

Third World stalls eco-fascist 'Eco-92'

A fight for national sovereignty and the right to economic development, waged by some developing nations of the South, is threatening to derail preparations for the Earth Summit scheduled to be held in Brazil in 1992. The third set of four preparatory negotiating sessions for Eco-92, held under the auspices of the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (Unced), drew to a close in Geneva Sept. 4 with environmental organizations particularly upset that no progress had been made.

The over 100 countries meeting in Geneva to prepare for Eco-92 abandoned their efforts to complete a treaty on the "protection" of the world's forests in time for the summit next year, Prince Philip's World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) reported in a press release Aug. 21. The proposed forest treaty had been endorsed at the Group of Seven industrialized nations summit in London, and was intended as a "keystone" of the Earth Summit.

"There is still time for them to build something significant for Rio. But there is no indication that they are doing so at the moment," WWF director of campaigns Gordon Shepherd told the Sept. 4 London *Financial Times*. "The forests convention is the first casualty of the Unced process." The fourth planning meeting will be held in New York next March.

South wants development

The fight is "symptomatic of a North-South divide," according to a joint press release issued by ActionAid and Greenpeace International. "A huge chasm" exists: "The North is here to discuss concepts such as the Earth Charter, while the South wants to discuss a Development Declaration. . . . Unless unequal economic relationships between countries, poverty, technology transfer, and other issues vital for the South are discussed, no progress can be made on other issues." Greenpeace asserted that the 150 countries which participated at the U.N. meeting "lost their way" in an attempt to agree on a number of environmental proposals.

The resistance to a worldwide treaty at Eco-92 prohibiting economic development in the name of preserving the environment, has come into sharper focus following the threat announced by Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on Aug. 16 to boycott the Eco-92 conference. He had denounced the terrorism being waged against his people in the name of the "environmental situation" in Malaysia by powerful international environmental groups.

Defense of sovereignty

Ismail Razali, the leader of Malaysia's delegation, "turned diplomatic difficulty—did Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad mean it when he said his country might not turn up in Rio?—into a clarion call for development," *Crosscurrents*, the U.N. Non-Governmental Organization paper sponsored by the Planning Committee for Unced, reported in its Aug. 21-22 issue. Razali attacked the attempt to move the discussions into areas which had not been fully defined, such as the concept of global commons, using "nebulous terminologies, on the assumption that we will give up sovereignty." This "assumption of supranational rights" by the North is "a very terrible notion." Razali told the press, "We won't go to Rio with hands tied behind our backs," adding that Malaysia's concerns were shared by other Third World countries and they would have to decide for themselves whether to attend Eco-92.

Such moves by the North put Malaysia and other developing countries in a disadvantageous position, leaving them simply as "global stewards" in relation to their natural resources, Razali charged, *Crosscurrents* reported. He added that Malaysia did not want to go to Rio to be lectured on how to look after its environment or how to treat its indigenous people. The time is past for "this kind of schoolmasterly approach," he said.

In this fight over forests, Edward Kufuor of Ghana, representing the Group of 77 developing nations, insisted that such biological resources are not a heritage of mankind. "They are part of a national heritage over which we will retain sovereignty." Kufuor attacked a paper proposed by the Secretariat of the session for proposing "a code of conduct that can't be enforced, yet developing countries that have two-thirds of the world's biological resources are asked to consent to a legally-binding agreement on conservation. . . . When we ask industrialized countries to devote 0.7% of GNP to Official Development Assistance, they say they don't like targets, yet they ask us to devote 10% of our land to conservation."

Several other Third World countries insisted on their sovereign right to exploit their forests, in remarks to Inter Press Service on Aug. 14.

"Any instrument on forests should take into account that they are part of the territorial jurisdiction of states, and it is up to the state to legislate on their use, taking into account their own national priorities," declared Brazilian delegate Everton Vieira Vargas.

The Nigerian delegation stated that it supports "any global initiative towards the conservation . . . of forests, as long as such an initiative does not infringe on our sovereign right to exploit our natural resources for our development processes."

Malaysian delegate S. Thanarajasingham summed up his country's position: "Forestry is only one of the issues. . . . The crux of the matter is that legal instruments are no guarantee, because sovereignty will always be an issue."