

# Hopes from the North-South summit

## Third World struggles for UN changes

*Cancun, Mexico*

Last week's meeting of the heads of state of 22 developed and developing nations in Cancun could help to break the stalemate which has characterized recent efforts to devise new strategies for technical and financial assistance to Third World nations through agencies of the United Nations.

The meeting failed to provide the clear resolution which many had hoped for. In summing up the discussion, the co-chairmen, Mexican President José Lopez Portillo and Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, stated merely that there had been agreement to support preparations within the United Nations towards "global negotiations", the term being used to embrace efforts to overhaul the technical and financial agencies of the United Nations for the greater benefit of the Third World with no clear indication of when or how any changes would be implemented.

This failure to reach specific agreement reflected the opposition, particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom, to any attempt at moving decision-making responsibility for the financial agencies of the United Nations into the UN General Assembly, where they would all become subject to a one-country one-vote system of control. However, delegates attending the Cancun meeting expressed cautious optimism that it had at least provided a basis for more detailed discussions.

It had been hoped that two areas concerned with the applications of technology to development would receive a significant boost from the Cancun meeting. First, the World Bank's efforts to increase the amount of capital available for investment in energy projects in Third World countries. And second, the continued attempt to put into effect the recommendations of the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development which took place in Vienna in 1979.

There was some slight but significant movement on both these fronts. The idea of an energy affiliate attached to the World Bank, thought to have been virtually scuppered by the opposition of the Reagan Administration, is far from dead. Many heads of state at Cancun spoke strongly in favour of the proposed affiliate. Particularly significant was the announcement by Saudi Arabia that it too supported the proposal. To the United States this seemed to imply the creation of a new "energy sector" to finance energy projects within

the World Bank, although the United States and the United Kingdom insist that this should only be done if there were new funds for the purpose.

At the same time, members of several delegations informally expressed support for a new initiative, now backed by 20 developing countries which signed a declaration at a meeting in Caracas three weeks ago, to set up a special fund for helping developing countries to build up their scientific and technological infrastructure.

These funds would be used to carry out some of the recommendations of the Vienna meeting, with a suggested initial target for voluntary contributions of a million million dollars over the years 1982-87. One possible form for the fund would be to base it on the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), set up after the World Food Conference of 1972 with funding from the developed nations, the oil-producing nations and the developing nations.

But the differences that remain, both on the appropriate way of raising capital for energy projects in the Third World and on

the best method of building up their scientific and technological infrastructure, reflect the wide gulf between the free market ideology of the United States and the interventionist stance of most Third World governments.

On food, for example, President Reagan had announced previously in a speech in Philadelphia that the United States intended to shift its aid efforts towards market-oriented qualities that would create "self-sustaining capacity" for research and innovation, and stimulation of job-creating entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Those attending the Cancun meeting agreed that priority should be given to finding ways in which developing countries could raise their own food production rather than to providing direct food aid.

But several developing countries also pushed for more direct intervention, for example, in the setting up of large emergency food stockpiles to compensate for poor harvests, and for greater efforts to establish a world food system embracing both production and distribution.

Discussions on both energy and food

## Monkey business hits university laboratory

One of Britain's largest and best laboratory breeding colonies of rhesus monkeys is finally to be disbanded despite the fact that it has not been possible to import the animals from their usual source for the past three years. About half the monkeys are likely to find homes elsewhere but the other half may be killed — ten of them already have been — because they harbour a virus which can be fatal to man.

The virus is herpes simian B virus, with which monkeys can be either acutely or latently infected. An animal in the former state is very dangerous since the virus can be passed on to man through a bite; most of the recorded human infections of this type have been fatal. By contrast, animals which carry the virus in latent form pose no threat to humans except for the possibility of reactivation of the virus to its infectious form in conditions of severe stress. That possibility seems remote to judge by the lack of concern that many of the monkeys in zoos and wild life parks carry the virus in latent form.

The University of Birmingham, however, became particularly concerned about its monkeys in the wake of the death in 1978 of one of its staff from smallpox contracted, it is believed, from a virus that had escaped from one of their laboratories. That incident, the fact that the Medical Research Council had just issued new guidelines on the hazards of simian virus and the general state and age of the housing for their rhesus monkey colony, led the University of Birmingham to ask the Health and Safety Executive to give advice on the safety standards of the monkey

housing. The upshot was that the university decided that it would cost £250,000 to modernize the building — a figure believed in some quarters to have been wildly inflated. In any case the university decided it could not afford modernization and that the colony would have to go.

That decision was made in September 1980 (although work on the monkeys carrying latent virus had been suspended in February of the previous year for lack of adequate safety). Following the decision Dr J. Marston, a qualified veterinary surgeon who had been closely involved with the maintenance of the colony for several years, suggested that he should be allowed to remove the monkeys to private housing and breeding facilities which he hoped to establish. The university agreed in principle but, after considerable capital had been raised, Dr Marston's plans were thwarted by the Home Office which was not satisfied with the proposed facilities. According to Dr Marston, the Home Office moved very slowly to its final decision and three weeks before it was finalized, at the end of September, the university threatened to start killing off the monkeys. Two weeks after the decision, on 12 October, the university ordered the killing of the infected animals at the rate of ten per day. Ten were killed with the participation, at his own insistence, of Dr Marston but a stay of execution was then issued. Dr Marston is now trying to find homes for all the monkeys including those with the latent virus, Home Office rules permitting.

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