

Neither Prince nor Merchant: Citizen

An Introduction to the Third System

By Marc Nerfin

Since 1978, the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA) has published 58 issues of the IFDA Dossier. From a modest start the IFDA Dossier has grown to become one of the most important instruments for the promotion of Another Development and for the strengthening of the third system—it is now published in an edition of about 20,000 copies. In this article, the President of IFDA, Marc Nerfin, provides an overview of the unfolding of the ideas of Another Development and the Third System over the past decade and a preliminary stock-taking of the first 55 issues of the IFDA dossier.

In analysing the present crisis, Marc Nerfin takes as his point of departure the fact that both the governmental power and the economic power, i.e. the first and second systems, have 'more often than not proved unable by themselves to offer solutions to the crisis and even less to contribute to the search for alternatives. (They have proved unable to respond to the cry for peace and Another Development). They are more part of the problem than of the solution. There is thus a need to go back to fundamentals, and to discern in the function of human agencies, those who may be better able to ensure the continuation of life on this planet, i.e. citizens and their associations, together forming the third system.' Marc Nerfin then goes on to discuss the characteristics of third system associations and the specific issues around which they are building their activities. He also dwells on the relationship of the third system to the first and second systems and gives the reader an opportunity to share his vision of the future potential inherent in the third system.

Copies of the IFDA Dossier may be obtained from the International Foundation for Development Alternatives, 4, place du Marché, CH-1260 NYON, Switzerland.



The moment the slave resolves that he will no longer be a slave, his fetters fall. He frees himself and shows the way to others.

Gandhi

Introduction

The formal title of this paper, presented at an ARENA/UNU workshop on Alternative Development Perspectives in Asia, Dhyana Pura, Bali, Indonesia, March 1986, was, as requested by the organizers, *The North-South impasse: Potential for creativity?—The IFDA third system contribution and experience.* *

There is indeed a North-South impasse, but to understand it, it appears necessary to (a) analyse its underlying causes and (b) consider the role of the different social actors, since the impasse may not be the same for different actors.

First, the 'impasse' is only an aspect of a general crisis, itself reflecting the historical changes which have occurred on this planet over the last forty years. To put it bluntly, the world as seen from San Francisco in 1945, at the founding of the United Nations, was essentially white, Western, Christian and elitist; its basic paradigms were Newtonian.⁷ Today, largely as a result of the 'great awakening' of the Third World, but also because we can now see our planet from outer space, humankind is recapturing its wholeness. What has not changed, on the other hand, is the unequal exchange, whatever the innovations in its mechanisms, the hegemony of the North over the South, and underdevelopment. The crisis is at the same time economic, financial, environmental, social, cultural, ideological and political, as well as one of security.**

In terms of the *human condition*, the crisis fundamentally means the permanent threat of the nuclear holocaust and the already real, daily, holocaust of hunger, which kills 40,000 children every day—the equivalent of a Hiroshima every week.⁸ These statistics cannot be repeated often enough: do we really understand the meaning of these four words, *a Hiroshima every week?*

But one must be aware of what underlies this massacre of the innocents. It is the fracturing into two of every society, much worse than the traditional East-West or North-South rifts: the two Indias, the two Chiles, the two USAs; the two worlds. There is the world of the powerful, of the rich, of the employed, of those who participate; and that of the powerless, of the poor, of the unemployed, of the dispossessed, and, worse, of those who, being no longer economically useful, can be dispensed with.^b This fracture is the result of underdevelopment, maldevelopment and other poisoned fruits of the same misdirection of human affairs everywhere on this planet.

The only way out of such a crisis is a new, alternative society, what we have called Another Development.¹⁹ In a nutshell, this could be described as (i)

* This paper includes two series of references. The first one, indicated by letters, refers to the *IFDA Dossier*, and the second, indicated by figures, to other sources.

** Rather than dwelling here on the matter, may the author refer readers to his paper 'The future of the United Nations system: Some questions on the occasion of an anniversary'.³⁶

need-oriented (but by no means limited to the so-called 'basic needs'); (ii) self-reliant; (iii) endogenous; (iv) in harmony with nature and ecologically sustainable; and (v) going hand in hand with people empowered to make structural transformations. In other words, Another Development means people organizing themselves so as to develop who they are and what they have, by themselves and for themselves.

Second, the powers that be, governmental or economic, have more often than not proved unable by themselves to offer solutions to the crisis and even less to contribute to the search for alternatives. They have proved unable to respond to the cry for peace and Another Development. They are more part of the problem than of the solution. There is thus a need to go back to fundamentals, and to discern in the functions of the human agencies, those who may be better able to ensure the continuation of life on this planet.

A modest contribution to the debate, more in the nature of 'ideas in progress' than anything else, this paper starts with a definition of human agencies and, on the basis of the IFDA experience, examines the world development of the citizens' movement, discusses the relations between people and the third system and advocates global networking as a tool of people's empowerment.

A definition. Contrasting with governmental power and economic power—the power of the Prince and the Merchant—there is an immediate and autonomous power, sometimes evident, sometimes latent: people's power. Some people develop an awareness of this, associate and act with others and thus become citizens.* Citizens and their associations, when they do not seek either governmental or economic power, constitute the third system. Helping to bring what is latent into the open, the third system is one expression of the autonomous power of the people.

**A snapshot of the
third system
constellation**

Associations are legion.** The 21st edition (1984/85) of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* describes 7,109 international 'non-governmental organizations' and 5,577 internationally-oriented national bodies. The

* The author must confess here to an ethnocentric shortsightedness: the concept of *citizen* is probably meaningful only in a Western (including Latin American) context and in the 'modernized' fringes of the world polity. There may be equivalents in other cultures—like for instance the *Mwananchi* in Swahili—but the question remains wide open and the author would be grateful to interested readers, especially those of African, Buddhist and Moslem cultures, for advice on the matter.

1981 *Directory of non-governmental organizations in OECD countries active in development cooperation* includes the profiles of 1,702 such bodies. There are many times more than these in the national and local spheres. In India, in 1978, a questionnaire on their participation in development was sent to 1,400 'NGOs'—of which more than 90 per cent had no effective international links.' In France, associations were in the hundreds in the 1930s; in the thousands in the 1950s; 10,000 in 1960; 30,000 in 1977 and anything between 300,000 and 500,000 in 1981, a year during which some 100 new associations were established every day.^d

These associations, by their sheer numbers, invite and at the same time defy classification. For the purpose of this introduction, a snapshot of that part of the galaxy of associations which could be considered as third system may suffice to help us discern some structure and some trends.

Third system associations are formed by citizens whose situation in society, and/or some personal reason, whether intellectual, moral or spiritual, makes them anxious to improve their lives, individually or collectively, and that of others. Social history suggests that individual motivation is more important, collective motivation more ardent, and the combination of both stronger. A worker usually remains a worker, and his/her reasons to be active in a trade union are part and parcel of her/his social existence. The same holds true for members of ethnic minorities (or majorities). A woman has even deeper reasons to be a lifelong feminist activist. But not all workers, all women, and so on, become citizens, and the personal motivation is always essential. Motivations are many, but observation of the third system as it currently unfolds—i.e. beyond its 'traditional' manifestations like the trade unions—suggests that there are only a few deep-seated mobilizing themes; peace, women's liberation, human and peoples' rights, environment, local self-reliance, alternative life-styles and personal transformation and consumers' self-defence as well as, in some industrialized countries, solidarity with the people of the Third World, including refugees and migrants, and, in Eastern Europe, or at least in Poland, a new form of trade unionism.⁵⁰

** Words are never innocent. The phrase 'non-governmental organizations' is politically unacceptable because it implies that government is the centre of society, and people its periphery. To insist on people's autonomy also requires some semantical cleaning up. Except in quotations, we will use, instead of 'NGO', the expressions 'association', whose sense is wide enough, and 'third system', in the precise acceptation proposed in this introduction.

The multiplicity of forms under which these associations appear correspond to the diversity of motivations and circumstances. Because they reflect the autonomy of the people, associations are often allergic to the forms defined by the establishment. The term is therefore used here, purposely, in a rather loose sense.

Many associations are officially recognized and/or registered, with a formal constitution, membership, committees, channels for reporting and accounting, etc. Others are just *ad hoc* gatherings of like-minded individuals who occasionally share ideas and experiences through a round-robin letter. In between, the spectrum includes all other possible configurations: some are underground; others do not care about their legal status and just exist; a few even resemble political parties, such as the Greens in Western Germany,^{c,8} but are still part of the third system as long as they do not exercise executive power. There may also be groups of marginal shareholders who try to voice social concerns in a transnational corporation. Quite a few, especially in Buddhist and Christian cultures, have a spiritual foundation. Some have a few members only; others constitute vast movements, occasionally assembling several hundreds of thousands of people. In short, third system associations are as diverse as societies themselves.

Citizens and their associations usually act in a determined space—local, regional, national, multinational, global—but also, and increasingly so, in several spaces simultaneously. Amnesty International, to take only one example, acts in the global space through representations to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in the national space through pressure on governments, and in the local space through the many groups which 'adopt' a political prisoner and campaign for his/her liberation.

Whatever makes citizens join forces and wherever they take action, third system associations/activities can be considered under a few broad, non-mutually exclusive and non-comprehensive clusters.

Some are geared to the realization of a *project* intended to respond to a crisis situation, to solve a specific problem or pursue a more general objective: organizing people, especially the poor;^f improving their daily life^g or their environment;^h extending technical or financial support to local initiatives;ⁱ promoting popular theatre;^j linking education with production;^k ensuring equal access to jobs; decreasing working time, opposing construction of a nuclear facility (or the deployment of missiles); reconverting the manufacture of arms into that of socially useful goods;^l preventing the export of dangerous drugs to the Third World or the careless storage of toxic wastes;

campaigning for the liberation of a political prisoner; sharing appropriate technologies;^m building new North-South relations;ⁿ facilitating the exchange of experiences through networking and cross-cultural dialogues; or searching for alternatives. In the Third World, there is a new and growing tendency among intellectuals,^o including women^p and lawyers,^q to serve the people.

Advocacy activities may be seen as constituting a second cluster. Associations may be formed to advocate peace,^r a new world order, the New International Economic Order or a federalist world; a world without hunger;^s a new approach to international security; better terms of trade for Third World countries; the recognition and effective respect of minority rights;^t breastfeeding;^u consumption of local products; Another Development in health; equality in opportunities among individuals and societies; protection and enhancement of the environment; ecodevelopment; cultural pluralism and respect for the Other; reform to strengthen the United Nations...

A third cluster of associations deals with *accountability* ('those who hold power must be held accountable for the consequences of its exercise')^v and the necessary mechanisms. The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal and its predecessor, the Russell Tribunal, are examples as far as the Prince is concerned; the International Organization of Consumer Unions,^w IBFAN^x or Ralph Nader's Corporate Accountability Research Group and its *Multinational Monitor* as far as the Merchant is concerned.^y

The three types of activities usually imply some underpinning policy-oriented research and have a broad educational role, and some associations devote themselves primarily to such functions. The association's activity often takes (exclusively or not) the form of a publication such as, to chose examples in the feminist movement, the Latin American *ILET Fempress*, the African *La Satellite*, the *Tribune* or the ISIS periodicals,^z or the *Samizdat* in USSR, third system activities not being limited to the West or the South.

This hazy picture may perhaps, at this stage, be complemented by a more focused look at three specific spots in the Third System constellation. First, *peace*. In Western Europe, the largest post-1945 manifestations took place in the autumn of 1983. Half a million people marched in the streets of the Hague, 600,000 in Rome and one million in West Germany, to oppose the deployment of Pershing 2 and cruise missiles. In North America, one million Americans overwhelmed New York Central Park and mid-town

Manhattan on 12 June 1982 on the occasion of the United Nations General Assembly Second Special Session on Disarmament—a demonstration far larger than any during the 60s anti-Vietnam war protests, and possibly the largest ever in New York City.

Even before the New York event, George Kennan, a senior US establishment figure and veteran diplomat, made this important comment:

The recent growth and gathering strength of the antinuclear-war movement here and in Europe is to my mind the most striking phenomenon of this beginning of the 80s. It is all the more impressive because it is so extensively spontaneous (...) At the heart of it lie some very fundamental and reasonable and powerful motivations: among them (...) a very real exasperation with their governments (...) They are the expression of a deep instinctive insistence, if you don't mind, on sheer survival (...) Our government will ignore this fact at its peril. This movement is too powerful, too elementary, too deeply embedded in the natural human instinct for self-preservation to be brushed aside.²⁵

Further, as Hilikka Pietilä observed, the peace movement is no longer a single-issue movement as the traditional peace movements were. Today the peace movement brings together and unites several different movements which all perceive the arms race and nuclear weapons as a common threat. This perception is shared by conservationists, various green movements, movements for a new life style, opponents of nuclear energy, activists for Third World countries and, first of all, the new women's movement.

Second, *women's liberation*. In the same paper, Hilikka Pietilä continues:

The most interesting and the most original of these movements is the women's movement. It is the most comprehensive and the least prejudiced of the movements which have started and developed their activity over recent years. It receives substance and enhancement from widening and diversifying women's research, which opens up new perspectives for equality between men and women as well as for social transformation altogether. An analytical, cognitive women's movement as such is a peace movement. Here it differs decisively from the so-called equal rights movement, which has not questioned the basic structures and values of the present social order, and which pursued equality for women in men's world mainly on male terms.²⁶

Social orders created and dominated by men have failed. Another Development, implying as it does new structures, calls for the rejection of any imitation. Competing with men just to do more of the same, and to run the same society with the same methods, women would only reproduce out-

dated and inappropriate patterns. The women's movement, which asserts itself everywhere, in all regions and in all spaces, has the opportunity to be imaginative, innovative, alternative. Like the Third World, the young, the alienated, the exploited, the dispossessed, women represent at the same time the difference, with its promise of change, and the totality which prefigures a better world. They may be the midwives of Another Development.

Hazel Henderson has noted that

these non-governmental organizations formed over the past fifty years by women, their proliferation in many countries, and subsequent convergence on world problems and the restructuring of policies to address them, are a prototype for international action.²¹

For her part Marilyn Ferguson writes that women

represent the greatest single force for political renewal in a civilization thoroughly out of balance. Just as individuals are enriched by developing both the masculine and feminine sides of the self (independence and nurturance, intellect and intuition), so the society is benefiting from a change in the balance of power between sexes.

And she quotes Gandhi who once said,

if satyagraha is to be the mode of the future, then the future belongs to women.¹¹

Third, *accountability*. The principle of accountability and its enforcement emerges perhaps as the central theme in the efforts to re-assert people's autonomous power vis-à-vis the Prince and the Merchant.^w Appropriate mechanisms are not in themselves enough, and formal recognition by the Establishment of the need for accountability is even less of a sufficient answer; but the systematic exercise of accountability measures would help us progress in the right direction.

As an instrument of democracy (that is, strictly speaking, people's power), accountability may progressively circumscribe the power of those who hold it. The act of making Prince and Merchant accountable may instil a new sense of self-confidence among the people. It is a natural concern for citizen's associations.

An example in a specific field is provided by the Consumers Association of Penang (Malaysia). CAP monitors prices, advertisements, marketing tech-

niques, sales of dangerous goods, inadequacy of health care, public transportation and housing. It alerts authorities and the people to any abuse. It carries out research into basic needs satisfaction, fights environmental deterioration (e.g. chemical pollution, deforestation, over-fishing), provides support to local initiatives, organizes educational programmes, publishes a widely circulated monthly paper, *Utusan Konsumer*, in Malay and English, disseminates statements in these two languages as well as in Mandarin and Tamil, and publishes pamphlets and postcards. More specifically, it handles complaints from people about abuses they suffer from either Prince or Merchant.

A CAP comment is relevant to this discussion:

In ex-colonial societies where the people have far too long been used to the passive acceptance of life's injustices, the successful lodging of a complaint changes the perception and attitude of individuals who now see that redress can be obtained if one is willing to do something positive about it. The Complaint Service thus becomes an effective means and channel through which the public is able to exercise its rights to fight business malpractices and to press for fair and better services from companies and government departments as well as to demand protection of these rights from authorities.^{bb}

People and third system

The phrase 'third system' in the sense accepted here, and in the practice it is associated with, was coined in September 1977. It was first embodied in the title of the 'third system project' carried out between 1978 and 1980 by the International Foundation for Development Alternatives as a contribution to the elaboration of the United Nations International Development Strategy for the 80s.^{35,v} As implied in the definition used here, the concept extends well beyond the modest context of its origin.

The association with the phrase 'Third World' is not only deliberate: as a matter of fact, both phrases come from the same source; both are meant to evoke *le Tiers Etat*, 'the third estate' of the French *ancien régime*. Before the 1789 revolution, French society comprised three 'estates', the nobility, the clergy and the third estate, i.e. the vast majority. Alfred Sauvy was the first, in 1952, to use the phrase 'Third World' to refer to the periphery, or the South, a phrase which has since then gained wide acceptance.^{42*} However, 'third system' is conceptually closer to 'third estate' than 'Third World' is to either. The latter concept is geo-political; it concerns countries. The former two are socio-political; they concern people, and that is what the third system is about.

For in the beginning were the people. As history unfolded, various social groups and individuals emerged as self-appointed rulers and leaders which, to put it schematically, managed to extract from the people, the direct producers, a tribute or plus-value. To this effect, warriors, landowners, aristocrats, clergymen, merchants, money-lenders, capitalists, generals and bureaucrats established various forms of government and economic organization. As a result of this evolution, people are dominated, at this particular point in history, by governmental power, that of the Prince, and by economic power, that of the Merchant, sometimes united, sometimes antagonistic but always present.

Government still fascinates, understandably so when it is sought as a tool for change at the service of people, less so when it is opposed.

The Prince may well be the object of hate or sarcasm, yet he is somehow admired. Even when a particular prince is really bad, the very manner in which the criticism is construed implies the possibility of a good prince, a prince-philosopher (me? or the friend who may listen to me?).

Princes of the literary kingdom themselves, though princes in their own right, often bow in a way to the political Prince. Consider for instance three great contemporary writers of Latin America, a continent which has had and still has its bad princes: Miguel Angel Asturias with *Mr President*, Alejo Carpentier with *The recourse of the method* and even Gabriel Garcia Marquez with *The autumn of the patriarch*: the Prince is torn into pieces, and yet somewhere floats the incense of mythification.

The alternative to the Prince, for a handful, is age-old anarchy. The Prince as a person does not really matter, it is the institution which is bad, so let's get rid of it. With neither God nor Master, let us join forces and tomorrow the International will be Humankind.

The Merchant used to be close to us. The growing geographical and economic distance between producer and consumer made it at the same

* That Sauvy implied that the OECD countries (the West) and the CMEA countries (the European East) were the other 'worlds' does not justify the use of the expressions 'first' and 'second' world. In this context, ordinal numbers are historically, conceptually and politically misleading. Further, it may be noted that the Chinese use a different classification which is more action-oriented in geo-political terms. By 'first' world, they mean the two superpowers, and by 'second' world, smaller industrial countries in both Western and Eastern Europe.

time more mythical in our perception and more real as a determinant of our daily lives. It has now grown into a monster/hero whose misdeeds are proportional to the services it renders. We resent its influence and its riches because we are under its influence and because its riches come from us as participants, through the market, in the process of production and consumption. For instance, we oppose transnational corporations—to a point: I don't like Nestlé, but I don't give up coffee. I don't like ITT, but I need to communicate with my fellow networker in Chile. I don't like Hoffman-La Roche, but what may happen to my child without this irreplaceable drug?

One alternative to the Merchant is workers' self-management, peasants' cooperatives and equal exchange among them. But not everyone likes to be a manager, and almost everywhere self-management has begotten new managers and restarted the process of alienation. Another alternative is the Plan, as a people-serving agent of rational production and distribution of socially useful goods and services. Whilst it may alleviate some of the Merchant's shortcomings, the Planner still has a lot to learn, including how to recognize the Plan's limits.

The permanent fascination of the Prince, the enduring reliance on the Merchant and the elusiveness of Utopias suggest not only that Utopias need to be revisited, but also that, however poorly they perform, neither Prince nor Merchant have outlived their usefulness.

At the present level of productivity, with its implications in terms of surplus extraction, ideological manipulation through the mass media and the so-called cultural industry, economic, social and political organization, and weaponry for both external and internal use, the fact is that some form of government, in the boundaries of the current nation-states system, is unavoidable, and to a point, necessary; in a world dominated by two superpowers, smaller or less powerful states still offer some protection against total subservience. Similarly unavoidable and to a point necessary is some form of economic organization, private or public, guided by the 'invisible hand' or by the Plan, mixing one way or the other transnational corporations, state enterprises, national and local capitalisms. When the most basic human needs remain unsatisfied, those able to foster production—provided it be socially useful and ecologically sustainable—as well as those able to ensure some social security through redistribution still have an essential function. Neither the withering away of the state nor generalized producer/consumer self-management are on today's agenda.

This is to say that we have to recognize that Prince and Merchant, as

alienated from us and as alienating as they are, remain parts of the realm of necessity. But understanding necessity never prevented liberty.

At the time, Prince and Merchant control only parts of power. Whether they exist *de facto* or *de jure*, whether legitimate or not, whether serving the general interest or not, they cannot possibly represent society in its totality and its differences. Moreover, they exert their powers *upon* society. Their powers are subsidiary to that of the people. Their very existence depends on the people. They are, in a sense, our creatures. People—the women and men we are—also have power, which we can exert on Prince and Merchant as well as on ourselves. People's power is thus the only autonomous power.

Beyond the principles, as essential as they are, stands reality. People—societies—are not homogenous.

To come back to an earlier analogy, the French third estate was not homogenous. Opposing the nobility and the high clergy were the merchants, the artisans, the peasants, the first industrial capitalists, the intellectuals, some parish priests. Their interests, beyond the abolition of absolutism, could hardly be the same. The ideology, formulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot and others, was essentially democratic—but the bourgeoisie, assuming leadership, merely used it to take over from nobility and church, which disappeared as both governmental and economic power. By and large, the people simply changed masters. A similar scenario occurred, in a different context and for different reasons, after the 1917 socialist revolution in Russia. Bureaucracy, not bourgeoisie, took over and one had to wait until the summer of 1980, in Poland, to see the people—the workers—get together and organize as an autonomous social force in a society born out of the quest for justice and socialism.

This suggests two observations.

First, whatever the ideology, the social origin or the motivations, no minority, group or individual seeking or exercising power, any power, can be given a blank cheque. Whatever provisional or lasting benefits the people may get from a change of power, or from power or counterpower exercised on their behalf, they will remain in a subservient situation if they do not retain their autonomous power. This is not to condemn those who aspire to, or get, governmental power—many are genuinely honest and try in earnest to achieve what they had set out to do—but a reflection of the nature of the Prince and a reminder that in the polity as in the economy, the division of labour breeds 'disabling professions'.²³

Second, people, save in exceptional circumstances, do not act politically as such, *en masse*. Not all people act as citizens, and people are not naturally good; they may be, for instance, racist, and are easily manipulated by propaganda. Enlightened minorities (or leaders), self-propelled but responsive to society, either act on behalf of people or, better, perceiving a problem and outlining a solution, formulate a *project* in which people recognize themselves. They join forces, thus creating the *movement* through which the latent power of the people is made manifest.

The third system is thus not coterminous with the people. It brings together only those among the people who are reaching a critical consciousness of the role they may play. It is not a party or an organization, but the movement of those associations or citizens who perceive that the essence of history is the endless effort for emancipation by which we grope towards mastery of our own destiny, an effort which is, in the final analysis, coterminous with the process of humanization of man (in the generic sense). The third system does not seek governmental or economic power. On the contrary, its function is to help people to assert their own autonomous power vis-à-vis both Prince and Merchant. It endeavours to listen to those never or rarely heard and at least to offer a tribune to the unheard voices.

Networking

Realities, telecommunications and perceptions* progressively confirm the oneness of humankind and its planet. The risk of nuclear holocaust and the combination of underdevelopment and maldevelopment also make us one. Environment and health hazards underline our interdependence. Two thirds of the planet—its oceans—are open to global management, as is outer space. Citizens and associations working in local spaces cannot limit themselves to these spaces, however fundamental they are. Those working in the global space cannot limit themselves to their sectoral concerns, however crucial these are. Beyond spaces and themes, all need to share experiences and ideas, to feel they belong to a larger whole, to relate to others.

The other systems of power do have their own linkages, mechanisms of consultation and joint action. Princes, whether they somehow represent their people or oppress them, have their fora. They are regional like the

* and also the recent discovery that we may well be, all of us on this planet, the descendants of a *single female* ancestor who lived in Africa 140,000 to 280,000 years ago.

League of Arab States, the Association of South East Asia Nations, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the Economic Community of West African States, the European Economic Community, the Gulf States Corporation or the Sistema Economico Latino Americano. They reflect specific historical circumstances, like the Commonwealth or the Organization of the Islamic Conference. They are also global: the United Nations system of agencies, programmes and conferences. Those Merchants who operate across national borders have formed transnational corporations. The third system as such has nothing of this sort. And its links cannot be the same as those of the powers which it intends to circumscribe or influence and which it wants to make accountable.

There seem to be two possible approaches to third system global relations. The first orbits around the United Nations system; the second, networking, while not necessarily excluding the first one, reflects better the nature and goals of third system associations and movements.

The United Nations approach itself is at least twofold. The first branch involves some improbable journey towards a remote Utopia but nevertheless deserves to be mentioned. After all, the Charter opens with the famous 'We the *peoples* of the United Nations', and not with 'We the *governments* of the united *states* of the world'.

The EEC Commission, which has more power than the UN Security Council, co-exists with the European Parliament whose role may be limited but whose members, elected as they are, somehow speak for the people of the member countries.

Another possible analogy is offered by the International Labour Organization, whose General Conference is composed of four representatives of each member-state with individual voting power. Two are delegates of government, one of the employers and one of the workpeople. This does not go very far, especially since the 'non government' delegates are chosen by the particular country's government in agreement with its most representative industrial organization.

Something along these lines, however, would be a significant improvement in the representativeness of the United Nations proper, where some 700 'non-governmental organizations' are in some sort of consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. They are a mixed bag of organizations, ranging from the International Association of the Soap and Detergent Industry to the Christian Peace Conference. Most are essentially

Western, and whether their relationships with the ECOSOC are 'obsolete and unproductive', as some say, does not really matter.⁵ Furthermore, there is a persistent habit, in the 'public information' sectors of the United Nations, to consider 'NGOs' as mere conveyor belts, of intergovernmental or bureaucratic wisdom distilled from above, to the 'public' which is seen as a passive receptacle.

It is of course not prohibited to dream of another United Nations.

Utopian as it may appear today—as did so many ideas, now part of the conventional wisdom, before someone took the first step towards implementing them—couldn't we sketch out a possible UN of 2025? Redeeming its original sin of having been conceived, brought into being and grown up as an organization of governments, the UN of our children and grandchildren will probably reflect better the societies of the world and the actors who make them alive.

This could for instance be achieved through a three-chamber General Assembly of the United Nations. The *Prince Chamber* would represent the governments of the states. The *Merchant Chamber* would represent the economic powers, be they transnational, multinational, national or local, belonging to the private, state or social sectors, since at the same time we need them and need to regulate their activities—which is better done with them. The *Citizen Chamber*, where there should be as many women as men, would, through some mechanism ensuring adequate representativeness, speak for the people and their associations. At the very least, this would make it possible for citizens to hold Prince and Merchant *accountable* for the consequences of the exercise of their power (...).

Perhaps some imaginative and innovative institution designers could start working and offer to the world community some ideas on how to move from the present state of affairs to something more apt to enable people to participate in the management of the planet.

It would be futile, at this stage, to direct the exercise at governments. Like most past re-structuring efforts (by far more modest), this one will, in the short term at least, strike the shelves of politico-bureaucratic lack of vision and vested interests. The exercise should, on the contrary, not only be directed at, but carried out with, the social actors themselves, the women and the young, the peasants and the city dwellers, the producers and the consumers, the peace marchers and the ecological sit-in people, all those who are vitally interested in another development interweaving peace, justice and a better life for all.^{6c}

Could some steps be taken immediately, offering alternatives to the end-of-the-day-no-audience practice of 'NGOs' addressing the ECOSOC (or other bodies)? Could the ECOSOC Committee on 'NGOs' upgrade its role from

attending to procedural matters to considering policy matters? Could the Human Rights Commission, the Transnational Commission or the bodies dealing with disarmament listen to and interact with Amnesty International, the International Organization of Consumers Unions or the peace movements? What kind of policy and procedures for the submission and circulation of documents would ensure that relevant views are available to intergovernmental organs? Could some enlightened governments take the initiative to send more representative delegations to the General Assembly? For instance, since each Member has five delegates, could one represent the opposition, one the business community, and one the third system? Some governments do it to some extent, but could this not be made more systematic and open? Could one member be elected?

In the meantime, a 'major departure from the traditional relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations' must be mentioned. In October 1979, at a meeting on infant and young child feeding which took place 'at the centre of WHO/UNICEF decision-making process', various groups of participants were involved on an *equal* footing: representatives of governments, scientists, health workers, executives of infant food manufacturers, representatives of the United Nations system and constituent-based associations from both South and North. The composition of that meeting helped make it a 'qualitative leap forward in the approach to infant feeding'.²⁸ And there should be no surprise that the Executive Director of UNICEF, James Grant, could write that:

we have had a remarkable amount of structural change in the past 30 years (...) most of this change has been brought about by public pressure, with people ahead of governments (...). The outstanding example is the national liberation movements, which have all been against governments. The civil rights movement in the US was another case of people being ahead of the government and forcing change. And the environmental and women's movements ...¹⁶

The 1979 event—whether a unique happening or a precedent remains to be seen—came after almost a decade of a new presence of associations in United Nations meetings. The turning point was the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the environment, where as many interesting and far-reaching things happened in the adjacent Forum as in the inter-governmental assembly. Since then, associations have been present and active in most major United Nations conferences, advocating their views, exchanging information, organizing debates, monitoring the position of governments, lobbying delegates, publishing journals or linking up with people at large. Examples are the World Food Conference (Rome, 1974), the Seventh Special Session

of the United Nations General Assembly on Development and International Cooperation (New York, 1975), Habitat (Vancouver, 1976), UNCTAD IV (Nairobi, 1976), the Conference on new and renewable sources of energy (Nairobi, 1980), the Second Special Session on Disarmament (New York, 1982) and, above all, the most recent, the Women's Conference (Nairobi, 1985) where the parallel Women's Forum gathered more than 15,000 women from all over the globe.^{dd}

Whatever the immediate impact of such activities, they serve another and far-reaching purpose, not without similarities to last century's International Exhibitions. The First International—the International Workingmen's Association—resulted from a meeting of workers in London, in 1862, on the occasion of the International Exhibition. Perhaps the United Nations conferences of the 1980s will be seen, in retrospect, as having played a similar role, facilitating contacts between people otherwise scattered, opening new space to *networking*.

Networking is the other approach to third system linkages. There is nothing new in its practice: since the beginning of history, some people have always been in touch with others on the basis of common values and interests. What is new is that networking becomes progressively global because of the new perceptions of the oneness of humankind, and because technology makes it possible: air travel and the photocopying machine, and the tapes, and now, in a new revolution, telecommunications.

Above all, networking already offers a concrete alternative to conventional institutions serving Prince and Merchant. These are usually designed and operated in a pyramidal manner so as to provide for hierarchical relations between a centre and a periphery, a leader and those led (even when centres or leaders are the product of some consensus). They are the vehicle of the exercise of an outer power over others. They rest on a vertical division of labour between bureaucrats and membership. They nurture disabling professions and dispossess people. They are internally and externally competitive and foster bigness. They seek and dispense information rather than facilitating communication. They breed conformism and dependence. They are change-resistant and self-perpetuating. As a whole, they hinder rather than enhance freedom.

In sharp contrast, networks operate horizontally. Their centres are everywhere, their peripheries nowhere. Networking simply means that a number of autonomous, equal and usually small groups link up to share knowledge, practice solidarity or act jointly and/or simultaneously in different spaces.

They exercise an inner power over themselves. Based as they are on moral (as distinct from professional or institutional) motivations, networks are cooperative, not competitive. Communicating is of their essence. They ignore coordination as a specialized task. Leadership, if and when needed, is shifting. The *raison d'être* of networks is not in themselves, but in a job to be done. When there is one, they set themselves up. They adjust quickly to changing circumstances. They are resilient in adversity (for instance, that one entity is coopted by the establishment does not affect the whole). When they are no longer useful, they disappear. They are transient. Moving outside mainstreams and beaten tracks on somewhat marginal paths, they learn from each other to look elsewhere and beyond the conventional and the immediate. Being multidimensional, they stimulate imagination and innovation. They foster solidarity and a sense of belonging. They expand the sphere of autonomy and freedom.

The source of the movement is the same everywhere—people's autonomous power—and so is its most universal goal, survival. But the latent power of people materializes only here and there. This is what happens when millions of Filipinos occupy the boulevards of Manila,^{cc} when millions of Europeans assemble to oppose nuclear weapons, when the consumers of Penang lodge complaints against the Merchant's abuses or when the activists of Solidarnosc raise their voice. But these remain worlds apart. Networking may now be part of North American reality, and the basis of the work of the International Baby Food Action Network, but things still look as if these were only isolated islands emerging in the still unconnected archipelago of Another Development.

Some associations, for instance Amnesty International or the IOCU, are worldwide in coverage, but their concerns are sectoral. If the objectives and activities of Lokayan in India are akin to those of IBASE in Rio de Janeiro, as are the problems of the peasants in the African Sahel to those of the fishworkers in the Philippines, there is no real interchange among them. Efforts are underway,^{ff} but they are light-years away from the requirements, however widely these are felt.

What is sorely needed is to make any significant happening in any local space an event in the global space, and conversely; to intensify the sharing of experiences, to help every citizen in every association feel that she/he is not alone, that she/he belongs to a global fraternity. This implies a conscious effort towards global networking,^{gg} towards global third system communication.

It is now technically possible. Said Arthur Clarke in 1983:

During the coming decade, more and more businessmen, well-heeled tourists and virtually all newsmen will be carrying attaché-case-sized units that will permit direct two-way communication with their homes or offices, via the most convenient satellite. These will provide voice, telex and video facilities (still photos and, for those who read it, live TV coverage). As these units become cheaper, smaller and more universal, they will make travellers totally independent of national communications systems.⁹

This does not need to be limited to the Prince, the Merchant and affluent people: it may and will be used by third system associations.

In a less high-tech mode, and since the written word is still available to the third system, it remains possible to multiply, intensify and indeed generalize communication through inexpensive publications.

Like many others mentioned in this paper, IFDA has been endeavouring to meet, however modestly, the need of third system associations to *relate to each other, in whatever space they operate and whatever their cause, through its bi-monthly Dossier* which is published in a single trilingual edition (English, French, Spanish). Dedicated as it is to the search for Another Development, it publishes case studies, notes on experiences, alternative views and approaches and information ('news from the third system'), as provided by the network of its readers. It is global in its coverage, contributors and circulation. It reflects most current concerns on the alternative agenda, from peace to the women's movement, through local self-reliance, people empowerment, human rights, consumers' self-defence, environment or people's North-South solidarity. Every issue systematically features authors from the principal regions and cultures of the planet. Starting from a modest mailing list of some 2,500 addresses, it is now circulated in 18,400 copies and reaches many more readers in virtually every country. This is obviously a drop of water in the ocean, and many problems are unsolved, such as that of languages,^{hh} but at least the IFDA *Dossier* is available.

In its effort to communicate, the third system should also examine the potential of a Third World press agency, Inter Press Service, which now has a telecommunication network extending to some 60 cities in all continents.ⁱⁱ It is trying to promote alternative information (contextual rather than limited-to-the-spot news); visibility of new actors; direct South-South and South-North links; and to create a new type of communicator. Here again,

many questions remain open, including the critical financial one, but IPS is an instrument open to the third system and could be made use of.³³

Discussing the 'task, substance and strategy of the social movements' in trying to stop the apocalypse, Rudolf Bahro writes:

There are various seemingly irrational responses in vogue: the New Age Movement or the Aquarian Conspiracy.¹¹ One thing about them is correct: what is required really is a world-embracing counter movement, and there is no Archimedian point within the existing institutions which could be used to bring about even the smallest change of course. Without forces which attack from outside, the atomic holocaust is not to be staved off (...). Only the most basic social movements can bring about that break in cultural continuity without which we shall be unable to save our very existence.^{kk}

What Bahro says applies equally to the holocaust of dispossession; and the only alternative to these two holocausts is Another Development. Only the *movement*, whatever its name, third system or not, will enable life to continue on this planet—perhaps simply because it is life itself.

And what matters first is to make available to people in each and every space the instruments through which they may exercise their autonomous power. In the process of realizing this potential, the role of citizens and/or associations is both critical and temporary. There may be seeds of change, but if seeds perish, there is no harvest. The medium may not be the message, but the process is certainly the policy, if the process means *enabling* people to become citizens, *empowering* them to act autonomously, to hold Prince, Merchant and third system associations accountable for the consequences of the use of whatever power, opposed or complementary, they may have.

For the last thing to do would be to exonerate the third system from what it requires from the others. Only full *accountability* will help the third system to avoid bureaucratization, resist cooption, keep its role of countervailing power, preserve its capacity for permanent renewal, strive to run itself by imagination, in a word, remain what it sets out to be, the servant of the people.

Notes referring to the IFDA Dossier

The *IFDA Dossier* appeared twice in 1978 (Nos. 1 and 2). It was published every month in 1979 (Nos. 3–14) and every other month since January 1980. Numbers 15–20 thus correspond to 1980; 21–26 to 1981; 27–32 to 1982; 33–38 to 1983; 39–44 to 1984 and 45–50 to 1985. Every issue bears the date of the month of

publication and of the following month. No.50, published in November 1985 is thus dated *November/December 1985*. Indices by author, theme and association appeared in *Dossiers* 17, 28, 36 and 50. *Dossiers* 1 to 37, except 27, 28 and 30 as well as 44, 45 and 48, are out of stock, but the full collection and the 20,000-page background papers of the third system project, are available on microfiche from Interdocumentation AG, Poststrasse 14, 6300 Zug, Switzerland, for SFR 950.

- a. Grant, James P., 'A children's revolution for 6 billion dollars a year', D.37, pp. 37–51.
- b. Kothari, Rajni, 'Lokayan's efforts to overcome the new rift', D.52, pp. 3–14; Pronk, Jan, 'The case for a world public sector', D.54, pp. 55–66.
- c. Szuszkiewicz, J.S., 'Can they do it: participation of NGOs of Third World countries in NIEO-oriented projects', D.10, pp. 83–95.
- d. Passaris, Solange, 'Les enjeux de la vie associative en France', D.24, pp. 15–24.
- e. Herz, Christina, 'L'assemblée fédérale des verts allemands', D.47, pp. 43–46; Langer, Alexander, 'The Greens in Italy', *ibid.*, pp. 41–42.
- f. Goulet, Denis, 'Development as liberation: policy lessons from case studies', D.3; de Silva, G.V.S. et al, 'Bhoomi Sena, a struggle for people's power', D.5; de Bruyn Jac and Jacobs, Roger 'Le mouvement de base', D.20, pp. 97–100; Mudali, Danieul, 'Small fishermen meet at Kuantan', D.23, pp. 78–80; Fishermen's Alliance of Rizal, 'The troubled waters of Laguna Lake', D.41, pp. 51–56; Ouedraogo, Bernard Lédéa, 'Developper sans abîmer' (Association internationale six S), *ibid.*, pp. 23–36; 'Fisherworkers get a chance to speak' (International Conference of Fishworkers and their supporters), D.44, pp. 61–62; 'Philippines: Agency for Community Educational Services Foundation (ACES)', D.45, p. 88. Cf. McCall, Brian, 'The transition toward self-reliance: some thoughts on the role of people's organizations', D.22, pp. 37–46; David, Karina Constantino, 'Issues in community organization', D.23, pp. 5–20; Rahman, Anisur, 'NGO work of organizing the rural poor', D.50, pp. 15–20; Khan Nighat Said and Bhasin, Kamala, 'Responding to the challenge of rural poverty in Asia: Role of people's organizations', D.53, pp. 3–16 & D.54, pp. 9–20.
- g. 'ENDA, Environnement et développement du Tiers Monde', D.45, pp. 83–84; 'Lutte contre la faim en zone sahélo-somalienne', D.47, pp. 49–54; Schkolnik, Mariana, 'People economic organizations in Chile', *ibid.*, pp. 27–28; Esteva, Gustavo, 'Mexico: Self-help network', D.51, pp. 73–75.
- h. 'India: Kalpavriksh, the environmental action group', D.48, pp. 76–78; Maathai, Wangari, 'Kenya: The Green Belt Movement', D.49, pp. 3–12; D.53, pp. 39–41; 'SINA: Settlements Information Network Africa', D.53, p. 73.
- i. IBASE, 'An innovative service for the popular movements', D.30, pp. 82–84; 'L'Association sénégalaise de recherche et d'assistance pour le développement communautaire (ASRADEC)', D.32, pp. 89–90; Tall, Rokiatou, 'Afrique occidentale: L'AFOTEC, service international d'appui à la formation et aux technologies', D.49, pp. 84–88.
- j. 'Philippines: Mindanao Community Theatre Network', D.50, pp. 88–89. Cf. D.30, 33, 42 and 48.
- k. 'Foundation for Education with Production', D.27, pp. 67–71.

- l. Cooley, Mike, 'Beating swords into ploughshares, The Lucas experiment described', D.35, pp. 53–63, & D.33, pp. 76–77.
- m. 'Tool', D.47, p. 84; SATIS, 'Socially appropriate technology international information services', D.48, pp. 71–74; WISE, 'World information service on energy', *ibid.*, p. 75.
- n. 'An outline of Japanese non-governmental organizations in development cooperation', D.43, pp. 81–83; 'Il était une fois SOLAGRAL', D.44, pp. 75–77; 'France: Le GRET, un outil de communication pour un développement autocentré', D.45, p. 89; 'USA: The Trickle Up Programme', D.46, p. 86; 'Collectif européen Conscientisation', D.51, pp. 83–84.
- o. Rahman, Md Anisur, 'All India Convention of people's science movement', D.4; 'Lokayan, dialogue of the people', D.28, pp. 84–85; D.41, pp. 37–50; Kothari, Rajni, *cf.* note (b) above; 'Brésil: Le Centre Josué de Castro', D. 43, p. 80; 'Ghana: Centre for the development of the people', D.45, p. 86; 'Ecuador: Red interdisciplinaria de investigación y participación', D.50, pp. 83–85; 'Uruguay: CIEDUR en la reconstrucción nacional', D.52, pp. 77–79; 'Paraguay: Educación, capacitación y tecnología campesina', D.53, p. 76; 'Ecuador: CATER, Centro Andino de Tecnología Rural', D.53, p. 77.
- p. 'L'AFARD, une association de femmes "chercheurs", D.21, p. 12; 'The Changleput rural women's social education centre', D.42, pp. 78–80; AWRAN, 'Asia: Women's research and action network', D.49, pp. 89–90; D.50, pp. 25–37.
- q. 'Les services juridiques en milieu rural', D.43, pp. 78–79; 'Asia: The law and society trust', D.46, pp. 78–79; 'Philippines: BATAS, Centre for people's law', D.48, p. 80; 'Network of Concerned Third World Lawyers launched', D.51, pp. 76–79; 'Lawasia', D.53, p. 83.
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- t. 'The Minority Rights group', D.31, pp. 86–87; 'The International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES)', D.43, pp. 75–78; 'DOCIP: Indigenous populations documentation, research and information centre', D.50, p. 86.
- u. IBFAN, 'European mothers: do they really have a "free choice" on how best to feed their babies?', D.50, p. 81.
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- x. IBFAN, 'New actions launched on baby food issues', D.41, pp. 73–74; 'Milupa campaign', D.43, p. 85; Chetley, Andrew, 'The power to change: lessons from the baby food campaign', D.52, pp. 45–56.

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- cc. Nerfin, Marc, 'A Three-Chamber UN', D.45, pp. 2 & 32. Cf. Garcia, Henry pease, 'Otro desarrollo y el tercer sistema', D.8; Ellis, William N., 'A second level of world government', D.16, pp. 124-126 & 'NewAge world governance', D.34, pp. 43-50.
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