



Having Fun Supporting the United Nations

I cut my civic action teeth in the mid-1960s in New York City, organizing Citizens For Clean Air. We passed local ordinances to prevent trash burning in millions of incinerators; got TV, radio, and press to release the City's primitive Air Pollution Index in weather reports; and fought the auto industry to speed installation of catalytic converters. All the while, our 40,000 members knew we were only scratching the surface, offering Band-Aids. While we released praying mantises and lady bugs in pesticide-sprayed Central Park to teach about natural methods of insect control, many of us knew the problems were national and international, involving fossil-fueled industrial methods, faulty technologies, and pursuit of the American Dream of keeping up with the Joneses via mass consumption.

I ended up realizing that too few people and resources were focused on—let alone defending—the global commons, the heritage of all humans: oceans, atmosphere, satellite orbits and

electromagnetic frequencies that carry communications and commerce, and the rich genetic library of ecosystems.

Any foray into the international arena must begin with some understanding of nation-states, their politics and their competitive behavior patterns set in motion by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Until the transnational challenge, national sovereignty was nations' holy writ, fostering patriotism and armies to defend their respective territories, echoing the ecosystem-spacing methods of our gatherer/hunter ancestors. Can such deeply rooted nationalism and patriotism, usually based on patriarchal social structures, be transcended? Can human awareness expand and societies restructure democratically to embrace planetary ecological realities in time to avoid disastrous collapses, more species die-backs and extinctions—including possibly our own? Most environmental activists, working on local, regional, national, or global issues, think such thoughts continually.

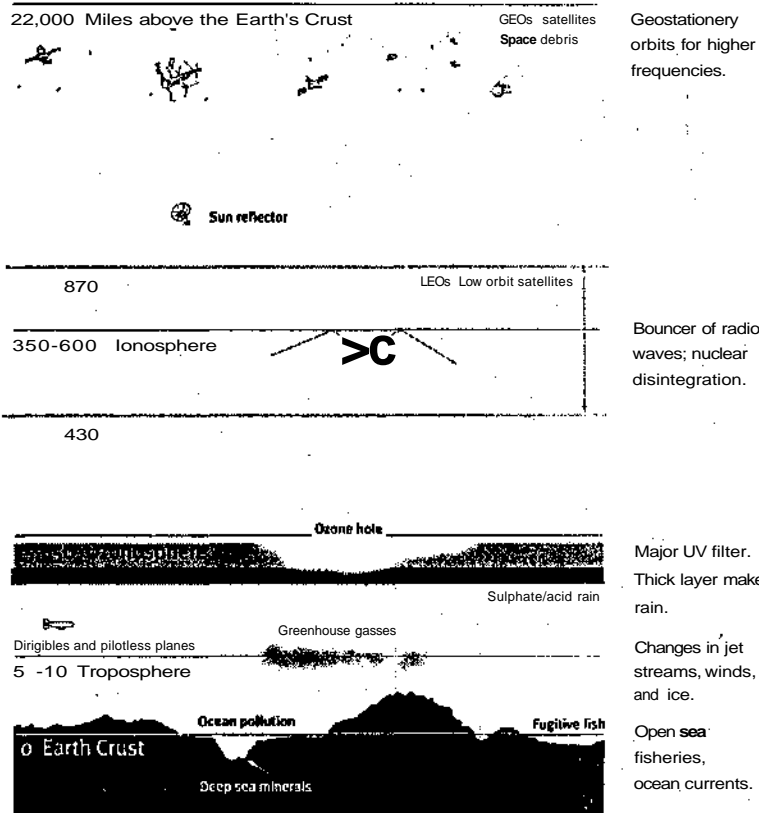
THE UNITED NATIONS

As I jumped into defending the global commons in the early 1990s I rediscovered the United Nations. I attended the first UN Summit on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972, where I participated with Stewart Brand, Stephanie Mills, Margaret Mead, Paul Ehrlich, Jerry Mander, Teddy Goldsmith, Barry Commoner, and others in a series of enlightening dinner conversations. The UN (in spite of much opposition from national governments) subsequently convened a series of summits on the real agenda of "We the Peoples," on such topics as food, shelter, population, health, children, human rights, science and technology, poverty and unemployment, cities, environment, and women and development.

The contemporary struggles over the global commons are just the latest in the fifty-three-year history of the United Nations, one of the major social innovations of the twentieth century. Few in the US understand that networking, convening, brokering, and facilitating standard-setting, treaties, and agreements among the 186 member states constitutes the bulk of UN activities. Agreements on universal human rights, work place and health standards, education, child development, the status of women and indigenous peoples, consumer and environmental protection, the promotion of the arts, sciences, and culture, as well as the UN's more visible peace-keeping roles, have been painstakingly achieved since the UN's Charter was signed in the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco in 1945.

Despite the UN's severe limitations as a deliberative body that can only recommend to nation-states, many of its international agreements work anyway. Sometimes this is due to countervailing forces and creative coalition-building between countries, e.g., the Canadian-lead, NGO-driven "Ottawa process" which led to the treaty to ban landmines in 1997. Sometimes, NGOs have assumed the role as monitors and enforcers of UN Charters (see "Neptune's Manifesto," p. 26—ed.). Maybe a third reason agreements work is that playing fair creates a more predictable market which benefits all the parties. It reduces the cost of bickering (at the World Trade Organization or a world court), and of negotiating and renegotiating many bilateral agreements.

Civic society organizations (CSOs) or NGOs are now one key to defending the global commons and making the UN more effective. (I no longer like the acronym NGO, since the World Trade Organization uses it for multi-national corporations; e.g., it designates General Motors and



The Biosphere is a series of "volumetric" commons, one inside the other like a Chinese box. The diagram lists six global commons: Earth's crust, troposphere, sulphate layer, ozonosphere, ionosphere, and near-Earth orbital. Each has been invaded and degraded. Decision-making, enforcement, and monitoring remain primitive except for the telecommunications industry "commons" (see p. 22).

Microsoft as NGOs!) The UN, since Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's 1992 initiative, has been creating ever more space for CSOs and making them partners in many of its programs, culminating in the People's Millennium Assembly to be held in New York in the year 2000.

BETWEEN NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES AND TRANSNATIONALS

Dealing with today's accelerating destruction of our global commons requires the UN—as the only international body with the mandate of "We the Peoples" and the broadest membership of all the nations. If the UN were not there, we would truly have to invent it. In large part because of its success, the UN is suffering a backlash. National governments and corporations do not like to be upstaged. Both often resort to the popular pastime of demonizing the UN.

Because the mass media cover UN summits, justice, equity, and sustainability issues become hot topics in many countries, where reluctant politicians are pressured to deal with them. No wonder

the UN is in such a crossfire, as its nation-members alternatively use the world forum as a fig leaf for their policies (as George Bush did in the 1991 Gulf War) or as a scapegoat (as both Bill Clinton and Bob Dole did as presidential candidates in 1996—both erroneously, and shamefully, portrayed US command failures in Somalia and Bosnia as the fault of the UN). Such policy disinformation, along with deceptive advertising and media campaigns, are now a major block to the UN's contribution to a sustainable future.

Of course, it's impossible to deal with the global commons without paying salaries to do it. The current financial crisis at the UN is due largely to one sovereign nation—the US's non-payment of some \$1.3 billion in back dues. With dues payments stalemated in Congress by Senator Jesse Helms and other conservatives, isolationists, and fundamentalists, and, in addition, a notable absence of leadership from Democrats and the White House, the UN is enmeshed in US political

cross-currents. Since 1996, the fifteen countries of the European Union have offered to support a cut in the US share of UN dues from its current twenty-five percent to fifteen-to-twenty percent and from its thirty-one percent share in the peace-keeping budget to twenty-five percent. Helms rejected this offer, yet still makes such a reduction one of his forty onerous and often irrational "conditions" for the US to meet its arrears obligations.

Meanwhile, the US still uses its veto in the UN Security Council as if it were a paid-up member, and attempts to influence the UN in countless ways. This has led to increasing frustration among the Europeans and other US allies, many of whose leaders have commented that there should be "no representation without taxation," as the UN Charter states. The war of words continues with sloganeering about "reforming" the UN and its "bloated bureaucracy." The reality is that the UN's annual budget is only about four percent of that of the City of New York, while its core functions

Hot Air & Equity

At the Kyoto Convention on Climate Change convened by the United Nations in December, 1997 the key issue in reducing greenhouse gases was not technology, monitoring, or

enforcement, but equity between countries of the industrial North and those of the developing Southern Hemisphere. The question asked in Kyoto: could an orderly transition proceed from unsustainable, fossil-fueled industrial production-based economies to cleaner, greener technologies of the emerging information-rich Solar Age, based on renewable energy and resources, working within nature's cycles and tolerances? Naturally, the resource-rich but cash-

poor developing countries of the South refused to be bound by the same rules for capping their share of green-

house gas emissions (twenty percent of the world's total) as those proposed for the cash-rich countries responsible for eighty percent of the emissions. This challenged the traditional economic and legal rules of Western societies.

Several new proposals were negotiated: a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) sponsored by Brazil, which would facilitate rapid transfers of green technologies, to enable developing countries to leapfrog the industrialization stage, in exchange for their ecological assets (biodiversity, oxygen, and carbon-sink capacities of rainforests, services of watersheds, etc.). Northern countries promoted Joint Implantation projects—often scams whereby companies receive credit offsetting their pollution by "sink-enhancement" or "carbon-sequestration" efforts (e.g. planting trees) in developing countries.

Predictably, economists' favorite proposals were based on extending markets and property rights, i.e., setting up pollution permit-trading of CO₂ similar to that allowed under the US Clean Air Act. This act gave rights to emit SO₂ to polluting companies, which were then allowed to sell and trade them on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT). Developing countries balked at a similar global proposal, unless such CO₂ permits were allocated equitably to all countries on a per-capita basis—so that the poor could at least sell them to the rich.

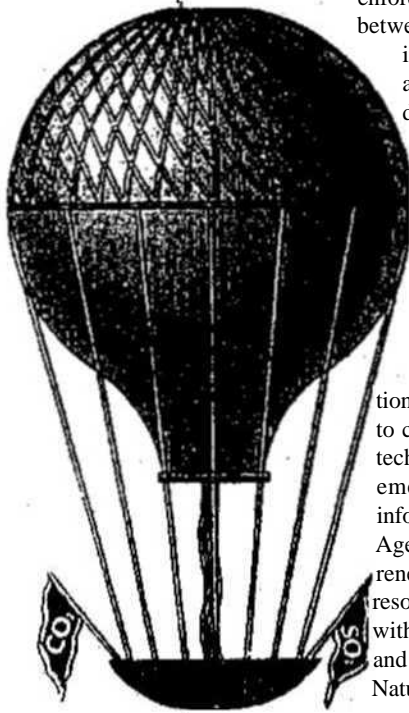
The constant, self-serving drumbeat of Western economists promoting such

pollution-trading cannot mask these equity concerns. CBOT trading of SO₂ has been unfair, since it deals with polluting the air in a global commons which all humans must breathe. The CBOT assumes national sovereignty of airsheds! Worse, the SO₂ permits were given to polluting companies rather than being auctioned, the correct approach for public assets. This set up rewards for laggard polluters, encouraging sub-optimal "end of the pipe" controls and lazy management—while punishing everyone else, including all of the innovating young companies emerging in the information/solar age sectors.

I asked the White House Advisor on Climate Change: "If the USA had really wanted a wide, liquid, and efficient market for SO₂, why did they not give rights to emit SO₂ to every man, woman and child in the country?" He agreed that this would have been the most logical way to set up such a market. Instead we got just another prejudiced trading desk on the global casino, parading as free trade.

The CO₂ pollution trading schemes are on hold until the equity issues are resolved. This will entail major North-South agreements and perhaps a proposed new type of "green" International Monetary Fund (IMF) owned by all the signatory nations, which would govern any pollution-trading regimes and oversee Joint Implementation and CDMs.

—HH



cost much less than the yearly budget of the Tokyo Fire Department.

The lack of US funding has pressured the UN into seeking funds from and partnerships with businesses. Such partnerships—especially with green businesses—should be encouraged. But, what standards will a corporation partnering with the UN be required to meet? The UN Development Programme, whose mission is poverty eradication and sustainable human development, is seeking partnerships with corporations:— provided that they meet its high standards. Any contracts with polluting, employee-exploiting, or otherwise irresponsible companies could harm UN credibility. Any partnerships that avoid corporate transparency and external auditing will be questioned. Some CSOs and smaller companies suspect that the UN favors the World Business Council on Sustainable Development and other corporate giants of the industrial era. Yet the UN will never offer its "brand name" to the highest bidder.

These questions have not been allayed by the realization that powerful global corporations have captured the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization (WTO)—all originally within the UN's mandate—and succeeded in shutting down agencies they opposed, including the UN Center on Transnational Corporations, and in crippling UNESCO, UNCTAD, and UNIDO (seen as controlled by developing countries) and marginalizing the International Labor Organization and the UN Environment Program.

CHAMPIONING THE UN

Contrarian that I am, I decided the best way to call to account those currency speculators, tax evaders, bio-pirates, drug dealers, arms traffickers, transboundary polluters, toxic waste dumpers, and child exploiters was to champion the UN and its time-honored standard-setting and treaty-negotiating process. This meant that I had to defend the UN from anti-abortion foes, various militia groups, and isolationists within the US and Congress. Their numbers are small in spite of the noise they make; surveys show most Americans still support the UN and actually trust the UN more than their own politicians in Washington.

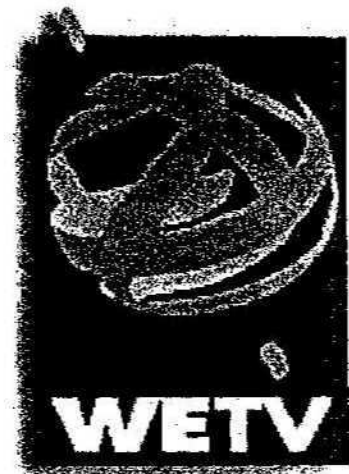
In 1994, I launched a civic group with friends and allies in many countries, the Global Commis-

WETV

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info@wetv.com, www.wetv.com.

A new common asset: global, multi-cultural public access TV is now a reality in WETV (the WE stands for "We the People" and "Whole Earth"). Citizens in mediocracies and attention economies are already sick of much of the content of online, cable, and broadcast media. They demand more useful content and coverage of community problem-solving, higher quality entertainment, education, and children's programming. WETV, headquartered in Ottawa, is a public-private-civic network with a state-of-the-art multi-media backbone now in thirty countries. It's committed to programming for human development, allowing self-expression from CSOs and the grassroots on global and local issues.

We are learning that cultural diversity is as important as bio-diversity, and both are the bedrock wealth of nations. Funded by the humanitarian aid programs of seven countries, led by Canada, WETV has obtained rights to all UN television programming and that of many other public-service producers. WETV is now opening



some ownership to private investors and I am proud to be one of the first. As a member of its Business Advisory Council, I am now working to bring in other socially responsible investors and businesses which will accept WETV's stringent code of conduct and standards for private-sector partners and will help guide a new TV series on emerging trends toward a more ethical marketplace. —HH

sion to Fund the United Nations. The Global Commission functions as a virtual organization, with members from over forty countries, ranging from ambassadors, parliamentarians, and a Nobel Laureate, to leaders of civic organizations.

The Global Commission produced a report showing how defending the global commons could also raise money to conserve such resources, and to fund the UN and many other humanitarian and development activities around the world. The Commission's report clearly demonstrated that the stumbling block to equitable, sustainable, human development is not money. Although the Agenda 21 agreements signed by 170 nations in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 estimated that shifting priorities to sustainable development would cost \$650 billion, the Commission showed the truth. If governments just stopped funding some \$750 billion worth of subsidies to unsustainable development (i.e. pork-barrel projects), there would be plenty of money left over. The Commission's report also advocated defending the global commons by encouraging international agreements, so that countries could (1) levy user-fees on all commercial exploitation of oceans, atmosphere, the electromagnetic spectrum, space and the newer commons of financial cyberspace, and the global casino, and (2) exact fines for abuses such as arms trafficking, polluting, and currency speculation.

Other proposals included a UN Security

WINDSLOW COLWELL



Insurance Agency (UNSI), a new global commons system of political risk management that is now possible. Employment of UNSIA could, reduce the world's military budgets by using insurance instead of weapons. UNSIA would be a public-private-civic partnership among the UN Security Council, the insurance industry, and the hundreds of civic, humanitarian organizations which engage worldwide in conflict-resolution and peace-building. Any nation wanting to cut its military budget and redeploy its investments into its civilian sectors could apply to UNSIA for a peacekeeping insurance policy. The insurance industry would supply

political-risk assessors and write the policies. The premiums would be pooled to fund both properly trained peacekeepers and a rapid-deployment online network of existing civic and humanitarian organizations to build trust and confidence on the ground. The UNSIA proposal is now backed by several Nobel Prize winners, including Dr. Oscar Arias and other leaders, and risk-management insurance is taught at the London School of Economics and other major institutions. UNSIA was debated in

Hazel is an old Whole Earth friend, independent futurist, in April, 1996, the first and heartfelt mover of global time that body had thought and institutions. Her latest book is *Building a Win-Win World* (1996; Berrett-Koehler Publishers). Her editorial columns can be found in 400 newspapers in twenty-seven languages—but not in the US! She received the Global Citizen Award in 1996.

tions into peace-keeping operations. In May 1996, the Security Council called on the Secretary General to investigate the feasibility of a rapid-deployment humanitarian force and, in October 1996, the Norwegian government pledged \$1 million to this project.

I am now a working investor on a new project: global, multicultural, public access TV (See p. 19). I've always dreamed of this global way to counter consumerist disinformation from commercial sources and give prominence to emerging trends that favor sustainability and a more ethical marketplace. I do not expect to see the fruits of any of these initiatives in my lifetime—but my grandson may—as our societies evolve toward planetary ecological awareness and we remember the difference between common money and the wealth of the commons. ©

The Global Commons

An Introduction

Susan Buck. 1998; 225 pp. \$25. Island



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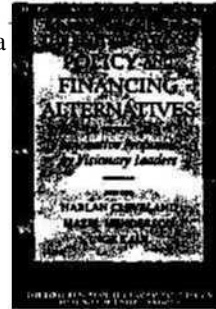
As I found out during my service from 1974 until 1980 on the original Advisory Council of the US Office of Technology Assessment, the "tortoise"

of social innovation always lags behind the "hare" of technological innovation. The former is suspect as planning, while even the most trivial new technologies in the private sector are hailed in media and corporate advertising as innovations or breakthroughs. Laws, treaties, and standard-setting lag even further behind today's accelerating rates of technological change.

Susan Buck sides with the tortoises, providing an excellent overview of today's pro-

The United Nations Policy and Financing Alternatives

Harland Cleveland, Hazel Henderson, and Inge Kaul, eds. 1995; 269 pp. \$12.95. Apex Press, 777 United Nations Plaza, Suite 3C. New York, NY 10017, 800/316-2739, 212/972-9877.



The sub-subtitle of this book is "Innovative Proposals by Visionary Leaders." And so it is. Published in 1995 as the first report of the Global Commission to Fund the United Nations, it has served and is serving its purpose: to stir up the imagination and let sail facts and proposals that

contradict such popular assumptions as "most Americans have qualms about the United Nations and its future directions," or "Americans are opposed to taxes for international pollution or currency exchange." The UN budget seems so meager by the end of this book that you wonder why it's getting such a bad rap. A fine document to recalibrate the UN's role in the global commons.—PW

"Who pays for 'international relations'?... What do 'international relations' cost? The calculation cannot be based on the expense accounts of the

liferating issues. Buck looks at such global commons as the oceans, the atmosphere, and space from an historical, institutional, legal, and economic perspective. She summarizes the evolution of law, jurisprudence, treaties, property rights, and the growing concern over managing and allocating planetary "resources" in the industrialized world. —HH

"After reviewing the history and structure of the global commons, do current trends point to the Grotian moment... a time in which a fundamental change of circumstances [creates] the need for a different world structure and a different international law"?

"Compliance is affected by monitoring and enforcement. How whole harvests are monitored and what sanctions are imposed on nations that violate International Whaling Commission (IWC) directives are part of the implementation component. A recurrent criticism of both international relations and international law is that effective enforcement is virtually impossible because there

scattering of diplomats around the world, let alone those concentrated in New York or Geneva or other international watering holes.

You would surely have to add in all the intelligence agents clustered in Washington, Brussels, Istanbul, Cairo, Tokyo and the many other places... who are assumed...to have some higher wisdom highly priced in the international market for secret information. And you would have to count the many agents of less impressive yet even more international networks of merchants, shipowners, airlines, insurance underwriters, currency speculators—and militant religionists and terrorist conspirators.

Then you would have to widen the net to count the world's military establishments, and the puffery of the arms suppliers....Better add in, too, the growing army of volunteer peacemakers who cluster around those who brandish the biggest weapons.

You could widen the net further to include all the trade negotiators, the exporters and importers, the protectionist lobbies and free-trade advocates, the business firms that span the globe with their internal transactions, and the miracle workers in information technology who make possible a truly global trade in things, money, culture, ideas and information, more and more of it bounced off

orbiters in the sky. You should certainly count the cost of exchanging more than a trillion dollars...each day across the world's increasingly porous boundaries. And you can't leave out the costs of migration—the costs that were too heavy to bear where the migrants came from, the costs of holding some of them in semi-permanent 'camps,' the costs of their transition in leaky boats and across leaky frontiers, the costs of proving they belong somewhere else, the costs of their resettlement wherever compassionate new neighbors welcome them to a new 'home'....

The aggregate costs of international relations are thus incalculable. What can be calculated, calibrated, judged, and acted on are the costs of doing something international about the human choices and chances in 'world affairs.'

" Virtually all Americans favour US participation in a world conference to make the United Nations more effective in the area of

- global security—92% favour;
- global environmental issues—93% favour;
- helping to shift economies to sustainable development that uses resources less wastefully and does not foreclose continuing development for future generations—84% favour.

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is no routinized sanctioning mechanism. However, equally striking is the observation that international agreements work more often than they do not...National leaders recognize that future cooperative ventures, which may be to their advantage, may be jeopardized if they become known as unreliable international actors.... Although cooperation entails costs (especially transaction and monitoring costs), it also reduces economic uncertainty because international regimes provide predictability. Routinization is especially helpful in the global market economy because of the high transaction costs of negotiating exchange terms individually with all possible exchange partners.

" free riders People or groups who benefit from the efforts of others without bearing any of the costs.

... global commons Resource domains to which all nations have legal access, such as outer space.

... international commons Resource domains shared by several nations, such as the Mediterranean Sea and Antarctica. ...

... precautionary principle The normative position that when faced with scientific uncertainty about the outcome of a proposed environmental policy, the alternative that poses the least risk should be chosen. In lay terms, "Better safe than sorry."

