UNICEF calls for a new ethic which "ensures that the protection of children has first call on the concerns and the capacities of adult society in times of turbulence and transition." This ethic is needed everywhere, UNICEF states, for in the last ten years, Great Britain has had a doubling of the number of homeless families. In the United States, "one-third of Hispanic Americans and one-half of African-Americans are living below the accepted poverty line, as are 40% of the children of New York, the financial capital of the world."

Adjustment with a human face

What is truly outrageous is that UNICEF thoroughly details how unjust debt obligations cause death—but it then demands that poor countries abide with the genocidal economic perspective that historically fostered death by forbidding any advanced agricultural, industrial, or housing solutions which would modernize these countries and wipe out their high death rates overnight. What UNICEF fails to mention is that the IMF-World Bank imposed and enforced backwardness on these countries condemns tens of millions of people to die with every hostile turn of nature. Consider the yearly floods that ravage India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, simultaneously destroying tens of thousands of the population and precious crops—these tragedies can be stopped. Consider the famines and drought that whipped through these nations and China and Africa—these too can be defeated. But, that is not UNICEF'a aim, even though these *preventable* tragedies contribute enormously to malnutrition and death. Approximately 40% of all young children who die in the world each year, 45% of the children who are malnourished, 35% of those who are not in school, and over 50% of those who live in absolute poverty, are to be found in just three countries—India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

True, UNICEF calls for some form of debt relief or loan discount, but its campaign is called "Adjustment with a Human Face"—Africans will just have to "adjust" to evil economic policies. "The blame" for this crisis, UNICEF says, "lies with irresponsible borrowers and irresponsible lenders, and with international economic arrangements, including trade regulations and commodity prices, over which the developing world has little control but within which it must earn its living."

UNICEF is dedicated to working within the existing undeveloped structure of these societies. Rather than focusing on producing new wealth, it wants to shift around the crumbs available. The UNICEF writers launch a diatribe against training new doctors, arguing that it is more cost-effective to train primary health care workers who will remain in rural areas. They complain about unemployed physicians in Mexico and elsewhere—implying there is a surplus, but in a plummeting economy—again imposed by debt, while there is a critical need for expanded medical services. To get basic, cheap medical care into the countryside, UNICEF wants to shift health expenditures from city hospitals to "meeting the needs and investing in the capacities of the poor." As if the poor somehow don't need or deserve advanced diagnostic equipment or laboratory tests or doctors! Instead of advanced universities to produce that country's future leaders, UNICEF wants the one-teacher schools with a basic primary education, "accessible to the children of the poor majority

After record cold spell, another oil hoax?

In just a few days during what has turned out to be a [illegible] December ever, a new energy "crisis" seems to have gripped the nation. Almost overnight, consumers have been hit with skyrocketing energy prices, startling shortages of heating fuel, and rolling electricity brownouts and blackouts.

Wholesale prices for heating oil, natural gas, and propane have nearly doubled, with consumers in the Northeast already paying 50% more for oil, natural gas, and propane. In many areas, propane has simply run out; suppliers are enforcing de facto rationing, restricting the amounts that even residential customers can purchase, while jacking prices way up.

Is this overnight energy crisis real? Or are the oil and gas companies pulling a new oil hoax, like those of 1973-74 and 1979?

According to the American Petroleum Institute and other energy experts, the United States has an ample supply of natural gas and both crude and refined oil, including heating fuels. Natural gas stocks at the beginning of winter were at an all-time high of 7 trillion cubic feet, sufficient to meet any winter demand.

Heating oil stocks as of Nov. 1 stood at 122 million barrels, virtually the same quantity as last year. Although consumption of petroleum products is exceeding the amount refined, the difference is only about 1.8 million barrels per day, which has been readily offset by imports.

Yet with the intensely cold December weather increasing demand some 30%, heating fuel marketers and local distributors have run short, and are scrambling to find fuel anywhere at almost any price.

There is a scam here, but it's not because of the oil industry per se, and certainly not because of local distributors. The local fuel supply shortage is indeed real; suppliers really don't have sufficient fuel on hand despite the ample production. The shortage is being caused strictly by the insane "free market" speculative financial policies that have otherwise ruined the entire U.S. economy.

Prior to the 1973 oil hoax, virtually all fuel energy financial transactions were on the basis of long-term contracts with prices based on cost of production and more-or-less-established profit margins of the various companies in the chain of production and supply. Distributors would stock up on heating fuel over the summer at discount rates, and simply keep on hand for future use any unused heating fuel.

This system depended on a relatively stable price range for oil and gas. After 1973, everything changed. Oil became a speculative investment, its price no longer grounded on real cost and profit requirements, but on what "the market" would bear. "The market" has become the crapshoot known as the "futures." In the United States, it is centered in the New York Mercantile Exchange, where more than 99% of the contracts traded have nothing to do with actual supplies of oil and gas, but are simply financial paper betting on the future price of the commodity.

'Free market' causes supply breakdown

This market is dominated by the major oil companies, but also by specialist oil-trading firms like Phibro and J. Aron, which are subsidiaries of Salomon Brothers and Goldman Sachs, two of the largest New York brokerage and investment houses. And it is the brokerage houses who control the Merc and who have increasingly used the market to govern the delivery and price of oil actually produced.

With the price of heating fuel drifting downward in recent years, and with the potential for losses having also jacked up their financing charges—often to 15% or more—fuel distributors cannot afford to hold it in storage and suffer losses. After several years of mild winters, distributors this year have generally "bet" that they could get by with minimal stocks. They bet wrong, and they—as well as the consumer—are now victimized by the rising costs of Wall Street's futures market speculation on the weather-induced shortage.

Even if energy prices were somehow stabilized, the insane financial policies of the last 15-20 years have virtually halted major capital investment by the energy industry. We have reached a point where current temporary power and fuel shortages will soon become chronic, with the United States subject to the fuel disruptions and power outages typical of Third World nations.

Oil refineries have been working at nearly full capacity for several years, and have just barely managed to keep pace with consumption requirements. Between obsolescence and unprofitability, some of these refineries are no longer in service, and the overworked remainder is becoming subject to bigger and more frequent breakdowns.

Incredibly, the last major refinery was built 15 years ago, in 1974, and there are no plans whatsoever to construct any more. Despite technology improvements that have enormously reduced construction costs, these costs have more than doubled, while per barrel profits on refined products have remained roughly the same as 20 years ago. Furthermore, the plethora of environmental regulations has nearly tripled the construction time from three to eight years, meaning that a company would have no cost recovery for over a decade.

The situation is similar for natural gas. Twenty years ago, the largest users of natural gas were heavy industries. Natural gas consumption was nearly steady year-round, with only a relatively slight increase during the winter months that the system could easily handle. Twenty-plus years of post-industrial financial insanity have destroyed so much of U.S. heavy manufacturing, that the major natural gas consumers have now become those with more seasonal usage. Under current economic conditions, natural gas distributors cannot profitably maintain a large pipeline system just to meet two or three months of peak winter use. Hence, under severe conditions like a persistent cold wave, the current system, even stretched to the limit, simply cannot match the demand.

This very real crisis, of course, delights Wall Street. Stock market prices for the big oil companies are soaring as speculators cash in on big price increases caused by sure-fire shortages.

—*Steve Parsons*

and relevant to their needs." In other words, since they will only dig wells by hand—like their parents before them—they only need to know how to count change, sign their name, and "read" the color symbols on the village's antibiotics and aspirin rations.

We agree with UNICEF that civilization and progress are measured by development of human conscience and by the degree which it acts when faced with the facts of human suffering. Thus, this unjust debt must be repudiated along with the economic policies that have fostered it and the death of 1 billion people in the Third World over the last decade. UNICEF proposes to make the 1990s the decade for doing the obvious; we can start with full-scale economic development.