

Toward A New World Order

by Heberto Sein

RIGHT SHARING—or righteous sharing, as one Quaker termed it—of world resources is a deepening concern within the Society of Friends. It weighs upon conscience, reminds that something is fundamentally wrong, urges action and requires change. It calls for faith in the prophetic “pouring out of the Spirit”...to enable Friends to help create a world community based on a new order.

The existing order, of course, contains two types of countries: central and peripheral. At the center are the highly industrialized, rich nations, whose 750 million people consume most of the world's renewable and non-renewable resources, and whose leaders control the major international credit and loan institutions and exert an imperial financial and economic power over others.

Outside the center are some one hundred and twenty countries at varying levels of development and dependency. Of their 2,200 millions of people some 1,000 millions exist at subhuman life levels under crushing poverty, hunger and misery.

Countries do not exist in a vacuum but are bound by interdependence. The behavior of each arouses behavioral responses of others. Both the behavior of center countries and the aspirations of poor countries are related to the character of the interdependence, whether exploitative or mutually participative. Those who exercise domination and seek to impose their advantage through economic and political pressures to maintain privileged positions will harvest reactions of resentment. It is people in both rich and poor countries who are responsible for the existing exploitative terms of interdependence, either by imposing them or submitting to them. Both rich and poor nations have respective roles to play in an enlightened, mutually beneficial process to create a new economic order. Right sharing is an essential part of that process.

The leaven is already at work in this process. Those on the periphery are at last on their feet and are speaking truth to the rest of the world community. The truth is that now the peripheral countries are an element of great importance in world dynamics. The breaking up of old colonial structures, the growing importance of non-renewable resources, the combination of pressing socioeconomic needs with internal unrest, and a global evolution within the existing order involving thinkers of central countries—all these indicate that a new order, dimly outlined, is in the throes of emergence.

People in Asia, Africa and Latin America are not marking time. They feel the push of creative historical

forces. Their aspirations are high and just, and their growing sense of solidarity is manifested in practical constructive cooperation. A few examples: Saudi Arabia turns to Taiwanese contractors for rural electrification and road programs. South Koreans in Iran help untangle a nearly paralyzing transportation bottleneck. Mexico ships prefabricated housing materials and technicians in hydraulic resources to South Vietnam as aid for its reconstruction. Educational curricula in Latin America, it is proposed, will include more knowledge about Asian and African countries and cultures. How encouraging!

The global hope for creating the new economic order now centers on the implementation of the UN's Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. This requires mutual confidence, unity of vision and creative responses from both periphery and center. Of the center, having accumulated much wealth, science, research capacity, technology and know-how, great sensitivity and generosity are required. The center has the potential to help the poor help themselves emerge from poverty. There is doubt that the center can fulfill its role through profit-oriented “aid.” From the poor it reaps profits for transfer of technology and badly needed know-how to raise productivity. Are central countries prepared to grant trade advantages to accelerate peripheral development? Are they willing to freely channel technology and know-how through the numerous specialized agencies of the United Nations in which the entire world community participates? As time runs out for the central countries to respond to humanity's distress, are they marking time, engrossed with power and profit structures, while the peripheral countries feel and respond to the dynamic push of history?

As Quakers who believe in the potential of the Spirit within every person, are we willing to dedicate our soul and mind and body to the stewardship of material things? Does not our answer reflect whether the message in Ephesians is speaking to our condition at this hour: “Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's way in the goodness and holiness of Truth.” □

Heberto Sein is a Mexican Friend who has written and spoken about Right Sharing of World Resources as a personal concern and as part of his involvement with the Friends World Committee for Consultation.