in the 1950s and 1960s and black opposition was progressively and violently crushed, British capital investment in the country grew, doubling between 1956 and 1970. According to South Africa specialist Geoff Berridge, "no major sector of British capitalism was without substantial representation in these investments".³⁴

Western support for South Africa continued throughout the 1970s; in the two years following South Africa's invasion of Angola in 1975, IMF assistance to South Africa was greater than that provided to all other African states combined.³⁵ By the 1980s, as South Africa stepped up its involvement in Angola and Mozambique,³⁶ Britain remained the largest single investor in South Africa, with around 40 per cent of the total, accounting for about 10 per cent of all British overseas investments and providing around 16 per cent of total investment profits.³⁷ By 1990, the United Kingdom-South Africa Trade Association estimated that British investment in South Africa accounted for as much as 50 per cent of total foreign investment in the country, involving £10 billion.³⁸

Meanwhile, collective international action against South Africa was consistently blocked by Britain and its allies, chiefly the United States and France. Britain's level of political support for South Africa corresponded to its economic backing. At the United Nations, Britain vetoed several resolutions hostile to South Africa. During 1965-74, Britain cast seven Security Council vetoes (six on Southern Rhodesia, one on South Africa); during 1975-84, it cast ten vetoes (nine on South Africa, one on the Falklands); and during 1985-89, it cast nine vetoes

(seven on South Africa). A former British Permanent Representative at the UN, Anthony Parsons, explained that the more recent vetoes were directed towards "defending South Africa against United Nations attempts to take coercive action in regard to South African military activity in Angola and elsewhere" and towards preventing the imposition of mandatory economic sanctions.³⁹

In the 1980s, the British government under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rejected international calls for full economic sanctions against South Africa. While the official British line asserted that dialogue with South African leaders and the avoidance of full sanctions would force an end to apartheid, the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Groups reported in 1986 that "at present there is no genuine intention on the part of the South African government to dismantle apartheid".⁴⁰ In 1987, when the South Africa had devastated Angola and Mozambique through its sponsorship of terrorism, Thatcher branded the African National Congress (ANC) a "typical terrorist organization".⁴¹

On 2 February 1990, President F.W. De Klerk made his historic speech announcing several reforms to the apartheid system and the release of Nelson Mandela. Thatcher immediately invited De Klerk to visit Britain. Even though Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said that "we are a long way from seeing the end of apartheid,"⁴² nine days after De Klerk's speech, Thatcher announced that all sanctions not subject to binding international agreements would be lifted,⁴³ and on 23 February, Britain officially lifted the voluntary ban on new investment and promotion of tourism.

But as Archbishop Trevor Huddleston wrote the day after De Klerk's speech:

"None of the measures [announced by De Klerk] is in fact the end of apartheid. Apartheid remains firmly in place; all the legislation which over the years imposed it upon the majority population remains in place."⁴⁴

Four months after De Klerk's announcements, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth concluded similarly that "not one of the fundamental pillars of apartheid has yet been dismantled".⁴⁵ Both the state of emergency and the Group Areas Act remained in force. A fortnight after De Klerk's speech, *The Guardian* revealed the existence of an army "death squad" which, according to the head of police investigations, had been responsible for "various incidents of murder, arson, bomb explosions at buildings and intimidation".⁴⁶ In March, the police

opened fire on demonstrators, killing eight people and injuring three hundred.⁴⁷ In April, the police shot four people dead and wounded twenty at a demonstration.⁴⁸ Atrocities perpetrated by South African-backed forces continued in Mozambique and Angola. De Klerk himself, two months after his February speech, stated that "majority rule is not suitable for a country like South Africa", preferring instead "power sharing".⁴⁹

Even today, there is no guarantee in the current international environment that the South African people's struggle for freedom from oppression by ruling elites will automatically end with the demise of apartheid. The aim of the industrialized states has been to ensure that the new economic and political system in South Africa will continue to guarantee Western business interests profitable access to the country's considerable economic resources (especially minerals and an abundance of cheap labour). Western leaders often refer to this as helping South Africa to "re-enter the world economy".⁵⁰

The United Kingdom-South Africa Trade Association, representing one hundred companies with business links with South Africa, has expressed its preference for the future:

"A non-racial democratic South Africa with a mixed but essentially free market economy enjoying normal business links with the world would be able to generate and sustain growth and bring to southern Africa the sort of economic miracle that is needed and that we have witnessed in South East Asia."⁵¹

According to the Southern African Association, also representing British companies with trading interests in Southern Africa, a part of British government policy should be "to persuade governments in the region to adopt more favourable investment climates".⁵² By May 1993, the ANC appeared to have succumbed to international pressures; ANC leader Nelson Mandela announced a future investment code that would guarantee no expropriation of property or investments and the ability to repatriate profits and dividends.⁵³

Britain and the leading Western nations support whoever can provide these conditions, whether that be an apartheid government or one led by the ANC. Had South African apartheid governments failed to provide a favourable economic climate, Britain would no doubt have denounced the evils of apartheid and aided the country's international isolation whilst expressing a commitment to support human rights and the freedom of the oppressed population.



Conflicts in the Third World have been to the benefit of Western states which have used them to justify intervention and sales of military equipment. Western states have in many cases provided arms to regimes for defence against external threats which are often used for internal repression as well. Arms sales tend to legitimize governments, both internationally and domestically, and reinforce the position of the military within society, thus narrowing the options of those opposing repression. Arms sales also help to play a crucial role in solidifying the relationship between Northern and Southern elites.

Partners in Crime

US leaders stated during and after the Second World War that their foreign policy priorities were centred on the creation of an "open door" in international trade and investment, whereby all states would be granted "equal access" to the world's economic resources and raw materials, unfettered by trade barriers or onerous restrictions which would deter investment and economic development generally.

The consistently-repeated goal was the establishment of an international economic order that would not "hamper the natural and normal flow of economic and commercial activity throughout the world".

Despite the rhetoric about "equal access", it was always clear that US business interests would be the prime beneficiaries of "free trade" and an "open door". Since the US had emerged from the Second World War as the world's most powerful nation, it alone was in a position to construct and, to a large extent, impose such an order.

US foreign policy goals were outlined by the US State Department's Policy Planning Staff in a top-secret report in February 1948. The report noted that the US has "about 50 per cent of the world's wealth but only 6.3 per cent of its population . . . In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment." It continued:

"Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so . . . our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction."

As part of this reasoning, the report observed:

"We should cease to talk about vague and — for the Far East — unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts."

Similar notions were contained in a secret 1954 report to President

Eisenhower which stated that:

"hitherto accepted norms of human conduct do not apply . . . To survive, long-standing American concepts of 'fair play' must be reconsidered. We must . . . learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us."

Britain accepted the new, US-led order and opted for the role the US intended it to play — "junior partner in an orbit of power predominantly under American aegis".

Doublespeak

"Equal access" to the world's economic resources meant access for the powerful states; other states using their own resources for genuine national development was a clear threat to the new economic order. The United States noted in 1947:

"It is important to maintain in friendly hands areas which contain or protect sources of metals, oil and other national resources, which contain strategic objectives, or areas strategically located, which contain a substantial industrial potential, which possess manpower and organized military forces in important quantities."

Of chief importance were the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The essential requirement for the furtherance of these interests was "stability" in the regions concerned — in practice, state power residing in the hands of political elements favourable to the West and acquiescing in effective Western control over the country's resources.

The US State Department noted in 1950 that "North Africa enjoys stability, even though such stability is obtained largely through repression". However, "if the Arab nationalist leaders were to attain power, it would inevitably create a situation of instability in this area".

"Instability" — the wrong elements in power — may lead to unacceptable nationalist development. A similar dualism is often applied to governments in the Middle East: those on favourable terms with the West are "moderate", while those who threaten Western hegemony and the Western right to control their resources are "extremists".

"Security" can be understood in the

same sense. Middle Eastern "security", for example, describes oil resources under the West's control or that of its friends.

As for "democracy", the State Department in 1948 called for the establishment of "our conception of a democratic state" in Vietnam while at the same time noting that "we have not urged the French to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh, even though he probably is now supported by a considerable majority of the Vietnamese people". US "democracy" thus ruled out support for the country's most popular leader.

The "Soviet Threat"

Although the foremost priority in US foreign policy was maintaining trading and business interests, policy was invariably explained by reference to the "Soviet threat" which needed to be contained.

Yet government documents are replete with examples indicating that communism was not a major threat in the Middle East, for instance. Rather control over Middle Eastern oil resources was jeopardized by the possibility that "the rising nationalism of the peoples of the Middle East should harden in a mould of hostility to the West".

In Africa, the State Department noted in 1950 a "growing spirit of nationalism on the part of the natives, which should not . . . be confused with communism". In South Asia, it commented that "communism does not immediately threaten the governments," while in the Far East, the head of the US Policy Planning Staff stated that "the problem is not one primarily of Russians but of the basic relations of Americans with Asiatics".

But since nationalism and communism pose similar threats to Western economic interests, they could often be presented as the same thing which was particularly convenient for public relations purposes. If nationalist development could simply be presented as "communist", it could more easily be ascribed to the machinations of the Soviet Union, providing Western leaders with a ready-made "cover" for their interventions.

Destroying Development in Nicaragua

In ordering the affairs of key nations and regions since the end of the Second World War, mutual British and US support has been a consistent foreign policy feature — Britain's role generally being to act as the world's most significant supporter of US aggression abroad. The case of Nicaragua is illustrative.

The 1979 Nicaraguan revolution overthrew the Somoza family dictatorship which had ruled the country since 1936 with constant US backing. Some 50,000 people died during the revolution, which was supported by practically all sections of Nicaraguan society except Somoza's immediate entourage, the army and the National Guard.



Sean Sprague/Panos Pictures

Students at La Inmaculada technical institute in the Nicaraguan capital, Managua. The commitment of the Sandinista government to education inspired UNESCO to award Nicaragua the 1980 Literacy Prize. Yet Britain, following the US lead, consistently sought to undermine the government.

The Somoza legacy was grim: the UN estimated that over 60 per cent of the population lived in poverty, two-thirds of them without sufficient income to cover their most basic needs and one-third enduring "extreme poverty". The richest five per cent of the population accounted for almost one-third of national income whilst the poorest half received only 15 per cent. Export crops, the profits from which went to large landowners and US agribusiness interests, took up 90 per cent of agricultural credit and 22 times more arable land than that used to grow staple food crops.⁵⁴

The central aim of the new revolutionary government, led by the Sandinistas, was to alleviate the appalling social conditions endured by the majority of the people. A 1985 Oxfam report noted that:

"The cornerstone of the new development strategy... was to give priority to meeting the basic needs of the poor majority. This was to be achieved by involving people in implementing change at a local level, through their neighbourhood groups, peasant associations and other organizations; at a central level, representatives of these organizations were to cooperate closely with the government ministries."⁵⁵

A nationwide campaign led to a fall in illiteracy rates from 53 per cent to 13 per cent of the people. By 1984 there were 127 per

cent more primary schools and the resources allocated to education had increased fivefold compared with 1978-79. Within three years of the revolution, around 70 per cent of the population had access to health care, compared to just over one quarter before it. Former Mexican ambassador to Nicaragua and novelist, Carlos Fuentes, writing in 1983, noted that the Sandinista government's spending on literacy and health care extended "to more Nicaraguans in three years than in the past three centuries".⁵⁶ Peasant farmers were the main beneficiaries of the land reform programme as thousands of families received titles to land.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, the US under President Jimmy Carter provided a safe haven for exiled members of the Somozan National Guard, permitted military training camps to be established in the

US, and authorized covert funding to anti-Sandinista political, press and labour organizations. When Ronald Reagan became US president in January 1981, he immediately froze US aid to Nicaragua and cancelled a proposed sale of wheat. Nicaragua's economic isolation was stepped up: international loans were blocked, pressure put on allied governments to withhold aid and an economic embargo imposed. In March 1981, an expanded programme of CIA activity inside Nicaragua was approved, including assistance to political opponents of the Sandinistas. In November 1981, the CIA was allocated \$20 million to build a 500-man force to conduct political and paramilitary operations against Nicaragua which would complement the 1,000 former Somozan supporters already being trained by the Argentine military, the costs of which were met by the US.⁵⁸

The rebel forces — the Contras — were in effect a terrorist organization; they conducted numerous atrocities against civilians, which were well-documented by human rights organizations.⁵⁹ Americas Watch noted in 1984 that the Contras were "engaged repeatedly in kidnappings, torture and murder of unarmed civilians, mostly in villages and farm cooperatives".⁶⁰ The killing of civilians, including children, and the severing of limbs and other mutilations were regular occurrences that served to sow fear among the peasant supporters of the Sandinistas. In 1982-84 alone, over 7,000 civilians were killed by the Contras; the "prime targets", according to Oxfam, were "individual leaders and community organizers who have worked hardest to improve the lives of the poor".⁶¹

Former CIA director Stansfield Turner stated in 1985: "I believe it is irrefutable that a number of the Contras' actions have to be characterized as... state-supported terrorism". Former Contra spokesman Edgar Chamorro stated in an affidavit to the World Court that the Contras were advised by the CIA to "kill, kidnap, rob and torture".⁶²

A leaked National Security Council paper of July 1983 indicates that the US Defense Department was aware how the Contras were viewed within Nicaragua: "support for democratic resistance [the Contras] within Nicaragua does not exist".⁶³

But Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher pledged British support in January 1984 for "the United States' aim to promote peaceful change, democracy and economic development" in Central America,⁶⁴ an area "threatened with a communist takeover".⁶⁵ The Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office noted in 1985, three years after Contra operations in Nicaragua had begun, that "the American government have stated time and again that they are seeking a solution by peaceful means to the problems of Central America".⁶⁶

British political support for US objectives was coupled with specific actions in line with US priorities. Britain was the only European government not to send observers to the 1984 elections in Nicaragua which were won by the Sandinistas. Yet it maintained that "free and fair elections could not be regarded as having taken place". Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe assured the House of Commons that whereas "a real transfer of power" had taken place in the 1982 El Salvador elections — which were conducted in the midst of massacres and the repression of civil liberties and in which only the parties of the right and centre-right participated — "that was not the position in Nicaragua."⁶⁷ In other words, the wrong side won.

Britain and the United States were the only major aid donors that gave more aid to Nicaragua in the last seven years of the Somoza dictatorship than in the first seven years of Sandinista rule, even though Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, according to a British government minister, had "a good record in the spending of development aid". According to the British Chargé d'Affaires in Managua, Nicaragua had a "very impressive record on social development", one which was "amazing" in comparison with El Salvador and Honduras, the latter receiving 100 times more British aid than Nicaragua.⁶⁸

A Foreign Office document leaked in 1985 stated that, with regard to Britain's policy of helping to block loans to Nicaragua, "we shall need to stick to our present line of claiming that our opposition is based on technical [rather than political] grounds." Another Foreign Office official appended to this document a note: "If we can find them!"⁶⁹ Britain abstained on a United Nations vote condemning the US for mining Nicaraguan ports. Throughout the US war, Britain preferred to maintain what Thatcher called "the fundamental alliance between Great Britain and the United States".⁷⁰

The Ongoing War

In the 1990s, Third World people continue to be disciplined by political repression and terror into accepting economic policies which promote Western business interests. But while military intervention is by no means obsolete — witness the Gulf War against Iraq — the level of structural control over the international economy achieved by the Northern powers might be regarded as the chief prize of "winning" the Cold War.

Lawrence Summers, US Treasury Under-Secretary for International Affairs, notes that the regional development banks in the Third World are "as important to the new world order as the regional security organizations were to the old one".⁷¹ Contemporary IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies and international debt and trade regimes are the contemporary means of warfare. Indeed, the economic "development" programmes now being forced upon most countries of the Third World, primarily through structural adjustment programmes, require the pursuit of virtually-identical policies as those that followed Western, including British, military interventions in

the earlier period. These include a reduction in the role of the state in the economy, and severe cutbacks in government spending on the basic needs of the population, in a context where foreign investment is encouraged and the economy is organized to benefit domestic elites and transnational corporations. Britain has an influential role in the IMF and the World Bank, being the Bank's fifth-largest shareholder and one of only five countries entitled to appoint its own Executive Director.

Development critic Susan George comments that "we must be honest and recognize that [the Western powers'] goal is not, and never was, to feed today's undernourished or starving millions, but to perpetuate poverty and dependence for altogether 'valid' political and economic reasons".⁷² So-called development, she continues, "has been the password for imposing a new kind of dependency, for enriching the already rich world and for shaping other societies to meet its commercial and political needs".⁷³

This view fits squarely with the evidence accumulated in government documents as to the motivation behind, and the effects of, British foreign policy in the Third World since 1945. Indeed, to state that in the light of the mass poverty that still exists in the Third World, Western "development" strategies there have "failed" misses the point: they have been singularly successful. A 1992 UN report, for example, notes that the gap between rich and poor has doubled in the last 30 years with the world's richest fifth receiving 150 times the income of the poorest fifth. Since 1960, the countries where the richest 20 per cent of the world's people live have increased their share of gross world product from 70 per cent to 83 per cent, making those states 60 times better off than those where the poorest 20 per cent live.⁷⁴

Since the early 1980s, the international debt regime has enabled a vast quantity of resources to be transferred from poor to rich to take place. Between 1982 and 1990, for example, resource flows from OECD countries to the Third World amounted to \$927 billion, while Third World countries paid \$1,345 in debt service alone to the creditor countries: \$418 billion in the Northern countries' favour. During this "crisis" Western banks received high rates of return on their loans, averaging 13.6 per cent from 1982 to 1989.⁷⁵ A former executive director at the World Bank commented that "not since the conquistadores plundered Latin America has the world experienced a [financial] flow in the direction we see today".⁷⁶

Democracy at Home

As long as foreign (and domestic) policy is dictated by the requirements of business corporations and small ruling elites within the societies of the North, human needs will continue to be sacrificed to narrowly-defined "economic interests". Post-war British foreign policy provides ample evidence for this view.

It also raises questions closely related to democracy at home: it is not only Third World societies which are becoming increasingly "transnationalized" and their sovereign power progressively reduced. A similar process is evident in the industrial countries, where decisions about investment, job creation and macro-economic policy are increasingly subjected to international economic forces that lack any democratic accountability. This process has grave consequences not only for those on the receiving end of Western policies abroad but also for those concerned with creating a better society at home.

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Bread and Freedom

Agriculture in Poland

by

Janusz Nagiecki

In 1993, a coalition of ex-Communists won the parliamentary elections in Poland, raising the question of a possible Communist return. But little practical difference has emerged between the economic policies of the "New Left", as the ex-Communists are referred to in the Polish press, and those of the "Right". Most obviously, the coalition is continuing with economic reforms begun in 1989 aimed at opening up Poland to the free market. In agriculture, Poland is under pressure from Western financial interests to transform the countryside into large, specialized farms. Polish peasants managed to resist collectivization in the Communist era, but agribusiness interests now threaten to wrest their land from them.

Most foreigners are aware only of industrial Poland: belching smokestacks, the coal-darkened faces of striking Solidarity miners, and mammoth industrial complexes. These are the symbols of a devastated Eastern Europe which have barely changed in the past few years despite Western investments and the adoption of free market "reforms".¹

Nevertheless, bleak industrialization is only part of the Polish reality. In her book, *Exit Into History*, Eva Hoffman looks beyond the "rickety socialist constructions" of the urban foreground to describe rural Poland as "an older Europe that never disappeared and that is still surprisingly alive".² Having evaded the disruptions of monoculture and the economics of agribusiness, hills and valleys, particularly in the south of the country, are covered in a fine quilt of rectangularly-patched fields and occupied by people tending their crops.

The Polish countryside is a land of small peasant cultivators, where mixed arable and livestock family farms are common and specialization is rare. Labour is the dominant input in Polish agriculture; chemical inputs are minimal. Pesticide use is less than 0.5 kilogrammes per hectare nationwide³ — a fraction of that used in Western Europe and the United States — while animal manures are still the main source of fertilizer.

What principally distinguishes Polish farming, however, from farming in most other East European countries, and West

European ones too, is the size of its farms: the national average is only six hectares, and approximately 90 per cent of farms are under 15 hectares. There are some two million farms in Poland, and a quarter of the population is employed in farm work.

Resisting Collectivization

At the turn of the century, Poland was a country of large estates and small peasant holdings. After the First World War, newly-elected Prime Minister Wincenty Witos, leader of a popular peasant party, continued land reform measures begun in the nineteenth century and transferred nearly two million hectares into peasant ownership.⁴

Following the Stalinist programmes in Russia in the late 1940s, the various Communist parties of Eastern Europe began to appropriate land by force and consolidate it into large, collective, state farms. "Scientific management" was to be introduced to the countryside through the collectives, which would rationalize farm practices and expand economies-of-scale so as to free up labour for industrial expansion. As sociologist Boguslaw Galeski indicates, "agriculture was thought of in the same way as industry: gigantic state farms directed by bureaucracy and subordinated to central steering".⁵

In Poland, such collectivization was strongly resisted by the peasantry. Their earnestness was due, in part, to a profound attachment to the land which has

been celebrated and immortalized by many writers and historians. In a 1918 classic work, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki claim that:

"there is hardly another economic distinction so profoundly rooted in Polish consciousness as that between independent work on the person's own property and hired work."⁶

These authors predicted that the Polish peasantry would resist any attempt at land communism.⁷ By 1956, this forecast was proving correct: only 10 per cent of the country's agricultural land had been incorporated into collectives, a mere ten thousand farms.⁸

Much to the surprise of Communist planners, the programme of enforced collectivization led to an immediate drop in farm productivity and widespread food shortages. These were exacerbated by active rebellion such as burning grain and destroying crops, which all ignited the 1956 national protests against Stalinist oppression. Among the popular slogans of the time was the demand for "Bread and Freedom".⁹

The Soviet Union, meanwhile, was contending with its own internal problems. Stalin had died in 1953 and his successor, Khrushchev, was calling for a revision of Stalinist policies, though not openly. Poland's leaders managed to convince the Kremlin of the "many roads to socialism" and of Poland's need to develop a "national brand of communism" consistent with its traditions.¹⁰ In response,

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the Kremlin consented to the end of forced collectivization in Poland.

Almost immediately, some 8,000 of the 10,000 collectives spontaneously dissolved.¹¹ Those that remained were primarily in areas where peasant communities were not well-established, such as in the western territories annexed from Germany.

“Repressive Tolerance”

But the defeat of collectivization did not mark the end of oppressive Communist Party policies. The Polish government continued to discriminate against peasant cultivators by granting subsidies and investments to state farms only. Although peasants no longer had to deliver produce to the state, they were obliged to buy a certain amount of fertilizer, irrespective of their needs, a practice which farmers regarded not as a form of subsidy but of taxation. They were also required to exchange grain for “first quality seed” which was often of a poorer quality than that which farmers produced themselves.

Despite a lack of support, peasant farmers were more efficient and productive than subsidized state farms which relied on chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and mechanization.¹² Still today, small farmers produce approximately 78 per cent of the corn produced in Poland, 91 per cent of potatoes, 85 per cent of milk, 87 per cent of eggs, 70 per cent of beef and 70 per cent of pork.¹³

The ability of Polish peasants to meet domestic food needs thus gave rise to a policy of “repressive tolerance”.¹⁴ Indeed, the domination of the countryside by Polish peasant farmers is considered by some to have crippled Communism.¹⁵ Their independence from “the system” frustrated the government’s ability to manage the economy in its entirety.

Try, Try Again

Polish agriculture continues to be a vexing issue, despite the collapse of the Communist Party in Poland in 1989. The



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prevalence of small farms is frequently spoken of disparagingly by officials and in the press. Criticisms often echo Communist arguments for a “rationalized” agriculture, demanding fewer hands in the field. But today they are couched in free market rhetoric and backed by Western agribusiness and financial interests. Journalist Janusz Majcherek reports that:

“after a period of revelling in the fact that Poland, as the only country in the former Communist bloc, had succeeded in preserving private land property, lately we have been told with increasing frequency that the Polish agrarian pattern, petrified as it has been for decades, produced backwardness which could handicap our integration with European Union economies whose agricultural sectors are more modern and highly developed.”¹⁶

The criticism that domestic food needs are not being met is never levelled; instead, agriculture’s productivity in relation to labour is considered too low — seven per cent of Polish GDP is accounted for by agriculture while some 26 per cent of the

population work on the land. Critics also claim that, despite subsidized loans for the purchase of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, farmers refuse to borrow and are thus “unsophisticated” and “uncompetitive”.¹⁷

The renewed effort to “modernize” and rationalize the countryside aims to displace the peasantry with large, specialized, single-crop farms geared towards exports. But unlike earlier attempts at expropriation, brute coercion will not be employed. Instead, less overt economic manipulation will be used to create greater liabilities and risks for farmers.

A Means to the Means of Production

Consolidating farm holdings into large farms is considered a necessary prerequisite to a “modern” transformation of Polish agriculture. Nevertheless, trying to answer the awkward question “What is the optimal size of a Polish farm?” ignores the fact that lives and families are intertwined with the land. Too often, the an-

swers are proffered with a hubris reminiscent of Communist centralization. One Polish newspaper recently reported that profitable farm size begins at 15 to 20 hectares, thereby allowing for 700,000 farms in Poland,¹⁸ a claim based on narrow economic assumptions only.

In its *Agricultural Strategy for Poland*, the World Bank recommends a tax to bring about a growth in farm size:

“Agricultural land and tax policy must be directed to action which leads to amalgamation of holdings, consolidation of plots, effective custom operation and other measures which provide economies of scale in farming”.¹⁹

The Bank recognizes that such growth is not likely to occur “naturally.” Consequently, the tax policy would overcome resistance to the transfer and disposal of land by creating new cash liabilities.

“Realizing the value of land through sales is only attractive if the opportunity value significantly exceeds the emotional risks involved in selling and leasing. If however, unused or unprofitable land is a cash liability,

Europe's Ecological Heartland

Professor Urszula Soltysiak of Warsaw Agricultural University claims that "there is probably no other country in Europe that can today equal Poland in quickly and efficiently reaching an ecological agriculture". Low use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides together with a strong small-scale and labour-intensive agricultural tradition are among the key characteristics that give Poland its rare ecological advantage.

Together with Professor Mieczyslaw Gorny, Soltysiak founded "Ekoland" in 1989, an organization that promotes the use of ecological farming methods in Poland and certifies farms meeting international ecological farming standards.

For Professor Gorny, a respected soil scientist and long-time advocate of ecological farming methods, Ekoland is the realization of long years of struggle. During the Communist period, he was forbidden to teach seminars on ecological techniques (even though he still did in remote places) and was accused of trying to retard Polish agriculture.

To date, only 225 Polish farms have reached full Ekoland certification and approximately 300 are undergoing pre-certification trials. Gorny admits that Polish farmers are reluctant to submit to any authority that might limit their freedom, even one that seeks only to approve their existing farming methods.

In the meantime, he speculates about how ecologically-produced farm products from Poland should be marketed. He is amused at the suggestions of a Polish-US organization that produce could be exported to the US by ship for an emigre market, preferring instead that foreign consumers come to the source.

Marian and Wanda Wegrzyn, together with their young son and daughter, run a five-hectare ecological farm and tourist home in the tiny village of Popowice in southeast Poland.

The farm produces a mixture of grains, vegetables, poultry and various milk products, including kefir and cheeses, which meet the family's food needs and supply the local market. The farm has operated under Ekoland certification for three years.

Marian says he learnt to appreciate the value of ecological farming while serving as manager on a 2,000-hectare state farm near the town of Opole in eastern Poland. He began work at the collective in 1971 in return for the state paying for his studies at the Agriculture Academy. He describes his initial experiences on the collective as "shocking" because the farm's intensive agriculture was unlike either the methods he had learnt at the Academy or his experience at home in Popowice. Rather than tending five cows as he does now, Marian had to manage 500 of them. Controlling the spread of disease in the herd was a constant headache. He also complains of the difficulties of



Marian Wegrzyn and his home-built tractor

motivating farmworkers. Overall, he recalls his experience there as unhealthy both for people and livestock, as a life shackled under the control of the central authorities.

After seven years, Marian left the collective to return to the family farm in Popowice.

Today, on the terraced hillsides of the Wegrzyn farm, a blend of nitrogen-fixing hay crops and manures replenish the soil's nutrients and maintain its structure.

Marian uses a horse to

till the slopes of the farm, which he claims is easier than a tractor to manoeuvre around the corners of the small fields and does not compact the soil.

The Wegrzyns speak of the advantages of ecological farming in terms of independence, efficiency and health. Because the farm produces most of what it requires in terms of fertilizer and seed, input costs are low and obviate the need for an annual credit. Costs are also minimized by low waste. Not only are manures from livestock ploughed back into the fields, but the crops produced are harder and less prone to spoilage — only one to three per cent of the farm's potato crop is lost annually. Marian compares the figure to the 30 per cent losses he witnessed on the collective farm.

Although they rely mainly on a horse and simple implements, the Wegrzyns do not reject mechanization outright. "The problem," Marian says, "is that most machinery is too expensive for Polish farmers." In the future, they would like to obtain a thresher and hay dryer. Currently, threshing is done by hand and hay dried in stacks. But they will probably build these implements rather than buy them.

Building one's own farm implements is almost routine in Poland, with tractors being one of the most common ingenious contraptions put together in the countryside from salvaged parts. Often built from the remains of military vehicles — Marian's tractor includes the axle of an old Russian truck — the machines are the humble equivalents of ploughshares being fashioned from swords.

Most Poles who buy rather than make their farm implements do so using cash rather than credit. With interest rates approaching 40 per cent, borrowing money in Poland is almost tantamount to suicide. Not long ago, a group of indebted farmers launched a hunger strike outside the Ministry of Agriculture and Food in Warsaw in protest at their impending foreclosures. They sought "an immediate debt restructuring, guaranteed credits for modernization, and a halt to debt-execution procedures". As a result, the Farm Restructuring and Modernization Agency and representatives of the protestors signed an agreement to provide recovery loans as a temporary relief measure. Steep interest rates may be a barrier to farm capitalization, but they are also preventing the wanton industrialization of

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Grey Fields, Green Future?

Agriculture was always a key sector in the planned economies of the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Even in the highly-industrialized German Democratic Republic, about 9 per cent of people were engaged in farming, while in Romania this figure was 22 per cent. By comparison, only 2.5 per cent of people in the US work in agriculture.

Unlike in Poland, agriculture in all other Communist countries (except Yugoslavia) was reorganized into Soviet-style "industrial farms": private ownership of land was abolished, land holdings were collectivized into large-scale production units, the state controlled production and prices, and high inputs of agrochemicals were the norm. In Bulgaria, almost 99 per cent of the farmland was collectivized into huge agro-industrial complexes averaging up to 24,000 hectares.

Following the political changes of the late 1980s, many countries have moved to privatize formerly collectivized land or to return land to its former owners. In East Germany, where 1.8 million hectares of large estates had been distributed by the Communists to some 6,300 families in 100 hectare plots, the former landowners were granted the right to buy back the land at subsidized prices. Some 1.4 million hectares were claimed by Germans living in the West. Overnight, many farmers in the East were rendered landless or reduced to being seasonal workers.

In Bulgaria, where there has been a widescale return of farmland to its original owners (often as household plots of

less than one hectare), problems have arisen in determining who should manage multiple-owned crops such as apples and vines. Many orchards and vineyards have fallen derelict as a result.

Other countries have eschewed outright privatization of landholdings. In Russia, for example, where agriculture was extensively (and violently) collectivized during the 1920s and 1930s, many collective farms have voted against full privatization, opting instead for the farms to be given the status of "companies" in which the farmers are the shareholders.

In many former Communist countries, there is a growing interest in organic or ecological agriculture. Individual farmers have been quick to exploit the potential export market for organic produce in Western Europe. Governments, too, are backing organic schemes in several countries. In the Czech Republic, the Baltic States and the Russian Federation, organic farming is being promoted within a number of "nature conservation" and "environmental protection" zones, such as the Karst region of northern Lithuania. Most recently, in 1995, the Danube Regional Environment Programme, funded by the EU, established three organic demonstration centres in the countries of the Danube basin — Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary — to investigate the effectiveness of organic farming in addressing agricultural pollution from pesticide and fertilizer run-off into the River Danube and the Black Sea.

Mark Redman

then farmers will take steps to reduce that liability. A land tax would apply just such a pressure".²⁰

In other words, creating a tax liability will provide the necessary shove to push stubborn farmers with small holdings into the pit of bankruptcy, clearing the way for structural changes in Polish agriculture.

Polish farm taxes currently amount to less than \$19 per hectare per year. However, the Polish government is launching several massive road and dam projects which will create pressure for taxation (see Box, p.17). Nevertheless, it is doubtful that substantial and sudden increases would be tolerated by the peasantry, whose political strength has been well demonstrated.²¹

Cheap Labour

So long as Poland follows the road of market liberalization, the pressures to cut the numbers of Poland's farmers are immense. To join the European Union, as successive Polish governments of both left and right have desired, Poland will need to conform to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), an elaborate system of subsidies and quotas governing farm production, nominally drawn up to

support the EEC's peasantry. The European Union's Commissioner for Agriculture, Franz Fischler, acknowledged in April 1995 that meeting Western norms may present a challenge for Poland.

Agricultural "development" in compliance with the current CAP would displace the Polish peasantry. As many as 1.5 million farmers may be removed from the fields, whom the government would be hard pressed to compensate in the face of the country's already burgeoning unemployment rolls and austere budget.

Indeed, it is precisely Poland's "excess" rural population — when viewed as a ready source of cheap labour — that makes Poland such an attractive investment opportunity for many western commentators. Dirk Damrau of merchant bankers Solomon Brothers, for example, describes Poland as Central Europe's best economic contender:

"Its big [agricultural] labour force — accounting for 28 per cent of all employment, compared with the Czech Republic's 6 per cent — should help fuel a bigger boom . . . Indeed, the demographic challenge for employing a huge rural population could provide fuel for a takeoff similar to the post-War recoveries of France and Italy."²²

Farmers are unlikely to sell up, however, unless secure, well-paid jobs are available off the farm.²³ Yet the prospect of secure jobs in an era of corporate downsizing is bleak. The proliferation of new service industries in Poland, such as roadside fast-food restaurants, may promise income for some, but are unlikely to leave Poland's proud and independent peasantry better off.

Borrow Today, Lose Tomorrow

Among the foreign interests seeking to industrialize Polish agriculture is the US Agribusiness Council, a consortium of US companies, which established a similar organization in Poland in early 1995. According to the chair of the US organization, Nicholas E. Hollis, the Polish counterpart will make more convenient credit available and will help organize "professional training".²⁴ It is unlikely, however, that ecologically-minded farmers with small holdings will be given serious consideration for such credit and training. Parallel developments in Poland indicate the kind of "training" that will be provided; Ciba-Geigy's newly-constructed pesticide warehouse in Warsaw has a

capacity to distribute four to eight thousand tonnes of pesticides each year.

A 1989 donation of \$60 million worth of "crop protection materials", made available through the European Union's PHARE programme (Poland-Hungary Assistance for the Reconstruction of the Economy), could be better characterized as an act of disposal. *Tygodnik Rolnikow*, the journal of Rural Solidarity, the farmers' trade union founded in 1981, reported that the donated pesticides had been banned in either the United States or Europe and included known carcinogens such as mancozeb.²⁵ Soil scientist professor Mieczyslaw Gorny complains that such pesticides continue to enter the country and that regulatory mechanisms to control them are virtually non-existent.

Many small Polish farmers who now use pesticides and synthetic fertilizers often do not admit to using them, fearing the stigma that could attach to their crops. It is common to hear shoppers at markets ask sellers whether their produce was grown without chemicals.²⁶

Even farmers using chemical inputs avoid consuming the produce. Some divide their plots into those where traditional means are used and those where synthetic inputs are applied. As one investigator reported: "The first was for your own use, while the products from the second were sold to the city dwellers".²⁷

Meanwhile, Alima-Gerber SA, is giving "special loans" to Polish farmers to plant new orchards and grow "sound vegetables".²⁸ Similarly, Cargill Industries recently invested \$7 million in building a second feed-mixing plant in the north-western town of Siedlce which is expected to produce 100,000 tonnes of feed each year. The US giant is planning to build two more plants in Poland.²⁹ The US investment group, White Eagle Industries, has also announced that it will invest \$150 million in Polish agriculture, food processing and wood industries.³⁰

Donations of pesticides and other such "assistance" seem designed to get Polish farmers hooked on Western inputs. As a representative of a large Western corporation active in Eastern Europe admitted:

"By helping them develop their economy, we're helping them move toward the time when they can purchase commodities and products, not just depend on commodities donated by the US and other countries. We're developing international markets for the future by creating a demand for our products and services".³¹

Pave the Fields, Dam the Rivers

During the Communist era, several highly-damaging, large-scale industrial projects were built in Poland. The Communist legacy includes the Lenin Steel Works (renamed the Tadeusz Sendzimir Steel Works) near Krakow, which is not only a notorious polluter, but was also built on top of some of the best farmland in Poland.

History looks set to repeat itself in the form of two new large-scale infrastructure projects: a 2,600 kilometre superhighway network and a series of cascade dams on the Vistula River, Poland's main river artery. Both projects have long been on the drawing board, but were never realized because of their high costs and other priorities. Today, with Western finance, the projects may soon become a reality.

The demand for an improved road network in Poland has increased in recent years, owing in large part to the growing trade between East and West. With only 300 kilometres of existing highway, Poland has a reputation of being a giant speed bump for trucks travelling along the major transport axes of Europe.

With preliminary costs already hovering above \$10 billion, the Polish Ministry of Transport predicts an economic boom and promises 200,000 new jobs. Yet, as Pawel Rozynski, a reporter with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, indicates, "roads are constructed with modern equipment, not spades." Not only are new jobs doubtful, but the impacts on other sectors such as agriculture (through farm consolidation) and rail transport are likely to result in reduced employment.

Funds for the highway are expected to come from private investors. The European Investment Bank has agreed to lend Poland \$1.2 billion over three years to finance construction. Last year, Minister Boguslaw Liberadzki announced that "fifteen large US companies are interested in the construction and operation of motorways in Poland". More recently, the US trade development agency granted \$1 million to Poland for preliminary work on motorway development.

Between 10 and 20 Polish consortia are expected to bid for the highway construction. However, with little capital of their own, it is unlikely that banks will loan them the millions of dollars needed for construction. Western consortia are thus more likely to be awarded the contracts.

Although interest in construction is high, investors are demanding financial guarantees from the government. The Polish Ministry of Finance has agreed to guarantee up to 50 per cent of the project's value. The risk will thus be handed over to the average Pole, who, if the project fails, will be burdened with a massive debt.

Tollbooths built at regular intervals along the highways are expected to generate most of the income to pay back lenders. But generating sufficient revenue will require an enormous growth in traffic. To meet the interest payments alone on the loans, the number of vehicle miles traveled in Poland will have to triple.

Poland still relies to a large extent on railways and small, fuel-efficient vehicles. Local and regional improvements are needed rather than large arterial thoroughfares. As writer Alina Ploszaj indicates, "Every Polish enthusiast of motorization would prefer good, safe, roads in their own neighbourhood to good, safe roads intended for German and Russian transit".

The plan for a series of seven cascade dams on the Vistula River follows a similar logic to that of the highways. Revenues from the generation of hydroelectric power are expected to pay back the \$3 billion needed for the project. At the same time, the dams will ruin one of Poland's most prized natural resources.

The Vistula's 600-kilometre course, often bordered by lush marshy forests, is valued as a prime habitat for birds. Flow controls would irrevocably alter the ecology of the river and quickly destroy what is recognized as a vital European bird sanctuary. For Poland, it would also mean the ruin of a powerful cultural metaphor, as the free-flowing Vistula has long been a symbol of the country's hope for independence.

Liberty, Ecology and Security

Today, Western countries are captive to a costly and socially- and ecologically-damaging agro-industrial complex supported by a small but powerful agribusiness lobby. In Western Europe and the United States, farm sizes have steadily increased over time. The small independent farmer is now a rarity and the family farm often an "ideological veil for larger business layouts".³² Agriculture is, in the main, no longer a way of life but another sector in a global industrial economy.

As agribusiness interests continue their search for new markets, the global displacement of small cultivators spreads, as do problems which emerge when the small farmer is usurped. Professor Robert Paarlberg claims that soil depletion, erosion, inadequate waste containment,

excessive reliance on pesticides and other environmentally-destructive practices are not so much the outcome of "market failures" but of unequal power relations and a lack of accountability. Paarlberg recommends that "ordinary peasant farmers need to gain control over the resource base on which they and their children depend".³³

Many of Poland's farmers still have such control, but may well lose it to agribusiness interests. Their displacement by industrial agriculture would illustrate that slow and insidious manipulation of structural factors is a more effective means of control than totalitarian coercion. It would demonstrate that the political contests between left and right are merely a ritual drama.³⁴ It would prove economist John Kenneth Galbraith right when he said, "the modern large corporation and

the modern apparatus of socialist planning are variant accommodations to the same need".³⁵

The World Bank characterizes Polish peasant farm management as "based principally on a logic of survival and not on a logic of development".³⁶ But from the peasants' perspective, if it is not based on survival, they stand to lose all. One observer explained it thus:

"The Polish peasant was able to survive through numerous hardships thanks to his faith and the love of the land cultivated by his ancestors. He will survive today if he isn't tempted by the promises of quick and easy profits made possible through large investments, large costs, using chemicals, pseudo-modern farming machinery and production specialization. Ecological farming makes it possible for farmers to defend their profession".³⁷

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The Use of an Image

America's Egypt and the Development Industry

by

Timothy Mitchell

Studies of Egypt's agricultural development invariably cite land shortage and overpopulation as major stumbling blocks. But while the image of more than 50 million Egyptians crowded into the Nile Valley has great visual power, Egypt's current inability to feed itself results not from the constraints of geography and nature but from political and social inequalities. Many of these are rooted in the policies of foreign aid agencies which use the image in an attempt to conceal their active role in Egyptian politics.



Workers weeding berseem, a fodder crop, in the Nile Valley.

Open almost any study of Egypt produced by a US or international development agency and it will probably start with the same simple description of the narrow fertile valley of the river Nile which is surrounded by desert and crowded with rapidly-multiplying millions of inhabitants. A 1980 World Bank report on Egypt provides a typical example:

"Although the country contains about 386,000 square miles . . . only a narrow strip in the Nile Valley and its Delta is usable. This area of 15,000 square miles — less than 4 per cent of the land — is but an elongated oasis in the midst of desert. Without the Nile, which flows through Egypt for about a thousand miles without being joined by a single tributary, the country would be part of the Sahara. Crammed into the habitable area is 98 per cent of the population . . . The population has been growing rapidly and is estimated to have doubled since 1947."¹

The visual simplicity of this image combines with the arithmetical certainty of population figures, surface areas and growth rates to lay down the logic of the subsequent analysis: the obstacles to Egypt's economic development are those of geography and demography. These apparently "natural" boundaries shape the solutions that follow: improved management of resources, and transfer of technology to overcome natural limits.

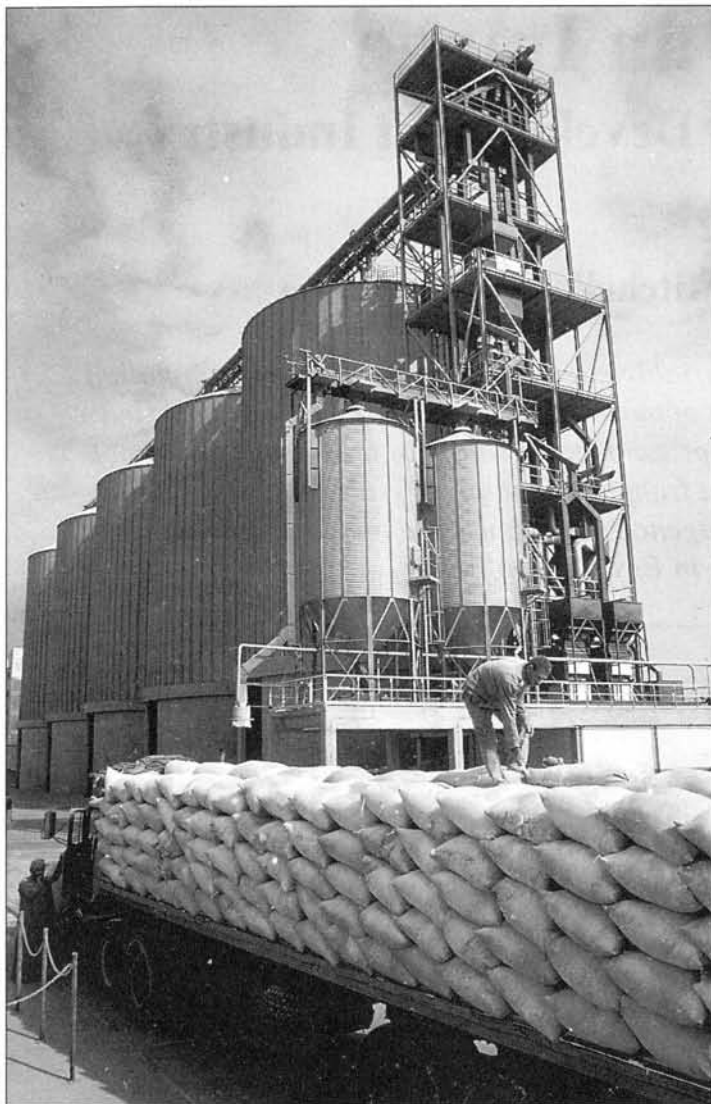
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Yet the apparent naturalness of this imagery is misleading. The assumptions and figures on which it is based can be examined and reinterpreted to reveal a very different picture, the limits of which are not those of geography and nature but of powerlessness and social inequality. The solutions that follow from this picture are not just technological and managerial, but also social and political.

Too Many for What?

The basic images used to describe Egypt are those of land shortage and overpopulation. It is seldom clear, though, what the prefix "over" refers to. Despite the visual power of an image of more than 50 million Egyptians crowded into the Nile Valley, there is no immediate evidence for the oft-made conclusion that Egypt is "overpopulated" in terms of its not being able to produce enough food for its people.

Certainly, Egypt has been a net importer of agricultural commodities since 1974.² But this does not automatically mean that Egypt's growth in population over the last few decades has outstripped the country's ability to feed itself.³ Between 1965 and 1980, according to World Bank tables, the population of Egypt grew at an annual rate of 2.2 per cent. During the same



A grain silo complex at Miniya. Although domestic production of grains has increased in recent decades, much of it goes towards feeding livestock. Imports make up the difference for human consumption.

period, agricultural production grew at the even faster rate of 2.7 per cent a year. During the 1980s, the population growth rate increased to 2.7 per cent a year, and agricultural growth continued to keep ahead.⁴ In 1991, food production per capita was 17 per cent higher than at the beginning of the previous decade.⁵ Why, then, has Egypt had to import ever increasing amounts of food?

Official statistics might suggest that it is because Egyptians consume relatively large amounts of food. Although Egypt is near the bottom of the World Bank's list of middle-income countries, the country's daily calorie supply per capita is higher than all except four other middle-income countries — and indeed higher than a majority of the world's high-income countries.⁶ The daily protein supply per capita also far exceeds that of most middle-income countries and rivals that of many high-income countries.⁷

Yet Egyptians suffer from high levels of malnutrition. A 1979 study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cairo University found that in Lower Egypt, 83 per cent of children up to five-years-old were malnourished; 27 per cent of these were severely malnourished. Another study in Cairo found anaemia (probably caused by the interaction of malnutrition and infection) in 80 per cent of children under two-years-old and in 90 per cent of pregnant women.⁸ The figures for

calorie and protein supply clearly do not reflect the actual calorie and protein intake of many Egyptians.

What the calorie and protein supply figures do reflect, however, are high levels of consumption among better-off people, and a shift in their consumption towards more expensive foods, especially meat, and a significant diversion of food supplies from humans to animals.

A 1974-5 consumer budget survey showed that the richest 27 per cent of the urban population consumed almost four times as much meat, poultry and eggs per year as the poorest 27 per cent.⁹ For a brief period between the late 1970s and mid-1980s, when the oil boom in the Gulf States provided millions of Egyptians with work abroad, most people's incomes increased. This income growth, together with massive US and Egyptian government subsidies, encouraged a broader switch from eating legumes and maize (corn) to diets of wheat and meat products. From 1970 to 1980, while crop production grew in real terms (taking inflation into account) by 17 per cent, livestock production grew almost twice as much, by 32 per cent.¹⁰ In the following seven years, crop production increased by 10 per cent, while livestock production rose by almost 50 per cent.¹¹ To produce one kilogramme of red meat requires 10 kilogrammes of cereals.¹² Feeding these animals has required an enormous and costly diversion of staple food supplies from humans to animals. Protein in the form of animal products costs Egyptians in real terms (discounting subsidies) about 10 times the price of eating it in the form of beans and lentils.¹³

Fodder for Peace

This switch to meat consumption required a dramatic increase in food imports, particularly of grains. From 1974 onwards, Egypt began to import enormous and ever-increasing quantities of grain, becoming the world's third largest importer after Japan and China.¹⁴

Egypt did not import animal feed, however, but diverted domestic grain production from human to animal consumption; human consumption of maize (corn) and other coarse grains (barley, sorghum) dropped from 53 per cent of domestic production in 1966 to 6 per cent in 1988.¹⁵ Supported by large US loans for Egypt to purchase US grain, the Egyptian government further encouraged this diversion by subsidizing the import of staples for human consumption, heavily taxing the domestic production of such staples, and subsidizing the production of meat, poultry and dairy products.¹⁶ Even the smallest farms have been forced to shift from self-provisioning to the production of animal products and to rely increasingly on subsidized imported flour for their staple diet.¹⁷

In terms of the commitment of land and labour, the priority is now towards meat, poultry and dairy products. Cotton, an annual crop, today occupies only about one million of Egypt's six million feddans (just over six million acres/2.5 million hectares). The other major year-round industrial crop, sugar cane, occupies a little over a quarter of a million feddans (some 100,000 hectares). Of the remaining four and three-quarter million feddans (two million hectares) of agricultural land, more than half is now used to grow animal fodder — principally Egyptian clover (berseem) in the winter and maize and sorghum in the summer and autumn.¹⁸ Egypt now grows more food for animals than for humans.

Human supplies of grain have been made up with imports,

largely of wheat for bread-making. To pay for these imports, the Egyptian government has borrowed money, contributing to the country's total external debt, which reached \$50 billion by the end of 1988, equivalent to 42.5 per cent of Egypt's GNP or five times the value of its exports of goods and services.¹⁹ Egypt began to default on its debt and required large loans to keep up interest payments on earlier loans. To meet this crisis, the US used the pretext of Egyptian support for the 1991 war against Iraq to write off Egypt's \$7 billion military debt and to reduce and reschedule its other debts. As a condition of this refinancing, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and USAID insist on a further shift towards producing export crops, away from staple foods, so as to generate more hard currency to pay off the debts.

That Egypt does not grow enough food to feed everyone in the country is thus not the result of too many people occupying too little land, but of the exercise of power by a certain section of the population, supported by the prevailing domestic and international regime, which has shifted the country's resources from staple foods to more expensive items of consumption.

A Question of Land

Similarly the contention that land shortages result from millions of overbreeding people crammed into a narrow strip of fertile land sidesteps the issue of access to and ownership of the land.

A 1976 USAID study discussing *The Economic Status of the Farmer* stated that:

"The average size of a holding is two feddans, 94 per cent of all owners have less than 5 feddans each, and only 0.2 per cent have at least 50 feddans each."²⁰

This picture of a countryside made up of millions of tiny parcels of land attempts to persuade us, once again, that if Egyptian farmers find it hard to feed themselves, it is because there are just too many of them for the space available. Once again, we should reexamine the figures.

Holdings of less than five feddans (a little over five acres) are not necessarily "small". With Egypt's fertile soils and year-round sunshine and irrigation water, the country is like a vast open-air greenhouse. High yields can be obtained from two or three crops a year, a 5-feddan holding producing between 10 and 15 feddans of crops each year.

In fact, five feddans is about the maximum area a family of five people can cultivate on its own, working full-time, without having to hire labour.²¹ The minimum farm size required for such a family to feed itself, assuming an annual consumption of 250 kilogrammes of grains (or equivalent) per year and state taxation of 30 per cent of production, was estimated in 1982 at 0.8 feddan.²²

While the 1976 USAID report stated that 94 per cent of landholdings were of less than 5 feddans, it did not mention that the remaining 6 per cent of landholders with holdings from 5 feddans up to the legal limit of 50 feddans per individual (or 100



Families living close to the Tawa Cement Factory in Cairo. Although the World Bank may attribute women's economic difficulties in Egypt to the number of children they have, many women are unlikely to do so. Far more relevant are the various power structures which limit their access to resources.

feddans per family with dependent children), accounted for 33 per cent of the country's agricultural area.²³ Since the mid-1970s, the number of these large landholdings has increased; by 1982 they represented 10 per cent of holdings and controlled 47.5 per cent of the country's cultivated area.²⁴

Even these figures, however, under-represent the concentration of landholding because they are based on village land registers. Studies of actual landholding in individual villages frequently reveal a much greater concentration of ownership because farms of more than 50 feddans are registered under several different names to stay within the legal landholding limit.²⁵

Nor do these limits apply to agribusinesses. For instance, Bechtel International, a US multinational conglomerate, manages a 10,000-feddan estate in Nubariyya in the northwest Delta which is owned by an investor from the Gulf states.²⁶ The Delta Sugar Company, 50.3 per cent owned by the Egyptian state sugar company and 49.7 per cent by a group of Egyptian and international banks, owns a 40,000 feddan estate on irrigated land in the north-central Delta.²⁷

If Egypt were to carry out land reform comparable to that of South Korea and Taiwan, landlessness and near landlessness could be eliminated. By setting a ceiling on landholding at 3 feddans (almost 5 times the minimum required to support a family), at least 2.6 million feddans of land could be redistributed.²⁸ If it was distributed to the landless and near landless, no agricultural household in Egypt would have less than the minimum 0.625 feddan required to feed itself. Total agricultural production might also increase, as small landholdings produce larger yields per feddan than large ones.²⁹

The possibility of radical land reform, however, is simply never raised in studies of the obstacles to Egypt's further economic development. Thanks to the powerful image of millions of Egyptian peasants squeezed into a narrow river valley, the assumption that holdings are already as small as is practicable is readily accepted: instead solutions are sought which focus on overcoming the "natural" limits of geography and demography through the forces of modern technology, on the one hand, and more efficient management, on the other.

A Technical Fix

In promoting technological modernization, the international development industry relies once again on images of Egypt which serve to justify a chosen solution. The country's agriculture, for example, is portrayed as a system which has remained essentially unchanged since antiquity and which has only recently discovered the West — or its synonym, the twentieth century. The 1976 US Department of Agriculture report states:

"The Nile Delta and its lifeline, the Nile river Valley extending southward some 600 miles, is one of the oldest agricultural areas of the world, having been under continuous cultivation for at least 5,000 years."

This prepares the reader to accept the idea that "in many respects, Egypt entered the twentieth century [only] after the 1952 Revolution."³⁰

These statements and images are highly misleading.³¹ They ignore hundreds of years of far-reaching economic and political changes in Egypt, such as the growth in the Middle Ages and subsequent decline of a network of world trade passing through the Nile Valley. The consolidation in the nineteenth century of export-oriented agricultural production based on the new institution of private landownership involved transformations in Egyptian villages arguably at least as important as those of 1952.³²

Ignoring these developments gives the impression that Nile Valley poverty is the "traditional" poverty of a backward peasantry, rather than a product of the political and economic forces of the twentieth century.

The image of a traditional static rural world implies that if Egypt "is to fully enter the modern world,"³³ the impetus and the means must come from outside. New capital investment, new irrigation methods, improved seed varieties, mechanization, and a switch to export crops such as vegetables and cut flowers to bring in the foreign capital required to finance such technologies are the principal means to achieve a "qualitative transformation" of Egyptian agriculture.³⁴

Thus the Agricultural Mechanization Project, funded by USAID between 1979 and 1987, aimed to purchase equipment from the United States for field trials and demonstration programmes in Egypt, to finance centres to service the machinery, and to send Egyptians to the US and other countries for training in "the techniques of technology transfer."³⁵

The contract for this \$38 million project was awarded to Louis Berger International Inc. of New Jersey. The company's final report on the mechanization programme explains that:

"continued investment in traditional inputs will produce very little in terms of an additional income stream. Consequently, the transformation from traditional agriculture is an investment problem dependent on a flow of new high-payoff inputs: the inputs of scientific agriculture."³⁶

Mechanization has also been heavily funded by the World Bank and the Japanese Agency for International Cooperation. These external funds required large additional contributions from the Egyptian government, which was already providing farmers with subsidized loans to purchase seeds and fertilizers and subsidized fuel. Consultants hired by USAID, however, claimed that this "high-payoff" solution to Egypt's problems would shorten the interval between crops and increase crop yields by as much as 55 per cent.³⁷

This claim contradicted evidence from other countries which suggested that higher crop yields occur as a result of

mechanization only in exceptional cases, and certainly not under conditions of intensive land use as in Egypt.³⁸ It also contradicted existing experience in Egypt where "there is no evidence that tractor farms have higher yields or cropping intensities than unmechanized farms."³⁹ A 1986 study showed that, indeed, no increase in yields had occurred.⁴⁰

Whilst mechanization failed to increase yields, however, it served to increase profits for the new machine owners and their foreign manufacturers. It also benefitted large landowners, among whom the demand for mechanization had grown in the 1970s because of a supposed shortage of agricultural labour which lasted into the early 1980s. This "shortage" took the form of a temporary rise in the wages of male agricultural labourers, particularly in regions close to large cities, caused by the higher wages available for urban construction work during the building boom of that period and by labour migration to the oil-rich Gulf countries.⁴¹ Agricultural wages, having averaged only one-third of the average real wage for all economic sectors during the first half of the 1970s,⁴² began to catch up for a while with urban wages. The true cause of the labour "shortage", in other words, was the unequal distribution of land into large farms requiring hired labour, and the low agricultural prices imposed by the state.

Rather than addressing these problems, the state, large farmers and international development agencies turned to mechanization. The demand for rural male labour was reduced and the inequalities between agricultural labourers and landowners kept in place. It is these inequalities that mechanization and other "high-payoff" inputs consolidate, inequalities which depictions of "traditional" agriculture in the Nile Valley and the need to transform it keep hidden.

Inequality and State Management

Another aspect of rural inequality in Egypt which the historical and "traditional" image of the Nile Valley tends to naturalize is the transfer of wealth from the rural population to the state through central government policies.

Since 1952, the majority of farmers have been subject to the central government's compulsory cropping requirements, requisitions and price policies. Even taking into account state investment in irrigation and subsidies of farm inputs, the net effect of government policies between 1960 and 1985 was to appropriate 35 per cent of agricultural production.⁴³ Small farmers suffered more than large landowners, who could invest in more profitable areas such as fruit, vegetable and dairy farming.⁴⁴

The appropriation of wealth from the countryside tends to be ascribed by the development industry to a "tradition" of "strong central government" stretching back to Pharaonic times, rather than to state policies reflecting a complex of dominant (although not always coherent) social interests — those of the governing elite, the state-supported private sector and larger rural landowners. The coordinator of a USAID-funded programme providing management training put it thus in a history lesson to Egyptian local government officials:

"For centuries, Egypt has been governed as a political system with a highly-centralized decision-making process. Although there have been a few minor exceptions, this statement is valid for the period since the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt was accomplished late in the fourth millennium BC — ie. for at least the past five thousand years."⁴⁵

Such centralized power is, in turn, explained in the familiar geographical and demographic terms describing the Nile Valley.⁴⁶

Depoliticized in this way, the state's role in agriculture ceases to be a question of power and control over people's resources and lives, and becomes instead an issue of management. State intervention has resulted in "dis-equilibrium"; a natural balance between the forces of agricultural supply and demand ("the market") has to be restored by a process of "readjustment."⁴⁷

To restore equilibrium, USAID has promoted in rural Egypt a gradual dismantling of the role of the state under the slogans of "decentralization" and "privatization." Although weakening the power of the central bureaucracy might be a positive benefit for many rural Egyptians, the actual political outcome of such decentralizing efforts depends on the distribution of resources and power at the provincial, district and village levels to which authority and funds are transferred. When "decentralization" transfers resources to an existing system of inequality, it can reinforce that inequality. Profits go to large farmers and local state officials while the poor receive, at best, only certain opportunities for wage labour. Village councils, if they have any role at all, are frequently controlled by powerful village landowners and local officials.

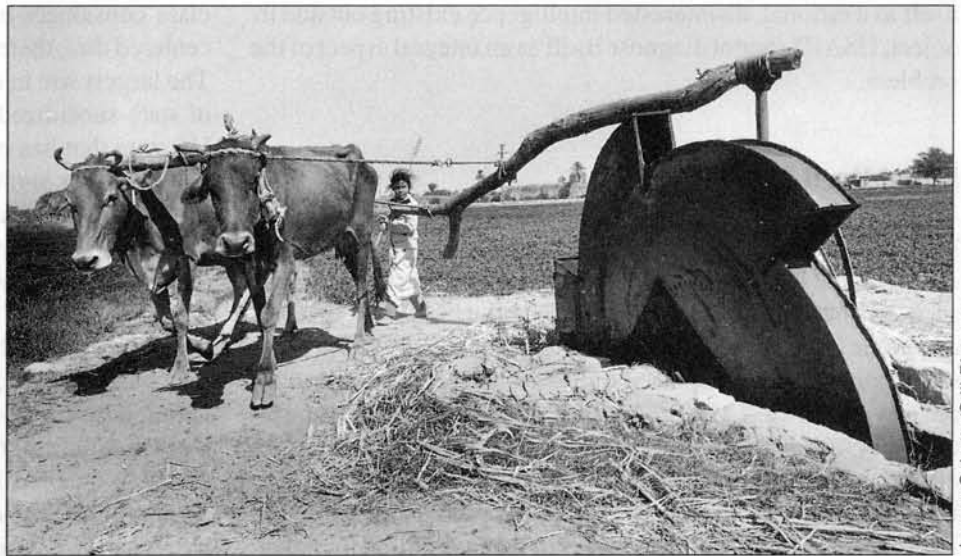
A USAID review of decentralization projects in eight different villages found that funds had gone to improvements in infrastructure and to income-producing projects such as milk refrigeration units, animal husbandry, poultry, bee and silk-worm raising, date packaging, olive canning, carpentry and furniture making, and the purchase of trucks, tractors and taxis. The report notes that "naturally, not all villagers have savings that enable them to invest" in these projects; the profits accrued to those in "middle to upper bracket income groups more than poor folks."⁴⁸

An olive pickling and canning project in a village in Fayyum in Middle Egypt, for example, provided employment for 200 villagers but served the marketing needs of just five wealthy farmers because only they could afford to grow olive trees. Likewise:

"only the wealthy villagers can hope to raise bees, because the economic success of such an enterprise requires raising at least 20 beehives, which is a large investment. Village officials such as agronomists often enter into partnership with such farmers and undertake such projects on their own."⁴⁹

The USAID report acknowledges that "the better off, the more educated and expert officials benefit more than ordinary villagers," but argues that this is "developmentally advisable." The relationship between rural capitalists and wage earners should not be called exploitation but "differential advantage," that is, "the variable ability of individuals or groups to make better use and reap greater benefits than others from available opportunities."⁵⁰

A sure way to "reap greater benefits" from an investment is to pay lower wages to those employed. This "ability" is based on a distribution of land that leaves many villagers with no



Irrigation in the Luxor region of the Nile valley. Landlessness and near landlessness could be eliminated in Egypt through land reform.

Jorgen Schytte/Still Pictures

resources besides their labour; on the absence of an enforced minimum wage; and on a system of patronage, policing and surveillance in rural Egypt that restricts poorer people from protesting or organizing to change their condition.

Agencies Above and Outside

Setting Egypt's economic development in terms of the "natural" geography and demography of the Nile Valley also removes from sight the participation of development agencies such as USAID in the dynamics of Egyptian political and economic life. The self-contained object, Egypt, introduced by reports of organizations like USAID evokes an entity "out there." The organization itself stands above the map and image of Egypt to measure and make plans for it — USAID is not on the map.

Development discourse thus practices a necessary self-deception, without which it "could not constitute itself".⁵¹ To plan effectively, a discourse of rational planning must map out every significant aspect of the reality with which it is dealing. A miscalculation or omission may cause the missing factor to disrupt the execution of the plan. Its calculations must even include the political forces that will affect the process of execution itself. Yet, despite being a central element in configurations of power within Egypt, USAID and other development agencies imagine themselves as a rational consciousness external to the country. They can thus never describe their own place in the configuration of power.

USAID's decentralization programme is illustrative. It was designed to reduce the role of the state and encourage "democracy and pluralism" by channelling funds to private initiatives at the village and district level. Yet far from encouraging the "private sector" in opposition to the state, such programmes made the state (and its employees) an even more powerful source of funds and site of patronage. The new accumulations of wealth are never more than semi-private, because they are parasitic on a strengthened state structure.

These results are not simply a fault in the design or execution of the programmes. USAID itself is a state agency, part of the "public sector." By its very presence within the Egyptian public sector, it strengthens the wealth and patronage resources of the state. USAID is part of the problem it has stated it is aiming to eradicate. Yet because the discourse of development presents

itself as a rational, disinterested intelligence existing outside its object, USAID cannot diagnose itself as an integral aspect of the problem.

Subsidized Deception

This difficulty reflects a much larger deception among the development industry. The prevailing wisdom of organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF and USAID is that the economic development problems a country such as Egypt faces stem from restrictions placed on the initiative and freedom of the private sector.⁵² The programme of "structural adjustment" these organizations have attempted to impose on Egypt aims to dismantle the system of state subsidies and controls. Prices Egyptians pay to consume, or receive for producing, food, fuel and other goods are to reflect prices in the international market.

Yet world prices for many major commodities are determined not by the free interplay of "private" market forces but by the monopolies or oligopolies organized by states and multinational corporations. Oil prices are determined by the ability of producer states to coordinate quotas and price levels. The price of raw sugar, a major Egyptian industrial crop, whose volatility is more than twice that of any other commodity monitored by the World Bank, is determined largely by US and other government price support programmes. Only about 14 per cent of world production is freely traded on the market.⁵³ The international market for aluminium, one of Egypt's major heavy industries, also operates under extensive state controls.

The most significant example is the world grain market. One of the arguments against Egypt producing the staple foods it needs to feed its people is that it cannot compete in the world market against the low grain prices of US farmers. Yet these prices are the result of subsidies and market controls. US agriculture operates under an imperative of constant growth and has come to be dominated by giant corporations that supply the inputs to farming and process and market its products. Over three-quarters of the US farm supply industry is controlled by just four firms. Six corporations, all but one of them privately-owned, control 95 per cent of US wheat and corn exports and 85 per cent of total world grain trade.⁵⁴ Squeezed by these monopolies at both ends — inputs and marketing — US farmers have to grow ever larger quantities of crops merely to survive, investing constantly in new technologies and getting increasingly into debt.

To mitigate the system's effects, the US state has instituted massive subsidies — price supports and crop controls of the New Deal programmes in the 1930s, the subsidized exports of the post-war Marshall Plan, the Public Law 480 programme (which financed up to 58 per cent of US grain exports during the 1950s and 1960s), and President Nixon's 1972 New Economic Policy (which further subsidized exports and boosted prices by paying farmers to take six million acres out of production, an area equal to ten times the total cultivated area of Egypt).

As a result of these policies, by 1982 US grain was being sold at prices 40 per cent below estimated average production costs, while keeping farmers afloat was costing \$12 billion a year in state subsidies. Despite low producer prices, moreover, consumer prices remain so high that 40 million US Americans require government subsidies to purchase food, costing a further \$27 billion a year in government funds.⁵⁵

Government export subsidies pay for middle- and upper-

class consumers in non-Western countries to shift to a meat-centered diet, thereby expanding the market for US feed grains. The largest site in the world to be incorporated into this system of state-subsidized US farming has been Egypt; the arm of the US state that has organized this incorporation is USAID.

An agency such as USAID which devotes itself to dismantling subsidies and promoting the "private" sector is itself an element in the most powerful system of state subsidy in the world. Almost every cent of the \$15 billion budget for "economic assistance" to Egypt since USAID operations began there in 1974-75 has been allocated to US corporations. Just over half the total (51 per cent) represents money spent by Egypt to purchase US goods: the PL480 Food Aid programme and the Commodity Import Programme, totalling about \$7.7 billion up to 1989, enabled Egypt to purchase grain, other agricultural commodities, agricultural and industrial equipment, and other US imports.⁵⁶ About half the commodities were paid for in dollars, with the US providing low-interest long-term credit. The other half were paid for immediately or on short-term credit in Egyptian pounds.

A further \$1 billion of the total aid (seven per cent) was paid directly to the US, by the US government itself, in the form of so-called Cash Transfers, used to keep up payments on Egypt's military debt.⁵⁷

Thus a total of \$8.7 billion, or 58 per cent of all US economic assistance to Egypt between 1974 and 1989, was spent directly in the United States rather than on development projects in Egypt; most of this "US aid" in fact represents money paid by Egypt to the US.

The remaining 42 per cent of US economic assistance funds to Egypt, totalling \$6.3 billion, were earmarked for development projects within the country, falling under the headings of water/sewerage, energy, local government, agriculture, human resources, infrastructure, industry and science/technology. Yet the entire amount seems to have been spent in the US itself, or on US contractors in Egypt — corporations such as General Electric, Westinghouse, Bechtel, Ferguson International, Caterpillar, John Deere and International Harvester. Hundreds of millions of dollars went to US universities and research institutes to provide training in agricultural sciences, management and technology transfer.⁵⁸

Many of these projects also required payment within Egypt in Egyptian pounds. In 1988, such local implementation costs were estimated to amount to about 200 million Egyptian pounds annually, equivalent then to just over \$100 million — about 10 per cent of annual US dollar aid for development projects.⁵⁹ Such payments are not made from US dollar funds: local currency funds, paid by the Egyptian government to purchase US imports under the Commodity Import Program, are used by USAID in Cairo to pay for all local costs.

Policy Leverage

Millions of Egyptians have benefited from this economic assistance, at least in the short-term. The supply of power stations, sewage networks, telephone exchanges, drinking-water plants, irrigation systems and numerous other basic infrastructure projects and services has improved the physical fabric of the Egyptian economy.

But these benefits have entailed a dependency on imports of US food, machinery and technology. In the 1980s, the US

Military Assistance

The \$15 billion of USAID spending for "economic assistance" covers only about one half of US aid to Egypt. A roughly equal amount takes the form of assistance to the Egyptian military — largely grants to purchase US weapons. Since 1985 alone, military aid to Egypt has provided a further \$7.7 billion of subsidies to US industry.

The Egyptian military, with the support of US funds, has developed into a major presence within the country's economy. Its arms industries, which receive state subsidies but whose income goes into military rather than national accounts, comprise the country's largest manufacturing sector, producing exports estimated to be worth about three times the total of all other non-textile manufactures.

The army has also moved into civilian manufacturing, symbolized by the deal it negotiated with General Motors in 1986 to manufacture passenger cars. Under pressure from the US Embassy, USAID



Soldiers from Miniya City. The military is one of the most powerful interests in the Egyptian economy.

pledged \$200 million from its aid budget to subsidize this project.

Agriculture is another sector in which the military has become a dominant presence through the acquisition of reclaimed land and the development of food processing industries, particularly in meat, fruit and vegetables. Its Food Security Division represents by far the largest agro-industrial complex in the country, producing 488 million Egyptian pounds worth of food in 1985-6, or almost one-fifth of the total value of Egyptian food production.

The military has also played a major role in constructing bridges, roads, telephone systems and other infra-

structure projects.

Together with the construction of its own housing, hospitals, shops, resorts and elite training colleges, such developments have transformed the military into "an almost entirely autonomous enclave of middle-class modernity in an increasingly impoverished and marginalized Third World economy."

Despite its massive presence in the Egyptian

economy, the large proportion of government funds it consumes, and its even larger proportion of total US support, the military receives almost no attention in the literature of organizations like USAID and the World Bank. Given the supposed objectives of developing the private sector and pluralism, the silence of this discourse is astonishing. A systematic enquiry into the economy and power of the Egyptian military would reveal its relations to US military industries and the system of state subsidies on which those industries depend — and thus to the larger object of US aid programmes.

became the largest supplier of Egyptian imports. This dependence, and the debt that goes with it, has given the United States a powerful position of influence within the Egyptian state. USAID conducts "cabinet-level dialogue" on macroeconomic policy with the Egyptian government. Acquiring this sort of "policy leverage" at every level of the Egyptian bureaucracy has now become the principal criterion according to which USAID development projects in Egypt are evaluated.⁶⁰

All this has been achieved by a programme whose larger effect is to provide vast subsidies to the "private" sector in the United States, both directly through the purchase of billions of dollars of its products and indirectly by converting Egypt into a future US market.

Thus USAID operates as a form of state support to the US private sector, while working in Egypt to dismantle Egyptian state supports — and while pretending to stand outside Egyptian politics, conducting merely a "dialogue" at the rational, detached level of "policy".

An analysis of Egyptian agriculture which examined the causes of the shift to meat production and the resulting shortages of food and growing indebtedness in the country would reveal the connections between these events, and the crisis in US

farming together with its chosen remedy, subsidized food exports. Such an analysis would serve as a reminder that the discourse of development is situated within, not outside, such global relationships.

But development discourse wishes to present itself as a detached centre of rationality and intelligence. The relationship between West and non-West is constructed in terms of the West possessing the expertise, technology and management skills that the non-West lacks, a lack which has caused the problems of the non-West. Questions of power and inequality, whether on the global level of international grain markets, state subsidies, the arms trade or, at the more local level, of landholding, food supplies and income distribution, are not discussed. So as to remain silent on such questions in which its own existence is involved, development discourse needs an object that appears to stand outside itself. What more natural object could there be than the image of a narrow river valley hemmed in by the desert, crowded with rapidly multiplying millions of inhabitants?

This is a shortened and edited version of an article which appeared in *Middle East Report*, No. 169, published by the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), 1500 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC, 20005, USA.

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Essential Drugs in Bangladesh

The Ups and Downs of a Policy

by

Zafrullah Chowdhury

with Andrew Chetley

In 1982, the Bangladesh government introduced a radical and far-reaching National Drug Policy to curtail the abuses of pharmaceutical companies and ensure the availability of high-quality medicines at a price poor Bangladeshis could afford. It was the first time a country had drawn up such a policy in such a short period of time in one document. Since then, the policy has been opposed by many actors, including the national and international pharmaceutical industry, some governments in the North, and some sectors of the Bangladesh government itself. Yet despite constant efforts to undermine it, the policy has brought significant benefits.

When Bangladesh became an independent country on 16 December 1971, essential medicines were highly-priced and not easily available. According to the government's first Five-Year Plan:

"Many so-called manufacturers are engaged in bottling drugs imported in bulk, acting indirectly as the sales agents of foreign firms. Quality control of drugs is insufficient and spurious drugs are quite common."¹

It was not until 1982, however, that significant steps were taken to tackle this. On 27 April 1982, just one month after a military coup led by General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, the military government appointed an eight-member Expert Committee to review the drug situation in Bangladesh and make recommendations for a National Drug Policy consistent with the health needs of the country.

A National Drug Policy

When the committee² was appointed, 166 pharmaceutical manufacturers were licensed to produce medicines in Bangladesh, while 122 foreign companies from

23 countries were exporting drugs to the country — 29 of them were British, 12 US, 11 Indian, 10 Swiss and 9 German. The total number of registered products, both locally produced and imported, was 4,340.

At its first meeting, the Expert Committee calculated that most medical practitioners usually prescribed from around a total of 50 of these thousands of drugs. They decided therefore to draw up a list of drugs they considered essential for Bangladesh's health needs in line with the advice given in a WHO publication, *The Selection of Essential Drugs*,³ and a list of drugs to be banned.

Sixteen criteria were drawn up by which to evaluate these and future drugs. Of these, 11 were based solely on scientific reasoning, concerning in particular effectiveness and therapeutic value; others were based on political and economic considerations or were intended to encourage the national pharmaceutical industry. For instance, multinationals were not to be allowed to manufacture antacids or oral vitamins in the hope that they would concentrate instead on antibiotics and life-saving drugs which were not so easily produced by smaller national companies.

The Expert Committee identified 1,742 non-essential or ineffective drugs to be banned and placed them in three categories. Production of drugs in the first category was to be stopped immediately, and stocks collected from pharmacies and destroyed within three months of the

acceptance of the Expert Committee's report. Drugs in the second category were to be reformulated within six months on the basis of the guidelines suggested by the committee. A maximum of nine months was allowed in which to use up stocks of drugs in the third category. The Committee prohibited the import of raw materials for drugs in the first and second categories.

All pharmaceutical manufacturers in Bangladesh were affected by these recommendations,⁴ national companies the worst.⁵ Of the banned drugs that were manufactured in Bangladesh, 949 of them were made by national companies and only 176 by TNCs. The total number of imported banned drugs was 617, most of them originating (in descending order) from Britain, Switzerland, Germany and the US.

Other major recommendations were to establish a list of 150 essential drugs and a supplementary list of 100 specialized drugs; use generic (not brand) names for the manufacture and sale of drugs intended for primary health care; eliminate product patents and limit the use of process patents; draw up a national health policy; and revise the 1940 Drugs Act to control drug manufacturing quality, labelling and advertising, prices, prescriptions, technology transfer and licensing agreements, and pharmacies.

The NDP was to be applied consistently to both the private and public sectors, and to traditional and modern medical systems.

Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury is a health activist who was a member of the 1982 Expert Committee which drew up Bangladesh's National Drug Policy, and author of *The Politics of Essential Drugs: The Making of a Successful Health Strategy: Lessons from Bangladesh*, Zed Books (in cooperation with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation) £13.95/\$22.50, ISBN 1-85649-362-8; **Andrew Chetley** is a journalist specializing in health and pharmaceutical issues.

A Storm Unleashed

As soon as they learned of the National Drug Policy (NDP), which was approved by the Council of Ministers on 29 May 1982, TNCs, some of the larger national pharmaceutical companies, the Bangladesh Medical Association and representatives of many Western governments immediately began efforts to undermine it.

The TNCs' main objection to the policy was not because they had a particularly large market in Bangladesh; they were concerned that unless the NDP was nipped in the bud, the Bangladesh example would be copied by other countries.⁶

Within hours of hearing about the policy, the US ambassador to Bangladesh, Jane Coon, called without prior appointment on General Ershad to convince him that the policy should not be implemented, or at the very least should be postponed, because it was unacceptable to the US.⁷

Over the next few days, Ambassador Coon met with the editor of the most widely-circulated, pro-US Bengali daily newspaper, *Ittefaq*, the managing directors of US transnational companies, and others to devise a strategy to prevent implementation of the NDP. She informed offices of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in neighbouring countries about the dangers of a policy such as the Bangladeshi one.⁸

British, Dutch and West German ambassadors also called on General Ershad to express their dismay at the proposed drug policy. The West German ambassador was particularly angry, saying that it would deter German investment in the country. He said that the German multinational, Hoechst, had intended to expand in Bangladesh but was now reluctant to do so.

The British threat was more subtle. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said in the House of Commons:

"We are keen that the Bangladesh government should use its scarce resources wisely. We are also keen that they should succeed in their policy of encouraging foreign investment to help them with the development of an industrial economy... It is important that in trying to achieve the aims

of the pharmaceutical policy, [the Bangladesh government does] not discriminate against foreign-owned manufacturing companies in Bangladesh and [does] not frighten off prospective foreign investors."⁹

Transnational companies started mobilizing the Bangladesh Medical Association and elite public opinion. Many directors and administrators of TNCs were retired army officers who were able to lobby the Martial Law Administration. Drug manufacturers met with senior officials of the army and the civil administration and with members of the governing

was attempting to ban drugs widely available elsewhere. Echoing the US ambassador, they called for the implementation of the NDP to be delayed, pending a review by an independent body. Arguing that the policy would deter foreign investors, they made a veiled threat to withdraw from Bangladesh.¹⁰

Nevertheless, government officials stood their ground, realising that the TNCs' claims about the banned drugs and drug policies were false and that the companies were simply trying to defend their commercial interests. Thus on 7 June 1982, the health minister made the NDP document public, the first step towards giving it a legal framework, and on 11 June, General Ershad signed the Drug (Control) Ordinance 1982 which brought the National Drug Policy into effect.

An "Independent" US Review

The day after the policy was made public, General Ershad received an unexpected invitation from US President Ronald Reagan to visit the United States. Just ten days later, General Ershad met President Reagan on 18 June in the US. Later he met Vice-President George Bush and, in response to Bush's suggestion, said that he would welcome a visit to Bangladesh by independent US scientists to advise him on the policy.

What he did not realise was that George Bush was a director of the US-based Eli Lilly, one of the world's top 10 pharmaceutical companies, and had substantial shares in other drug companies. Nor was he aware that only a few days earlier, Bush had told senior pharmaceutical industry executives from 22 countries that

the Reagan administration planned to limit regulation of the pharmaceutical industry and end the "adverse relationship" between government and industry.¹¹

After high-level manoeuvrings between the US Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, the US State Department and the US Embassy in Bangladesh, Ambassador Coon told Health Minister Dr Shamsul Huq that a four-member "independent scientific committee" would



Manufacturing medicines at Bemixco Pharmaceuticals in Dhaka. The quality of locally-manufactured drugs improved significantly with the introduction of the National Drugs Policy because of greater vigilance.

Council of Ministers to persuade them that the NDP had no scientific basis. The finance and industry minister sided with the TNCs.

These pressures led General Ershad to call a public hearing on 6 June 1982 which lasted for over three hours. Rather than debate the scientific rationale of the NDP, however, TNC representatives argued that generic drugs policies had failed all over the world and that Bangladesh

be arriving in Dhaka on 20 July 1982 to examine the drug policy and advise the Bangladesh government.

When Dr Huq asked for the *curriculum vitae* (CV) of each of these experts, the US ambassador angrily implied that it was impertinent for a minister of a Third World country to ask for the CVs of experts from the US and discourteously left the minister without having tea which had already been laid on the table.

The health minister persisted with his request for the CVs until they were made available. Not one of the members of the "scientific committee" was an independent scientist: two were senior executives from Wyeth Laboratories, one was a Squibb vice-president, and the fourth was a director with the US Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association.

General Ershad later told the health minister that he had expected the independent advisory committee to consist of officials from the US Food and Drug Administration and members of the National Academy of Sciences and other academics, definitely not representatives from the pharmaceutical industry.

The US "independent scientific committee" met executives from drug companies and *Bangladesh Aushadh Shilpa*

Shamity (BASS, Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries) and had a few meetings with the Bangladesh Medical Association. They did not wish to meet members of the Expert Committee and their findings were never made public.

US Citizens Challenge Their Government

Although Bangladesh's drug policy was opposed by the US government, it received unexpected support from sectors of the US public. Well-known consumer rights activist Ralph Nader, concerned US citizens, consumer bodies, various church groups and human rights activists were among those who raised questions with their senators, congressional representatives and the State Department about US opposition to the policy. Many of them highlighted the US government's support for WHO's programme on essential drugs at the 35th World Health Assembly in May 1982.¹²

The Public Citizen Health Research Group in Washington wrote to the Bangladesh Health Minister on 9 August that many of the drugs now banned from the Bangladesh market:

"were removed from the US market during the past 12 years on the recommendation of eminent medical scientists; many of the drug mixtures you are removing were deemed to be 'irrational combinations' . . . and their use was 'not recommended'."

The Group also wrote to the US Secretary of State on 18 August that "to pressure the Bangladesh government to delay the withdrawal from the market of dangerous, ineffective, useless or unnecessarily expensive drugs is unconscionable".

The State Department responded that the US Embassy in Dhaka had simply "facilitated a dialogue" between the industry and the Bangladesh government and expressed the "hope" that implementation of the NDP might be delayed while this dialogue took place.¹³ Dr Sidney Wolfe of the Group replied:

"Imagine the outrage of the US public if a foreign government asked us to delay implementing a health-protecting decision of our Food and Drug Administration or the Environmental Protection Agency! Moreover, it is rather naive to ignore that Bangladesh is a US aid recipient and that a 'hope' expressed by our State Department is perceived as a threat, veiled or unexpressed though it may be."¹⁴

WHO's Peculiar Silence

Although the National Drug Policy followed guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) on essential drugs and has been welcomed and publicized internationally by the WHO Action Programme on Essential Drugs, within Bangladesh itself, WHO's support appears inconsistent and slow to materialize. This is because the public face of the organization in any country is its country representative.

In Bangladesh, one WHO country representative was slow to respond to a request from GK for permission to translate the WHO essential drug list into Bangla. In 1992, the WHO representative even stated that the policy encouraged the smuggling of drugs. There are several possible explanations for WHO's varied support for national drug policies and rational drug use:

- WHO may be reluctant to upset the United States, which provides about 25 per cent of WHO's regular budget. The US consistently balks at supporting WHO policies which could be seen to interfere with the free trade interests of US companies.
- WHO's staff are primarily doctors who are skilled in the scientific diagnosis and treatment of diseases but who rarely show concern for social and environmental factors. Most fail to appreciate that a disease such as tuberculosis is an indicator of social inequality, and that malnutrition and insanitary conditions contribute significantly to the incidence of the most common diseases of the Third World such as diarrhoea or acute respiratory infections.

- Political and economic viewpoints are rarely considered as the organization attempts to maintain an "apolitical and neutral" stance which precludes "interference". Thus colonialism in its past and present forms, all of which have played an important role in the cause and spread of diseases, is ignored. As the British Medical Journal has pointed out, "WHO should be doing more to tackle the root cause of most diseases — poverty — and doing more to improve infrastructure of health care in the developing world".
- The action that WHO has taken on drugs is typical of a technological approach to health with which WHO medical officers feel familiar and comfortable. Doctors know about prescription and usage, efficacy and quality, but they do not know how to get drugs to the people who need them most. They do not realise that the class character and political will of the government determine the affordability and provision of essential drugs.
- WHO is known for its "fixation on medical technology — vaccines, drugs and doctors — [and] its unwillingness to grapple with the practicalities of delivering health care". But disease is not merely the consequence of poor health services; the provision of primary health care alone does not bring better health. To produce documents on drug policy but not to defend them actively or publicly, and to publish materials and then not to distribute them widely, as WHO has done in Bangladesh reflect a political decision not to act.

Another Review

Despite such support, further pressure had built up on General Ershad in Bangladesh from TNCs, the elite, politicians and newspapers. Claims were made that the NDP would ruin the national drug industry and that doctors' clinical freedom was being infringed. Intellectuals were confused by the sudden decision to implement this kind of policy which was unexpected from a military government.

So General Ershad set up a Review Committee of six army doctors on 6 July 1982. Family members of two of the committee members had high-level jobs with national pharmaceutical companies which had licensing agreements with TNCs.

This Review Committee interviewed representatives of the national drug industry, TNCs, BASS, the Chemists and Druggists Association, the chamber of commerce and the Bangladesh Medical Association. It met separately with the former president of the Bangladesh Medical Association, Professor Firoza Begum, who was a director of Pfizer and owned shares in three other drug companies.

The BMA's statement was submitted to the Review Committee by a BMA former general secretary, Dr Sarwar Ali, who was the Assistant Medical Director of Pfizer (Bangladesh). The BMA said that many of the drugs that had been banned were safe, effective and necessary, and that adverse reactions and side

effects were rare, only being caused by inappropriate self-medication. The BMA concluded that the problem lay not in the drugs themselves, but in the unrestricted availability of these drugs without prescription.¹⁵

The Review Committee submitted its report direct to General Ershad on 12 August — a report which was diametrically opposed to that of the Expert Committee setting out the NDP. Following a suggestion of the Expert Committee, General Ershad brought the two committees face-to-face on 7 September to establish the scientific validity of their reports.

The meeting resembled a courtroom battle umpired by General Ershad. After a five-hour debate, General Ershad was convinced of the scientific validity of the NDP.

However, amendments were made to the NDP. The time allowed for banned drugs in the second category to be reformulated was extended from six months to one year and for drugs in the third category to be used up from nine to 18 months. Six products in the first category were taken off the proscribed list. Some 33 drugs produced under third-party licence were permitted until the expiry of the contracts; 55 other drugs manufactured by 52 small national companies were placed in a new category and allowed to manufacture for two years. After these adjustments, the final list of banned drugs stood at 1,666.

Simmering Opposition

Since its inception in 1982, opposition to the National Drug Policy has continued, flaring up every now and then with calls to review the policy.

The drug industry has tried hard to discredit the public health group *Sabar Janya Shasthaya* (Heath for All) which has publicized the content and ideas behind the NDP, exposed the misuse of medicines and the reasons for banning certain medicines.

The industry also whipped up attacks against *Gonoshasthaya Kendra* (the People's Health Centre), set up by the author in 1972¹⁶ and *Gonoshasthaya Pharmaceuticals Limited* (GPL), established in 1981 to manufacture essential drugs of high quality and at low cost.¹⁷

Simmering opposition came to a head in 1990. At the beginning of the year, President Ershad outlined to Parliament a National Health Policy. Although the 1982 Expert Committee had recommended that the drugs policy be part of a national health policy, it was only in 1987 that Ershad had appointed a committee to draw it up and in 1988 that it was ready.

As soon as the bill was introduced in Parliament in mid-1990, the Bangladesh Medical Association called for all doctors to strike in protest at the "anti-people health policy". While opposition political parties admitted in private that it was a good policy, they used the opportunity of the strike to discredit the government.

On 27 October 1990, the office, stores and vehicles of GPL were again attacked and burned. Tension and protests escalated after a prominent doctor and high-ranking BMA official was killed in November 1990, and finally the Ershad government fell on 6 December 1990. The National Health Policy was cancelled by the acting President and for a while it seemed as if the drugs policy, also considered "anti-people" by the BMA, would be withdrawn as well.

Safe For Now . . .

Political stability began to return to Bangladesh following elections in February 1991. Begum Khaleda Zia was sworn in as Prime Minister in March and Parliament was convened a month later. On 30 April 1991, a cyclone devastated the southern part of Bangladesh; and in the midst of this disaster, the NDP survived one of its most rigorous tests since its introduction.

Vaccination in Bangladesh. Although promoting essential drugs policies, WHO was inconsistent in its support of Bangladesh's NDP.



Achievements of the National Drug Policy

Substantial gains have been derived from Bangladesh's National Drug Policy which are evident when prices, production figures and quality indicators at the time when the policy was introduced are compared with those of a decade later. Between 1982 and 1992:

- essential drugs increased from 30 to 80 per cent of local production;
- drug prices stabilized, increasing by only 20 per cent, compared to an increase of 179 per cent in the consumer price index;
- Bangladesh companies increased their share of local production from 35 to more than 60 per cent. Overall, local production increased by 217 per cent;
- less dependency on imports and prioritization of useful products saved the country approximately US\$600 million;
- the quality of products improved: the proportion of drugs tested which were found to be substandard fell from 36 per cent to under 7 per cent.

Availability of essential drugs increased dramatically with the increase in national production, which led to a decrease in imported drugs. Eighty per cent of locally-produced drugs are for primary and secondary health care.

The procurement of raw materials at the most competitive prices led to a sharp drop in such prices and, in turn, a fall in the maximum retail price of finished drugs. The drop in price in real terms made drugs more affordable for consumers. The smallest price decrease was 12 per cent, the largest 97 per cent. The highest price increase was for aspirin which went up from Taka 0.10 to Taka 0.55. As

drug prices are low, the incidence of counterfeiting is also low. High-priced drugs, whether imported or produced locally, are most subject to counterfeiting.

The NDP eliminated most transfer pricing and over-invoicing for imports of capital machinery, raw materials and packaging materials, which were common practices before 1982.

The quality of locally-manufactured drugs improved through greater vigilance; testing became easier because, according to the Expert Committee's criteria for drug assessment, most drugs contain only one active ingredient. In 1981, 327 products were tested of which 36 per cent were substandard; in 1992, more than 2,600 samples were taken with less than seven per cent found to be of substandard quality. Substandard drugs are produced mainly by small companies; if all the companies producing substandard drugs are taken together, they account for about one per cent of the market.

The number of drugs per prescription issued by doctors has decreased from five or six drugs per prescription in 1982 to between two and four in 1990. This was due in part to the elimination from the market of many useless and combination products and to increased awareness among doctors of the need to prescribe more wisely. Such awareness was stimulated by public discussions about the National Drug Policy.

Despite these achievements, misbranded and spurious drugs, mostly smuggled from India, banned under the national drug policy continue to be prescribed by unqualified village practitioners who are often the only health providers in rural areas.

A consultative meeting, presided over by the new prime minister, with NGOs and foreign diplomats was held to address the provision of effective relief to cyclone victims. Swiss and US diplomats said that their airplanes were loaded with medicine and baby food, ready to fly into Bangladesh, but that the country's drug policy created an obstacle.

All the ambassadors and other participants were stunned by Khaleda Zia's prompt reply. She said that she greatly appreciated the offer to provide assistance, but that any medicine brought into Bangladesh must conform with the essential drugs list. The policy was safe.

... But Under Attack Again

It was, however, a short-lived respite. In the midst of negotiations with the World Bank over loans for industrial development, the new government faced continued pressure from the Bangladesh Medical Association for the withdrawal of the

drug policy. The Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), led by Managing Director of Pfizer (Bangladesh) Ltd, S. H. Kabir, were also demanding a review of the NDP.

In response to such pressure, the government announced a 15-member Review Committee to revise the drug policy by 30 April 1992. The committee was chaired by the secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; other members were medical teachers and from the pharmaceutical industry, the army, and the Chemists and Druggists Association. The deputy secretary of the health ministry, the director of the Drug Administration, the president of the Bangladesh Medical Association and two MPs were also members.

Meanwhile, in April 1992, the World Bank's head of its industry and energy unit in Bangladesh, Abid Hassan, met government officials to discuss an industrial sector loan. He followed up the meeting with a letter to the Joint Secretary of the government's economic relations division, Ayub Quadri, in which he made

five specific "recommendations" pertaining to pharmaceuticals — "recommendations" which in the context of a loan negotiation were, in effect, "directives". These were:

- to allow the introduction of new products by using free sales certificates;
- to lift all controls on prices;
- to remove control over advertising from the drug licensing authority;
- to remove restrictions on foreign firms as to what they can produce;
- to abolish controls on the import of pharmaceutical raw materials.

At about the same time, the FICCI presented the Health Minister with a set of proposed amendments to the NDP which simply echoed the recommendations of the World Bank, with one small exception. The FICCI was not concerned about the removal of controls over advertising as drug companies were already printing

and distributing product showcards giving misleading or untrue information.

Concern over these developments led the WHO and UNICEF country representatives to write to the head of the World Bank in Bangladesh, Christopher Willoughby, calling on the World Bank to ensure that gains secured by the NDP were not undermined, in particular "low-cost and price-controlled basic essential drugs, affordable by the majority of the population, ensuring cost-effective process in primary health care."

Abid Hasan was ordered to send another letter to Ayub Quadri, clarifying the World Bank's position on the NDP. His cleverly-written letter of 8 June 1992 began with the statement, "First and most important, we fully support the drug policy objective of increasing the supply of essential drugs (EDs) and making these available at affordable prices."

But it went on to argue that the present controls could be replaced by more liberal policies or procedures "without sacrificing the objective of increasing availability of good quality and affordable EDs". The five recommendations were repeated, albeit in a modified form, and the final paragraph contained a veiled threat:

"We would appreciate if these views are brought to the attention of the drug policy review committee urgently, specially since one aspect (import controls) of the above is germane to [Industrial Sector Adjustment Credit-II] negotiations."¹⁸

A New Drug Policy?

Amidst confusion and disagreement among the Review Committee, its term was extended by six months to 31 October 1992. Just two days before that date, the drug review sub-committee agreed on a draft National Drug Policy 1992, which amounted to little more than a camouflaged and elaborate version of the recommendations made by the World Bank representative, Abid Hasan.

The new policy provided for the creation of a Drug Registration Advisory Committee (DRAC) in place of the Drug Control Committee (DCC), comprising experts from medicine, pharmacology and pharmacy, and representatives from the manufacturers and other trades and professional groups. The term "professional groups" effectively excluded consumer

groups but would open the door to groups directly or indirectly related to the industry.

The DRAC would be authorized to approve the safety, efficacy and quality of drugs and to determine patterns of disease prevalence and therapeutic need.

The sub-committee prepared a list of over-the-counter drugs to be sold without prescription for the short-term relief of symptoms considered not to require medical advice or accurate diagnosis.

Other recommendations were to encourage foreign companies to set up manufacturing plants in Bangladesh to produce "research-based" new drugs; to remove the requirement of prior approval for imports of raw and packaging materials; manufacturers to set each drug's Maximum Retail Price; and separate administration of traditional medicines "which should not be amalgamated with [pharmaceutical] drugs at any level, be it manufacturers or dispensaries".

Before this version of the NDP could get off the ground, in November 1992, the association of the traditional medical systems sued the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, claiming that the Review Committee was invalid as it did not include any traditional practitioners. The court issued a stay order, preventing the government from giving any further consideration to the report.

A Lull in the Storm

For almost a year, it appeared that the main elements of the original NDP would survive. But in 1993, another major threat came, this time from Bangladesh's finance minister, M Saifur Rahman, who believed that the NDP was a major impediment to foreign investment in Bangladesh. He said publicly that the National Drug Policy should be "immediately scrapped" because it was "ruining the blue-chip pharmaceutical industry", adding that the industry should be free of all controls.

About a week later, the health minister said that the government might review the drug policy, a comment which was sufficient warning for WHO and UNICEF representatives to go back to the head of the World Bank in Bangladesh, Christopher Willoughby.

The trio met with the finance minister and the health minister the following week. Finance Minister Saiful Rahman was visibly angry and asked whether he

should comply with Abid Hasan's 1992 directive or theirs. Willoughby was forced to admit that Abid Hasan's letter had been sent without proper clearance.

Eroding the NDP

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman thus changed his strategy to defeat the NDP. Instead of attempting to abandon its basic principle of a limited list of essential drugs, he encouraged the Drug Control Committee (DCC) to take a number of drugs off the banned list at each of its meetings.

The DCC had been reconstituted in early 1992 with an abundance of new members representing the drug industry. At its first meeting in March 1992, a non-essential combination cough rub, Vaporub, was approved, along with 12 single-ingredient products of no proven superiority over existing ones. Three of the drugs were not recorded in the British Pharmacopoeia, the US Pharmacopoeia or *Martindale: The Extra Pharmacopoeia*.¹⁹

In late 1992, a DCC meeting attended mainly by members from the pharmaceutical industry, and with barely the minimum number of committee members present, permitted combination products such as antacids with Simethicone, multivitamins with minerals and vitamin B-complex syrup, which had been deemed since 1982 to be of little therapeutic value, to be sold. This violated the principles of the national drug policy. Since then, the number of new products registered for manufacture has grown rapidly.

On 12 January 1994, the DCC agreed to several price deregulation measures.²⁰ Rather than removing all price controls, which would provoke reactions from consumers and professionals, a list of 117 drugs which would be subject to price control was drawn up. These were referred to as "listed drugs" to avoid definition problems associated with the concept of essential drugs and to bypass High Court restrictions on amending the essential drugs list. The list was an arbitrary one and the criteria for inclusion on it were not defined by the committee. High-selling common drugs as well as expensive newer drugs were not included.

Price control of imported raw and packaging materials was to be discontinued, and manufacturers of "unlisted" drugs were free to fix their own price.

An extensive press campaign by Health

For All (HFA) managed to delay the implementation of these measures until June 1994. As expected, the prices of drugs which are not "listed" have started to shoot up.

Unwritten Chapter

The Bangladesh National Drug Policy has been both praised and attacked since its inception in 1982. It has survived several onslaughts from vested interests at home and abroad which could have destroyed it completely.

Consumer organizations, health activists and a few journalists continue to struggle to retain the benefits achieved through the drug policy, while TNCs and local producers alike, backed by sections of the World Bank, press for further deregulation and liberalization.

Bangladesh's National Drug Policy has been far from perfect. Virtually every year since the policy was adopted, there has been prominent media coverage in Bangladesh of substandard, counterfeit and spurious drugs, the sale of expired drugs, the smuggling of banned drugs, the preponderance of unauthorized retail pharmacies — and inadequate provision to control these violations. Quality assurance, transparency concerning drug registration and misleading drug promotion are current controversial topics. But not one popular newspaper has called for the withdrawal of suspension of the 1982 policy.

In summarizing the Bangladesh National Drug Policy in 1992, pharmacologist Milton Silverman — the author of several books medicine use in developing countries — and his colleagues wrote that "the end of the chapter is yet to be written".²¹

The ending envisaged in 1982 when the National Drug Policy was drafted was one which puts people's health first, which delivers essential drugs, which encourages a strong national pharmaceutical sector that operates within reasonable regulations to ensure public health concerns are foremost. The struggle to achieve that goal continues.

Further Reading

"Making National Drug Policies a Development Priority: A Strategy Paper and Six Country Stories", *Development Dialogue*, 1995:1, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Övre Slottsgatan 2, S-75310 Uppsala, SWEDEN.

Notes and References

1. Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *The First Five Year Plan 1973-78*, Dhaka, November 1973.
2. This committee had three significant characteristics. First, no representative of the transnational drug industry was included; it consisted instead of academics, regulatory personnel and health activists who were all members of the Bangladesh Medical Association. Chief executives of the BMA were excluded because of their formal associations with transnationals. Second, it was a well-informed committee. Many of its members were familiar with the misdeeds of drug companies and with ideas for new policies on drugs. Some were well-acquainted with the problems experienced by India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in their attempts to regulate drugs. Third, no civil servant was included.
3. WHO, *The Selection of Essential Drugs*, Technical Report Series 641, World Health Organization, Geneva, 1979.
4. US-based Reckitt & Colman, as the only producer of soluble aspirin, was exempted from the criterion that no multinational without its own factory in Bangladesh would be allowed to sell products after manufacturing them in another factory in Bangladesh on a toll basis.
5. This included Gonoshasthaya Pharmaceuticals Limited which had been set up by the author.
6. In India on 23 July 1983, for instance, the government banned with immediate effect the manufacture and sale of 25 irrational or potentially harmful drugs. Even in the UK, the Bangladesh National Drug Policy was cited as an example of effective action on drugs in a House of Commons debate on ways to limit the high costs of drugs to the National Health Service. See Tiranti, D.J., *Essential Drugs: The Bangladesh Example—Four Years On*, IOCU/New Internationalist/War on Want, Penang/Oxford/London, 1986.
7. General Ershad was new to the political arena and was perhaps unaware of the politics of aid and its close connections with the business interests of donor governments. He had been reluctant to believe that, in 1975, the US ambassador in Sri Lanka had implicitly threatened to withdraw food aid because of the country's drug policy, seeing no reason why the US should interfere in Sri Lanka's domestic policy. He was astonished that the National Drug Policy formulated by Bangladesh should be a matter of concern to the US.
8. Much information about these meetings and communications is available under the US Freedom of Information Act. But the details of Ambassador Coon's report of her conversations with General Ershad, various ministers and senior civil servants are still classified.
9. Chetley, A., *Bangladesh: Finding the Right Prescription*, War on Want, London, 1982.
10. Smaller companies took a less oppositional approach. Recognizing that 90 per cent of their products had no scientific validity, they argued that the fault lay with the Drug Administration which should not have permitted their production in the first place. They said that the negligence of the Drug Administration should not result in their financial ruin. They asked for a two-year extension on the banned drugs, and access to easy credit to compensate for their loss.
11. "Bangladesh unleashed by US: George Bush blesses drug industry, damns regulation", *Multinational Monitor*, August 1982.
12. The Commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration, Professor Arthur Hull Hayes, had said at this Assembly: "All delegates appreciated the need for the people of all countries to have access to pharmaceutical products that were relevant to their health needs and priced within their means: that need was particularly acute in developing countries. The Action Programme on Essential Drugs had the potential for helping countries meet their needs, and the United States strongly supported it." See WHO, World Health Assembly Documents, A35/A/SR/5, World Health Organization, Geneva, May 1982.
13. Kirby, H.E., Deputy Assistant Secretary (Acting), Department of State, letter to Sidney M. Wolfe, Director, Public Citizen Health Research Group, Washington DC, 31 August 1982.
14. Wolfe, S.M. and Benjamin, G., Public Citizen Health Research Group, letter of Harman, E. Kirby, Deputy Assistant Secretary (Acting), Department of State, Washington DC, 15 September 1982.
15. On its own initiative, the Expert Committee which had drawn up the NDP met the Review Committee and enquired whether its members wanted explanations on any point in the NDP. The Review Committee politely declined the offer and said it had a copy of the NDP, which was self-explanatory.
16. The centre initially concentrated on primary health care and the training of paramedics, but later expanded to include education, nutrition, agriculture, employment generation and women's issues. These activities now reach some half a million people.
17. Health for All was set up in mid-1982 by a group of physicians, lawyers, journalists, women activists, freedom fighters and university teachers soon after the National Drug Policy had been introduced. The initial motivation was, in part, a response to the government's failure to inform people in Bangladesh about the reasons behind the policy, its silence concerning the misinformation put out by TNCs, and its failure to allay people's fears in the confusion that ensued. GPL had given the government information about the international prices of raw materials and packaging materials and, in general, provided information whenever the government sought it. On 18 August 1984, a crowd of more than 2,000 people attempted to set fire to the GPL factory; 63 female and 21 male GK workers were wounded trying to fend off the attackers.
18. At the same time, another division of the World Bank's office in Bangladesh, the Population and Health Unit, was finalizing an agreement with the government and major donor agencies for a five-year programme which stressed the need to support the National Drug Policy through education and information activities.
19. One of the criteria set up the 1982 Expert Committee to evaluate drugs was that all prescription chemicals not included in guides which set standards for composition and quality, such as the British Pharmacopoeia, or the British Pharmaceutical Codex, would be prohibited.
20. The drug pricing policy, formulated in 1987, set a Maximum Retail Price for each drug sold. This was calculated on the basis of a simple formula of adding 100 per cent to the unit price, inclusive of import duties, taxes, import licence fees and transportation costs of individual raw materials and packaging materials. An extra mark-up of between 50 and 225 per cent was allowed for the costs of processing, quality control, commission for distribution and retailing. Taxes and various duties were then added to arrive at the maximum retail price for each drug which is reviewed every six months. Many companies, both national and transnational, sell their products at prices below the Maximum Retail Price.
21. Silverman, M., Lydecker, M. and Lee, P., *Bad Medicine: The Prescription Drug Industry in the Third World*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1992.



Books

Reproductive Control

CONCEIVING THE NEW WORLD ORDER: The Global Politics of Reproduction, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, \$17.95/£13.95 (pb) ISBN 0-520-08914-6

The battle over human reproduction is being waged across the United States in churches, clinics, medical schools, state and federal courts and agencies, through ballot initiatives and voting booths, and in the hearts and minds of the American people.

Such a battle is also taking place at the international level, for instance, at the UN conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and on Women, Equality, Development and Peace in Beijing in 1995.

Every aspect of reproduction has been politicized from teenage pregnancy to the number of children a woman on welfare can have and still be eligible for assistance, from access to abortion to the nature of the family.

These battles are explored in *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, an anthology which focuses on how reproduction is being restructured across social and cultural boundaries, particularly at local/global intersections. The 23 carefully-selected pieces illustrate how the struggle for control over reproduction is continuously being negotiated by a range of local, national and transnational interests.

Numerous essays testify to the concern of countries such as Canada, Egypt, Norway, Nigeria, Romania and the US to control reproduction. States impose policies of selection, exclusion and marginalization to which many people

devise subliminal and overt resistance.

Ann Anagnost explains that birth control in China is designed to bring production and reproduction into "a proper balance". A township party level secretary says: "We used to manage production, now we just manage babies."

Anagnost contends that while no policy is more resisted at the local level in practice than the one-child policy, no other policy needs such a centralized national leadership. She maintains that in the past 15 years or so, the public has largely internalized the government's official view that the quality and quantity of people is a principal cause of the country's failure to progress.

Anagnost also believes, however, that the flourishing abduction of and illicit trade in women and children indicates an "unfulfilled hunger for bodies". Far from being a drain on national resources, the "buying" of people demonstrates that people are seen as a productive resource, essential for the reproduction of the household.

The value of having more children is underlined in the practice of "wealthy independent entrepreneurial households paying fines in the tens of thousands of yen to have additional children." Anagnost argues that this "development suggests new dimensions of resistance to the allocative power of the state."

Indeed, a deep scepticism of state and foreign intervention in reproduction undergirds the anthology. The conflicts that arise when ideologies and technologies fashioned in accordance with values and structures of a dominant society are transferred in population control programmes to another society which has different assumptions, patterns and constraints are vigorously examined.

Soheir Morsy critiques the Egyptian government's support of the Safe Motherhood Initiative to reduce maternal mortality in her essay, "Deadly Reproduction Among Egyptian Women". She argues that USAID established this particular health care strategy from the narrow premise that sickness and death can be reduced by reducing the number of children a woman bears.

This analysis, which is attractive to the ruling elite in Egypt, ignores the power relations that generate poverty and malnutrition — the primary causes of maternal mortality. Resources are spent on the Safe Motherhood Initiative instead of on improving the overall health of women in Egypt or on bringing about broader social and economic changes. The state's at-

tempt to "medicalize" reproduction so as to make childbirth "safe" has been resisted by the vast majority of Egyptian peasant women who prefer indigenous fertility regulation methods.

Meanwhile, Morsy contends that the Egyptian state relies on the repatriated earnings of men working abroad to promote economic development in the country. This "export" is subsidized by women and children's production in the informal sector, a process which encourages larger families.

In an excellent essay, "Households Headed by Women: The Politics of Race, Class and Gender," Leith Mullings explores how strongly-held ideologies of race, class and gender are reflected in state policies for women-headed households in the US which are disproportionately higher in African-American and Latino communities than in European-American households.

Racist ideologies portray these women as "promiscuous and inadequate mothers" while class ideologies blame them for their poverty. This "underclass" is exhorted to have fewer children and vilified as wantonly consuming national resources through their dependence on state assistance. The state thereby justifies its punitive measures towards them such as mandatory birth control and welfare cuts, made on the basis of the appropriate number of children the state considers a welfare recipient should have.

Meanwhile, the structural causes of inter-generational poverty — the lack of child care and decently-paid jobs — are ignored.

In countless situations, women have in fact sought to control their reproduction so as to assert their social and political rights and agendas. John O'Neil and Patricia Leyland Kaufert demonstrate that the Inuit struggle for birthing rights in Northern Canada cannot be disengaged from their struggle for self determination and land rights.

For Pauktuutit, the Inuit Women's Association, restoring childbirth to the community (which by Canadian decree has shifted to large tertiary hospitals) symbolizes the essence of cultural survival. Pauktuutit believes that the passive acceptance of Canadian medical paternalism together with the loss of traditional knowledge has undermined Inuit identity and unity.

The Inuit have established the Povungnituk birthing centre as a model of culturally-sensitive birthing services.

It has emphasized how hunting and land rights, the traditional concerns of Inuit men, are integrated with issues of family stability, prenatal nutrition, childcare and cultural revival. New community development initiatives are attributed to the confidence generated by the independent success of the maternity centre.

The anthology also contains several essays which challenge readers to rethink the meanings of family, kinship, work and social organization. Ellen Lewin explores these in her essay, "On the Outside Looking In: The Politics of Lesbian Motherhood". She identifies how lesbian women imagine new futures for themselves and society through their particular experiences of motherhood which are not enmeshed in the replication of conventional gender arrangements. As a lesbian mother says, "We have the opportunity for radical social change beginning in our homes".

The US obsession with teenage pregnancy and the imperative of social agencies to exert control over adolescents is explored in Martha Ward's essay on "Early Childbearing: What is the Problem and Who Owns It?" She denounces current programmes for unmarried teenage mothers as politically opportunistic and for failing to address issues of economics, female power, powerlessness, sexuality and coercion.

For example, the Adolescent Family Life programme administered by the Office of Population Affairs links young mothers with social, educational and health services but does not provide contraceptive services, nor address their socio-economic situation. Ward contends that the "problem of teenage pregnancy" is a symptom of a disadvantaged youth which therefore demands a shift away from "morality" — or the lack thereof — as a source of the problem.

In US society, Ward argues that marriage, the "solution" proposed by some politicians, tends to increase a pregnant girl's chances of closely-spaced pregnancies, decrease her educational chances and cut her off from childcare help for the family. In her bold conclusion, she suggests that:

"the public debate should address the future of marriage and novel patterns of family formation that adolescents are pioneering in the United States."

One segment of the anthology surveys developments in reproductive medical technology and the challenges they raise

for feminist analysis and action. Sarah Franklin outlines some of the difficulties inherent in mobilizing against threatening new forms of birth control in her essay "Postmodern Procreation: A Cultural Account of Assisted Reproduction".

She outlines how the phrase "reproductive choice", usually cited in the context of women, has taken on new meanings as fathers and fetuses have acquired reproductive rights too. The fact that human reproductive processes are, in many instances, now technologically-modified, managed and marketed compels the political, economic, cultural and social redefinition of reproduction itself.

The emergence of new assisted reproduction, for example, through *in-vitro* fertilization, (IVF), removes the conceptive process from "nature", leading towards a potential crisis in beliefs about parenthood, procreation and kinship.

International scientific collaboration in the fields of human reproduction and genetics has made it difficult to establish boundaries around the "technological enablement" provided by assisted reproduction because the "natural facts" have lost a certain degree of authority: "In place of the order of nature... technology has become foundational".

A particularly refreshing characteristic of this richly textured collection is its irreverence throughout to received wisdom and current political tides. There is a commitment to analyze and express ideas on current political issues from a staunchly feminist vantage point.

Most contributors stretch dominant social ideologies and challenge conventional thought and practices. New concepts such as "stratified reproduction", "euphemized violence" and "imagined futures" are invoked to explain the complexities and increasingly stratified nature of reproduction and the different meanings it holds for different classes of women. New terms and concepts such as these are needed to capture complex social realities and transformations in a changing transnational world.

Sensitivity to issues of race, ethnicity, class and the differential treatment that is inherent in reproductive politics is woven into all the essays. There is a keen perception of and intellectual resistance to women's bodies being used to fulfill multiple political agendas.

Jael Silliman

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Nuclear Arms

NUCLEAR WASTELANDS: A Global Guide to Nuclear Weapons Production and Its Health and Environmental Effects, edited by Arjun Makhijani, Howard Hue and Katherine Yih, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995, \$55/£34.95 (hb) 666pp. ISBN 0-262-13307-5

The ending of the Cold War in the late 1980s not only halted the crazed momentum of the nuclear arms race; it also broke down some of the secrecy surrounding the atomic industry's gargantuan operations. *Nuclear Wastelands* examines the legacy of nuclear weapons production for more than 50 years inside hundreds of grim, barbed-wire-fenced compounds. It shows that the pressures to produce nuclear warheads against what were seen as vital deadlines led to an appalling disregard for human health and the integrity of the environment.

The authors estimate that at least two million people have been involved in various aspects of producing nuclear weapons worldwide. These include miners inhaling dust at dozens of uranium mines; workers in the enrichment, processing and plutonium production plants; and thousands more who had to handle and dispose of the radioactive waste generated throughout the process. And, of course, there are the people who, often not realising what was going on, lived in the vicinity of an atomic site.

The freshest evidence in the book comes from the former Soviet Union, which has historically been covered in the thickest blanket of secrecy. At Chelyabinsk, the country's largest plutonium production complex, radioactive waste poured into nearby lakes and rivers during the 1950s. At the exit from the plant's discharge pipe, readings were so high that they gave an adult a lethal dose of radiation within an hour.

Lake Karachay is now judged to be the world's most radioactively contaminated body of water. It is steadily being backfilled with rubble, but lorry drivers have just 12 minutes to dump their load before exceeding the maximum "safe" annual radiation dose. Since much delayed publicity was given to a 1957 accident in which a waste tank exploded and 10,000 people had to be evacuated, Chelyabinsk has been designated an "ecological disaster zone".

An equally vast clean-up operation is required in the United States, which has accounted for over half the 70,000 nuclear warheads produced worldwide. Apart from the leaks and discharges into the environment from notorious sites like Hanford and Savannah River, thousands of drums of waste are still waiting for a final resting place. At the same time, hundreds of US citizens have been the unwitting subjects of experiments to judge the effects of nuclear weapons.

Apart from the two "superpowers", *Nuclear Wastelands* also has chapters on France, Britain and China, as well as those states in "unofficial" control of nuclear arsenals. Although written by different contributors, each section opens with a useful history of the development of nuclear weapons activities in that country, followed by a description of each of the main sites, their environmental impact, and a clear list of all the facilities.

Overview chapters, meanwhile, deal with the processes involved and the health hazards. One important section deals with the mining of the basic element of nuclear weaponry, uranium, an aspect which is often forgotten and which involves some of the worst health risks. In Eastern Europe, where mines were often worked by forced labour, "pyramids" of black mining waste are still turning sheep grey and blowing dust into the surrounding villages. As in other countries, the tailings have been used in construction materials, involving the risk that their burden of radon gas will be discharged and inhaled by vulnerable lungs.

Despite its strong title, this is a cautious and extremely well-referenced book which makes no wild allegations. It is a vital research tool for anyone interested in the nuclear state. The lack of full, publicly-available documentation on exposure levels or medical records at nuclear sites and the long latency period for some cancers means that it is still difficult to judge the full health effects of nuclear activities.

Nonetheless, on the basis of currently-accepted relationships between radiation exposure and health risk, it is clear that very large numbers of people all over the world have suffered numerous ailments, including premature death from cancer. The irony is that this damage has been done to the very people whom the weapons were supposed to protect.

Crispin Aubrey

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Overlooked Epidemic

PREVENTING BREAST CANCER: The Politics of an Epidemic by Dr Cathy Read, Pandora, London, 1995, £7.99/\$13 (pb) 250pp. ISBN 0-04-440909-5

Three hundred women die every week from breast cancer in the UK. This toll has crept up gradually since the early 1950s and is now of epidemic proportions. Cathy Read's book is indicative of women's fight back against what seems to be an inexorable disease. We have tended to behave as if breast cancer is an inevitable burden that women have to bear in silence. As Read says of the disease:

"It is the leading cause of death among young women aged 35-54. These women leave young families, devastated partners and successful careers. The older women who die in far greater numbers from breast cancer have not retired from society; they are partners, carers and beloved grandmothers".

The diagnosis of Cathy Read's mother with breast cancer inspired her to write the book. A well-established science writer, she has lucidly explained both the scientific complexities and the societal implications of the disease to produce an excellent and accessible reference book which addresses all the potential causes of breast cancer.

The recognized risk factors for breast cancer are believed to be age, family history, age of first period and of menopause, obesity, a high fat diet and alcohol consumption. These risk factors are thought to account for approximately 3 in 10 cases of breast cancer, leaving at least 7 out of 10 cases for which there are no known causes.

Environmental factors are conspicuous by their absence from the list of risk factors, in spite of well-documented evidence in some cases and strong probability in others. Indeed, breast cancer appears to be caused by many aspects of modern society.

Environmental influences considered in the book include persistent synthetic chemicals including pesticides, especially those which mimic or disrupt oestrogen's action in the body, ionizing radiation, and electromagnetic radiation, from power lines, for instance.

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend the complex effects of so many chemicals and influences acting together, the case for precautionary action is overwhelming, for example, banning suspect chemicals which are also associated with other male and female reproductive disorders such as falling sperm counts. However, the prevailing attitude to such chemicals is to wait for scientific proof.

The medical establishment seems unwilling to address causes of breast cancer in general, and in particular to resent questions about chemical causes, while underestimating the ability of women to change their lifestyle or diet. Whenever causes are mentioned, individual "lifestyle" factors are emphasized and societal ones ignored. Women have rightly condemned this victim-blaming approach.

Cathy Read makes a plea for addressing the societal causes of breast cancer. Late childbearing is associated with a greater risk of breast cancer, but in developed countries education and career prospects suffer if women have children in their early twenties. Breast feeding is believed to lower a woman's risk of developing breast cancer, but is inadequately encouraged in Britain and is often unwelcome in public.

As Read says, the means for making healthy choices genuinely available to women — consuming locally-produced organic foods and vegetables, taking affordable regular exercise, having access to proper childcare facilities — lie with the government as well as individuals and thus are a political matter.

Women are not helpless in the face of rising breast cancer rates as Western lifestyles are increasingly adopted worldwide. As Read points out, "If the rate of breast cancer has gone up, then it can come down." In the United States, activists have succeeded in diverting a considerable portion of the defence budget into breast cancer research, including investigation of its environmental causes.

But little has been done in Britain in terms of "real" prevention, while most of the charities that support women with breast cancer are not militant about the causes of the disease.

Read quotes Devra Lee Davis, Senior Adviser to the US Secretary of Health, who says:

"One may speculate about why so little attention has been paid to efforts to prevent a disease that afflicts so many women, but the fact

PREVENTING BREAST CANCER THE POLITICS OF AN EPIDEMIC



DR CATHY READ

of this deficit remains glaringly clear. Prevention is less glamorous than treatment and fewer profit financially if it succeeds".

This is why the prevention "war" is at present being fought *inside* the body. It is easier and cheaper than tackling the real problem while fat profits are to be made by surgeons, pharmaceutical and mammography companies.

Prevention entails woman being active and consulted in all areas that affect their future, treatment and aftercare. It should include positive information on affordable, accessible preventative means relating to diet, treatment, exercise *and* the environment.

Cathy Read suggests that eating more organic vegetables while cutting down on meat and dairy products and alcohol may offer some protection against breast cancer. Such a change of diet would be a less wasteful use of land and would spur a move away from pesticide-dependent agriculture.

Preventing Breast Cancer puts the disease in its political and environmental context and combats the individual private victim syndrome which threatens women, whether the suspected cause is lifestyle or chemicals. It empowers women to deal with the causes, as many are beginning to do by campaigning for pesticide-free food and promoting organic produce and by setting up supportive and campaigning organizations.

Breast cancer is a disease horribly symbolic of women's position in society. Once

women have breast cancer, they are at the mercy of mainly male medical expertise. Women need to come out of the closet about the disease, a frightening thing to do in a society that worships breasts but only in pairs. Women need to regain power by challenging accepted medical practice and reducing the need for pharmaceutical and surgical butchery.

Ann Link and Helen Lynn

Ann Link and Helen Lynn are respectively Science and Health Coordinators at the Women's Environmental Network, Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London N5 2EA.

Can't See the Trees

THE DYING OF THE TREES: The Pandemic in America's Forests by Charles E. Little, Viking/Penguin, New York, 1995, \$22.95 (hb) 275pp. ISBN 0-670-84135-8

If you read US newspapers or magazines looking for information about forests, you tend to find stories only about the destruction of rainforests in South America or about the logging battle raging in the Pacific Northwest over the spotted owl. Except for these two issues, forests do not make the news.

But trees are sick and dying everywhere in the United States. If this seems to be an extreme statement, this book will convince you otherwise.

The Dying of the Trees gives a detailed picture — from New England to Oregon and California, from Alaska to Florida, across the upper midwest, across the southern border states, and even into the desert southwest where the giant saguaro cactus is in major decline — of sick and dying trees.

Why is this happening? The reasons are many and varied. In New England, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, it is a combination of acid rain and clearcuts. In California, it is killer smog. In Arizona and New Mexico, it is excessive ultraviolet light filtering through the earth's damaged ozone shield. In other places, it is pesticides, or toxic heavy metals released by burning coal and oil. In Alaska and Florida, it is rising temperatures and rising sea levels from global warming. In Colorado, Oregon and Washington, it is

destructive forestry practices, such as clearcut logging and fire suppression, that leave forests weakened, unable to withstand extremes of weather or attacks by insects and fungi.

In most places, it is probably various combinations of all these factors. Scientists are now conducting studies that may explain the complicated causes of widespread tree death. But if action is postponed until they have completely described the problems, the answers may come too late to do any good.

And answers come slowly. Hubert Vogelmann, a botanist at the University of Vermont, wanted to study an undisturbed forest. In 1965, he made a thorough survey of Camel's Hump, a 4,083-foot peak in the Green Mountains in Vermont. As far as he knew, he was describing a healthy ecosystem. He measured the types and sizes of the trees, and various other aspects of the ecosystem.

As Vogelmann periodically re-surveyed Camel's Hump, a pattern began to emerge. The trees were dying. His 1979 survey, compared to the 1965 baseline study, showed a 48 per cent loss of red spruce; a 73 per cent loss of mountain maple; a 49 per cent loss of striped maple; and a 35 per cent loss of sugar maple.

By examining tree rings and other studies, Vogelmann showed that the health of Camel's Hump had begun to decline during 1950-1960. The most likely cause is acid rain.

Acid rain does not just affect trees; it also affects the soil and thus the entire ecosystem. Soil contains a large amount of aluminium silicates. Acid rain dissolves the silicates, thereby releasing the aluminium which is taken up by plant roots. The roots then clog, preventing the plant from taking up adequate nutrients and water. Trees are weakened, and they may then fall prey to extreme cold, or to insects or pathogens.

Acid rain also releases and washes away other minerals — calcium, magnesium, phosphorus — leaving the soil depleted of nutrients.

Acid rain kills off portions of the detritus food chain — all the microscopic creatures that "compost" leaves, twigs, pine needles and dead branches into soil. Because the detritus food chain is damaged by acid rain, forest "litter" builds up on the floor of the forest and prevents new saplings from taking root. Furthermore, the litter promotes the growth of ferns, which give off substances that inhibit the growth of red spruce saplings, among others.

Given the high rates of tree death, and the widespread nature of the problem — it is occurring in every US state — one would think that the community of botanists, forest ecosystem specialists, and US Forest Service employees would be up in arms, advocating change. One would be mistaken.

Throughout *The Dying of the Trees*, Charles Little cites studies and statements by the US Forest Service which downplay the significance of tree disease and death. In 1991, for example, the Procter Maple Research Center at University of Vermont pinpointed acid rain and other air pollution as an important cause of decline of sugar maples in Vermont: "We think we are looking at the early stages of an epidemic problem," the Center's report stated.

The following year, however, the US Forest Service issued a report maintaining that 90 per cent of the sugar maples surveyed were healthy and the overall numbers and volume of sugar maples were increasing. In fact, the Forest Service had counted only the standing dead trees, not the dead trees lying on the ground. Says David Marvin who owns a maple sugar farm in Vermont:

"I am very concerned that a great deal of forest research is funded by the federal government, by chemical companies, and forest industry companies — and it's very difficult for people who depend on that funding to stick their necks out or to help influence policy that might go counter to what the funders are interested in. Many scientists I talk to will not publicly say anything about the connection between air pollution and forest decline, but privately, to a person, they tell me, yes, we've got a problem."

A new candour — and a continuing candour — among scientists and foresters will be essential to counter the epidemic of tree deaths. But in addition we need to recognize that there are many causes of tree death. We need first and foremost to study and emulate nature, to learn to live within natural limits, and to respect the right of non-human species to inhabit the planet. For starters, we should cut waste, not trees. If we don't take these lessons to heart — and soon — the trees will survive but probably we will not.

Peter Montague

Peter Montague is the editor of *Rachel's Environmental & Health Weekly* and the monthly *Environment & Health Background Report*.

BOOKS DIGEST

- **FAITH AND CREDIT:** *The World Bank's Secular Empire*, by Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli, Penguin, Harmondsworth, (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado) 1994, £6.99/\$16.95 (pb), 282pp. ISBN 0-14-024101-9.

The World Bank remains for most people a largely unknown institution, even though it has wielded immense political power over the Third World for the past 50 years. Examining its policies, internal culture and the interests it serves, the authors compare the Bank to the medieval Church and argue that it relies on hierarchy and a rejection of dissension to promote free market economics worldwide.

- **THE CONSERVER SOCIETY:** *Alternatives for Sustainability*, by Ted Trainer, Zed Books, London and New Jersey, 1995, £14.95/\$19.95 (pb) 246pp. ISBN 1-85649-276-1.

Resource-intensive Western lifestyles are unsustainable — but what can we do about it other than recycling and taking the bus? The author details not only easy changes in everyday lives concerning food and agriculture, housing, and water and sewerage, but also wider changes in the way the economy is structured, energy used and communities organized.

- **ECONOMISTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT:** *What the Top Economists Say About the Environment*, by Carla Ravaioli, Zed Books, London and New Jersey, 1995, £11.95/\$17.50 (pb), 212pp. ISBN 1-85649-278-8.

Why does one read cries of alarm about unsustainable levels of air pollution caused by car exhaust emissions and equally alarmed cries about the depressed automobile market in one and the same newspaper? The author put such common-sense questions to influential economists. Letting their replies speak for themselves, she notes the economists' ignorance, scepticism and lack of interest in environmental issues.

- **WINGS OF DEATH:** *Nuclear Pollution and Human Health*, by Chris Busby, Green Audit (Wales) Ltd, 17 Prospect St, Aberystwyth SY23 1JJ, 1995, £10.99 (overseas £15/\$20) (pb) 340pp. ISBN 1-897761-03-1.

When he compared official cancer incidence rates in Wales and England over the past 30 years, Chris Busby found a much higher incidence in Wales, a difference he attributes to low-level radiation. His book is an exhaustive study of the health effects of low-level radiation and a critique of why governments and industry refuse to acknowledge them.

- **THE GREENPEACE BOOK OF WATER**, by Klaus Lanz, David & Charles, Devon, 1995, £16.99 (hb), 164pp. ISBN 0-7153-0425-9.

An accessible and thorough text provides an overview of water "crises" worldwide — floods, droughts, shortages and pollution — and their human-made causes such as the demands of industry, the construction of large dams and irrigated monocultures. Combining these descriptions with 150 colour photographs makes for an unusual coffee-table book.

- **BAD HARVEST?:** *The Timber Trade and the Degradation of the World's Forests*, by Nigel Dudley, Jean-Paul Jeanrenaud and Francis Sullivan, Earthscan, London, 1995, £12.95/\$19.95 (pb), 204pp. ISBN 1-85383-188-3.

An incisive and detailed account of how the international timber trade has destroyed and degraded tropical, temporal and boreal forests. Keeping pace with globalized markets, the book details the timber industry's moves towards fewer and larger companies; vertical integration within companies; and the growing role of companies based in the South. Also explored is the impact of the pulp and paper industry — pulp, paper and board consume half the world's annual commercial cut of timber.



Letters

Environmental Sell Out

The article "Democracy for Hire", (*The Ecologist*, Sept/Oct 1995) may have shocked many, but not those of us who have watched mainstream environmental groups compromise and sell out because they have thrown their lot in with those whose largesse supports them — congressional committee leaders, mass media, corporate givers and wealthy foundations anxious to give funds to only the most reputable (ie. non-controversial and appeasing) organizations.

As a result, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) between them probably monopolize half of all foundation grants in the US. Staff and board members of these groups either sit on foundation boards or have cultivated close relationships with them in order to influence how and where these foundations spend their money.

What this means to underfunded, grassroots and less conciliatory environmental groups is obvious in financial terms. In political terms, it means that when government, the press or corporations need credibility on an environmental issue, they quickly turn to these same groups, whose name, status, influence and opinions are interpreted as representing the "environmental community" — when, in most cases, the exact opposite is true.

An example of this took place in New York. Years ago, the Department of Transportation targeted a parcel of vacant, publicly-owned land on the South Bronx waterfront as a freight centre, where freight trains could unload cargo for local distribution by truck and barge, and vice versa. The Department spent over \$300 million on upgrading the incoming rail line. Such a freight centre would contribute to cleaner air (the area nearby has the highest asthma rate in New York City), decreased truck traffic, decreased energy

consumption, a revival of freight transport, local job creation, and a sound use of waterfront for water-dependent uses rather than luxury high-rise housing or "yuppy" commercial development.

But a politically, well-connected developer prevailed on the Department of Transportation to renege on its commitment to the freight centre and to publicly-owned and public interest uses of the site. Instead, the Department signed a 99-year lease with the developer to construct an industrial park on the site.

The developer knew that it stood a better chance of getting public and media support for the project if it had "the environmental community" on its side. Thus, a representative of the Empire State Economic Development Authority, which was responsible for privatizing the site, contacted Alan Hershkowitz of the Natural Resources Defense Council and proposed that the industrial park could include a de-inking and pulp plant which utilized recycled newsprint. Hershkowitz jumped at the opportunity and sought some Swedish sponsors for the plant. Well-placed news articles demonstrated how the giveaway of this land to a private developer, with gigantic subsidies that would effectively balance out the developer's entire investment (subsidies which were never mentioned), would be beneficial and environmentally sound.

Community groups and nearby residents disagreed. Together with the Urban Environmental Alliance, they went to court to challenge the deal. They won the first round but lost the appeal. The dispute will now go to the state appellate court. NRDC was used, in effect, as a battleaxe to split the community; NRDC was supported by a well-funded local development group, Banana Kelly, but opposed by the South Bronx Clean Air Coalition, the Business/Labor/Community Coalition, and other smaller groups and individuals.

To counter NRDC's bad "image" from the opposition, the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* ran extensive favourable coverage of the plan. All the cogent facts were omitted, and stress placed on NRDC's credibility, while the leading lawyer and opponent was dismissed as a "rail buff".

One omitted fact was that the freight centre had been the idea of the Department of Transportation, not the opposing "rail buff".

Another was that there are several alternate sites for a pulp plant in the South Bronx (but only one for the freight centre). NRDC rejected them all, claiming that they were "contaminated". In fact, they rejected

the other sites for one main reason: by locating on publicly-owned land, they could avoid any in-depth environmental review and the plan for the industrial park and plant could be expedited.

NRDC's Hershkowitz has blasted opponents for misusing the environmental process. But the fact that this site is NRDC's preferred site because it will escape environmental review undermines his accusation.

In addition, the state's own environmental consultants produced studies clearly indicating that in terms of environmental impact, the industrial park would have far graver impact than the freight centre. This report and several others were deliberately withheld from the public (and from the courts too, apparently).

Community, grassroots and regional environmental groups who do not want to appease corporations, media or congress are thus at a dual disadvantage: they are deprived of funds because NRDC and EDF get most of the foundation funding — and NRDC and EDF get most of the funding because funders know they will be non-confrontational and work within the system (for example, EDF's campaign to get McDonald's to switch to paper trays instead of styrofoam). When NRDC and EDF get favourable press treatment for their willingness to "work with corporations", the funders can feel justified in having supported these groups.

A NRDC representative recently stated baldly: "we don't need to do anything different". That statement indicates that the speaker is either out of touch with reality or actively working to subvert any movement for real social change.

Lorna Salzman

29 Middagh Street
Brooklyn NY 11201, USA

CASTing Light

It was with disappointment that I read the article "Democracy for Hire: Public Relations and Environmental Movements" (*The Ecologist*, Sept/Oct 1995) by John C. Stauber and Sheldon Rampton. The characterization of CAST was inaccurate and raises questions about your integrity.

The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) was created in 1972 by scientific societies, not by Shandwick. Last year, CAST contracted with Dorf and Stanton (now Shandwick) to review CAST's communications efforts and to assist in media assistance for a Sustainable Agricultural conference in Washington, DC.

CAST does receive support from corporate sustaining members; however, the description in your article was grossly overstated and quite misleading. More than half CAST's total support comes from other than corporate sponsorship, namely through individual memberships, professional scientific societies, foundations and other gifts. The CAST Board of Directors are the governing body of the organization and comprise representatives of member scientific societies. The member scientific societies are the heart of CAST.

Because of your inaccurate portrayal of this organization, I naturally view the other statements in your article with suspicion.

Richard E Stuckey
Executive Vice President
Council for Agricultural Science and Technology
 4420 West Lincoln Way
 Ames, IA 50014-3347, USA

John C. Stauber replies . . .

The lengthy article which appeared in The Ecologist was excerpted from our new book Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry, Common Courage Press, 1995.

The book makes clear that we are well

aware that CAST was established in 1972, and not by Shandwick PR. Below are the book's two paragraphs on p.135 which refer to CAST and from which was edited the mention of CAST in The Ecologist:

"No doubt Allen Finch did see Earth Day as a tremendous 'gift', much the way a fox would relish managing the chicken coop. Finch's work for Shandwick includes personally representing one of the oldest, most notorious anti-environment front groups, called the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST). Founded in 1972, CAST is funded by hundreds of companies invested in genetically-engineered foods, agricultural chemicals, food additives and corporate factory farming, including Dow, General Mills, Land O'Lakes, Ciba-Geigy, Archer Daniels Midland, Monsanto, Philip Morris, and UniRoyal. According to O'Dwyer's PR Services, Allen Finch personally works to establish CAST as 'the source for public policy-makers and news media on environmental issues'.

CAST is a classic industry front group claiming 'to provide current, unbiased scientific information concerning food and agriculture'. In fact, for over two decades CAST has vigorously and publicly defended and promoted pesticide-contaminated foods, irradiated fruits and vegetables, and the use of hormones and drugs on farm animals. The hundreds of industry and university researchers who belong to CAST are often on the receiving end of large grants and other payments from the same agribusiness corporations that subsidize CAST."

As an observer of CAST since its inception, I know of its function, so critical to its corporate funders, as a third party apologist for agribusiness technologies, products and practices.

You might not like our book's depiction of CAST, but it is indeed an accurate criticism of your organization.



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Editor: Alan Holland, Department of Philosophy, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YG, UK. Fax 0 (+44) 1524 592503

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Corrections

The Katse dam described in Korinna Horta's article, "The Mountain Kingdom's White Oil: The Lesotho Highlands Water Project", (*The Ecologist*, Nov/Dec 1995, p.227), was closed on 20 October 1995 (not 1985).

In Tom Hellberg's article "Incineration by the Back Door: Cement Kilns as Waste Sinks" (*The Ecologist*, Nov/Dec 1995, pp.232-237), the photograph on p.236 depicts the cement plant at Barrington operated by Rugby Cement, not Castle Cement. Croda (not Creda) Solvents has opted not to supply waste-derived fuels.

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DIARY DATES

16 March 1996: **ALARM UK NATIONAL CONFERENCE**, Queens Walk Community Centre, Nottingham, UK. 11am-5pm. £12 per person, including vegetarian lunch, tea and coffee. To book, contact ALARM UK, 9/10 College Terrace, London, E3 5AN. Tel: 0181-983 3572.

16 March 1996: **ECO SPRING CONFERENCE: The party options for voters concerned about the environment**. Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, 10am-4pm. For more information, contact George Williamson, Campaign for Political Ecology, 42 Rose Terrace, Horsforth, Leeds, LS18 4QA. Tel: 0113-259 0812.

16-19 April 1996: **FRESHWATER EUROPE 96: An Integrated Approach to Management of Europe's Freshwater Resources and Hydrological Extremes in Europe's Rivers and Lakes**, The Battleby Conference Centre, Redgorton, Perth, SCOTLAND. For more information, contact Dick Playfair, Playfair Walker, 3 Winton Loan, Edinburgh, SCOTLAND. Tel: 0131-445 5570; Fax: 0131-445 1006; E-mail: playfair@easynet.co.uk.

26-30 April 1996: **SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES STRATEGY CONFERENCE**, Victoria Conference Center, Victoria, British Columbia, CANADA. For more information, contact Gino Lucchetti, King County Surface Water Management, 700 5th Ave, Suite 2200, Seattle, Washington 98104, USA. Tel: +1 (206) 296 8366; Fax: +1 (206) 296 0192.

12-17 May 1996: **THE 15th COMMONWEALTH FORESTRY CONFERENCE**, Forestry in a Changing Political Environment: Challenges for the 21st Century at Victoria Falls, ZIMBABWE. For further details, contact Libby Jones, Standing Committee on Commonwealth Forestry, Forestry Commission, 231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh EH12 7AT, SCOTLAND. Tel: 0131-334 0303; Fax: 0131-334 0442.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Society for Ecological Restoration, 1996 Annual Conference, **PAVED TO PROTECTED: Restoration in the Urban/Rural Context**, from 17-22 June 1996. Contact SER '96 Conference, Blake Hall, Rutgers, The State University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903-0231, USA.

BOOKS

ECO Directory of Environmental Databases in the UK 1995/6. Comprehensive guide to computerized environmental information sources in the UK. A reference book for all environmentalists - not just those with computers. Contact Monica Barlow or Hugo Nieuwenhuizen, ECO Environmental Information Trust, 10-12 Picton Street, Montpellier, Bristol, BS6 5QA. Tel: 0117-942 0162; Fax: 0117-942 0164; Email: ecotrust@gn.apc.org.

ROMA/GYPSIES: A European Minority, by Jean-Pierre Liegeois and Nicolae Gheorghe, a new report from Minority Rights Group. 36pp, A4 wirebound, £4.95/US\$8.95. ISBN 1-897693-16-8. For further information, contact Angela Warren, Tel: 0171-978 9498, Ext.103.

WORLDWATCH PAPERS

NO. 126

Hilary F French. **PARTNERSHIP FOR THE PLANET: An Environmental Agenda for the United Nations**. 71pp, £3.

NO. 127

Aaron Sachs. **ECO-JUSTICE: Linking Human Rights and the Environment**. 68pp, £3.

Please note that all orders for Worldwatch Papers should now be sent to The Ecologist, Agriculture House, Bath Road, Sturminster Newton, Dorset, DT10 1DU, UK.

NEW MAJORITY: A New Research Report, looks at immigration into Tibet and considers the threat to its political, economic and cultural future. Contact Tibet Support Group, 9 Islington Green, London N1 2XH. Tel: 0171-359 7575; Fax: 0171-354 1026.

FIRE AND FORGET: An Information Pack on the World Arms Trade. Yvonne Burgess, John Henderson and Victoria Wild, (eds.) Common Weal, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EL, SCOTLAND. 1995. 24pp, £4.50. Only sterling cheques accepted. Payment must accompany order. List of contact organizations, illustrations.

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Tim Lang and Colin Hines, **THE NEW PROTECTIONISM: Protecting the Future Against Free Trade**. An important book which shows why we must protect our communities, their natural environments and their local economies against market forces which GATT would unleash on them. 184pp, paperback, 1993, £10.95.

Ralph Nader et al, **THE CASE AGAINST FREE TRADE, GATT, NAFTA and the Globalization of Corporate Power**. Essays by 16 leading activists examine the ideological roots of free trade, discuss trade negotiations and detail the devastating effects these agreements will have on communities and the environment worldwide. 230pp, paperback, 1993, £6.00.

Marcus Colchester, **SLAVE AND ENCLAVE: The Political Ecology of Equatorial Africa**. This new report from the World Rainforest Movement shows that urgent help is needed to protect the tropical forests in Equatorial Africa from unscrupulous dealers and suggests more community control of forest-based enterprises. 75pp, paperback, 1994, £4.00.

Jerry Mander, **IN THE ABSENCE OF THE SACRED: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations**. A critique of Western technological society and its many specific technological forms, from television and computers to genetics and robotics, as having failed to live up to their well-advertised Utopian promise and instead brought us to the brink of environmental catastrophe. 445pp, paperback, 1992, £7.50.

Marcus Colchester and Larry Lohmann, **THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND AND THE FATE OF THE FORESTS**. Based on six countries, this book illustrates the complexity of the problem and discusses the future options to avoid total destruction of the ecosystems. 389pp, paperback, 1993, £9.00.

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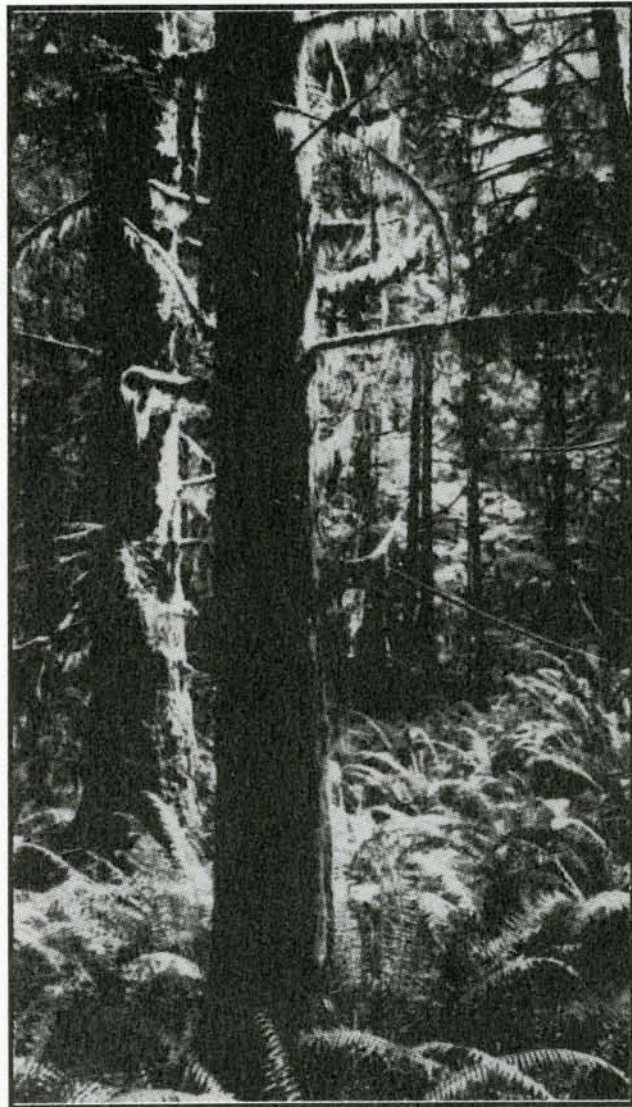
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Annual subscription rates for this quarterly publication: \$20/"Living Lightly," \$30/ Individual, \$60/ Institution. Rates are Canadian or US dollars. Add \$20 for overseas airmail. Contact the Managing Editor, Ecoforestry Institute Society, PO Box 5070, Station B, Victoria, BC, Canada, V8R 6N3. Tel: (604) 388-5459. Fax: (604) 388-5123. Email: eis@islandnet.com.