

Seminar Tackles North-South Environmental Issues

The New York School's Saturday Seminar on Oct. 3rd addressed the most difficult question: how can nations with vastly different levels of poverty and development agree on a collective response to the grave dangers that beset our global environment?

Jim Morgan, an architect and housing activist from Brooklyn, who traveled to Rio de Janeiro in June to attend the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) under the auspices of the Society of Friends, reported on his experiences there and assessed the potential for progress. Even though North-South economic conflicts (and what many would call the intransigence of the U.S.) resulted in few substantial accomplishments for the "Earth Summit," Mr. Morgan was eager to report that there is more to the story. "I return from Rio full of hope," he writes. "Despite the depressing official results, I bring good news, news of people - clever, committed and energetic... whose vision of a collaborative future will soon prevail..."

The foundation of this hope was laid in the "Global Forum", the alternative Earth Summit held that same week in Rio. According to Mr. Morgan, it was "as different from UNCED as a demonstration in Washington is from what goes on in the White House." Over 14,000 representatives from hundreds of organizations traded views and forged alliances, in 36 meeting tents and over 300 exhibition booths. "The opportunity for self-education was overwhelming."

The Non-Governmental organizations (NGO's) of the UN, seeing that little of value was coming out of the official conference, agreed on their own global environmental targets as an alternative to Agenda 21, "UNCED's watered down, underfinanced action plan." No, the Global Forum's documents have no binding authority on anyone yet, but Jim Morgan said that the process begun there can only grow in strength. "In twenty years, when the world's leaders are assembled, there's a good chance many of them will have gotten their start at Global Forum '92."

The key to the nascent power of the Global Forum is in its recognition that considerations based on "national interest" will inexorably have less power in the years ahead. "The insular perspective many governments took with them to Rio simply doesn't make sense anymore," said Jim. And he asserted that it is not, after all, so difficult for one's outlook to become globalized. "I grew up in Ohio," he said, "And I have come, now, to look upon the United States flag in much the same way as I see the old Ohio state flag - as a reminder of a bygone era."

(Editor's note: The other scheduled speaker at this seminar, Mr. Georg Kell, regretted that a last-minute family obligation made him unable to appear. In his stead, your humble editor studied a great deal of material provided by Mr. Kell and his organization. Thus enriched, I went on to present a description of how global environmental cooperation may be shaped: not by restricting trade, but increasing it - by fashioning a system of tradable pollution credits. For more information on this fascinating idea, see "A Market for the Environment" in our May-June issue - and stay tuned! - L.D.)

His fence, my land

By Anders Corr

*i sleep with the land
there is a man somewhere
that thinks the land is his
that he owns the land

he is wrong
he owns the fence
which strangles the land
with sharp wire

his land is a piece of paper
a money figure on an LED screen
a chore

my land is the sun
it heats my face in the morning
it is the lunar light which guides me
it is the tall grass within which
is my sanctuary

his land is created by the state
my land is a gift of the unknown

what he calls land is a
real estate rape fantasy

for myself,
the land is a cradle
as i drift into a dream
without boundaries*

The poem above is by Anders Corr, a California "homeless activist". Mr. Corr shared the poem with Pat Aller, in a letter which also included a copy of an article from the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* describing how Mr. Corr and six other activists were arrested, in July of this year, for camping on a public park. He is currently working on an anthology entitled *Our Right to the Earth*, which contains writings in various genres on that most important subject. Mr. Corr reports that "I have become homeless this summer to save time (because I do not have to spend as much to pay for rent) so that I can do more work on the anthology." - Lindy Davies