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Analysis: Rich, Poor Countries Must Work Jointly to Save Biosphere (Part 2)

by Guest

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Public resistance to International Monetary Fund dictates may slow the rate at which Third World populations are impoverished. But no fundamental solution is possible without the cooperation of the developed world.

Some suggestions bear mentioning.

First, the Third World's aggregate foreign debt, currently estimated at about \$1.2 trillion, should be canceled. The lion's share of the debt is unpayable in any case.

Second, major multilateral lending agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, must establish new criteria for awarding financial assistance. The major objective should be the creation of modern and competitive industrial and agricultural productive systems.

Third, social welfare services should be expanded to maintain a healthy, well- educated population.

Whatever cost this may entail for advanced industrialized nations, so be it. Ecology is evidently not the only issue. Politically, the huge standard-of-living gap between First and Third worlds cannot be ignored. The effort to set things right must be global. Since World War II some 20 million people have been killed in wars that reflect attempts to solve on a local basis conflicts which are fundamentally international in scope. This figure does not include the wars in which the superpowers have been directly involved (Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan).

The current crisis in the Persian Gulf is yet another example of the fruitless and self-destructive attempt by individual nations to seek local solutions. The creation of an integrated world economy would create widespread benefits, not the least of which would be a reduced demographic growth rate. In the advanced industrialized nations population growth tends toward zero. In the Third World rapid population growth is propelled by impoverishment. The most abundant resource, and often the only resource, controlled by the poor is labor. Birth control pills and condoms cannot modify this fact of life.

Although large-scale application of modern technologies may be necessary for integration of Third World nations into the global economy, such efforts are likely insufficient. Large nations such as Brazil, Argentina and India remain little more than second cousins within the international economy. Difficulties faced by small nations are even more daunting. As Mikhail Gorbachev emphasized in a speech reported by the New York Times (08/13/90), all nations must be integrated into a global society and economy.

Anything less will lead to economic, political and ecological disaster in the Third World and, consequently, in the First World as well. It is widely recognized that the Cold War is directly but not exclusively responsible for the Soviet Union's economic and political difficulties. The impact of the Cold War on the US has also been devastating, if not as well-reviewed in the media. Washington's huge deficit, deterioration of the nation's infrastructure, and numerous ecological crises most notably in and around nuclear complexes have imposed huge costs and limitations for the present and subsequent generations.

US citizens had just begun examining the potentials of the so-called peace dividend to address some of the problems mentioned here, when the Gulf crisis erupted to upset budget calculations. Unless solutions are defined and implemented for the problems of the Third World, there will be other such crises. First World nations must deal not only with pollution, but with related issues stemming from the plight of Third World nations. There is no alternative for the planet as a whole, politically or ecologically.

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