



Wilting Greens

The World Summit on Sustainable Development disappointed environmentalists—and heartened the poor.

"IT'S CLEAR THAT we've suffered a number of major defeats," declared Andrew Hewett, executive director of Oxfam Community Aid, at the conclusion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September. Greenpeace climate director Steve Sawyer complained, "What we've come up with is absolute zero, absolutely nothing." The head of an alliance of European green groups proclaimed, "We barely kept our heads above water."

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Environmental activists hoped the summit would set the international agenda for sweeping environmental reform over the next 15 years. Indeed, they hoped to do nothing less than revolutionize how the world's economy operates. Such fundamental change was necessary, said the summeeters, because a profligate humanity consumes too much, breeds too much, and pollutes too much, setting the stage for a global ecological catastrophe.

But the greens' disappointment was inevitable because their major goals—preserving the environment, eradicating poverty, and limiting economic growth—are incompatible. Economic growth is a prerequisite for lessening poverty, and it's also the best way to improve the environment. Poor people cannot afford to worry much about improving outdoor air quality, let alone afford to pay for it. Rather than face that reality, environmentalists increasingly invoke "sustainable development." The most common definition of the phrase comes from the 1987 United Nations report *Our Common Future*: development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

For radical greens, sustainable development

means economic stagnation. The Earth Island Institute's Gar Smith told Cybercast News, "I have seen villages in Africa...that were disrupted and destroyed by the introduction of electricity." Apparently, the natives no longer sang community songs or sewed together in the evenings. "I don't think a lot of electricity is a good thing," Smith added. "It is the fuel that powers a lot of multinational imagery." He doesn't want poor Africans and Asians "corrupted" by ads for Toyota and McDonald's, or by Jackie Chan movies.

Indian environmentalist Sunita Narain decried the "pernicious introduction of the flush toilet" during a recent PBS/BBC television debate hosted by Bill Moyers. Luckily, most other summeeters disagreed with Narain's curious disdain for sanitation. One of the few firm goals set at the confab was that adequate sanitation should be supplied by 2015 to half of the 2.2 billion people now lacking it.

Sustainable development boils down to the old-fashioned "limits to growth" model popularized in the 1970s. Hence Daniel Mittler of Friends of the Earth International moaned that "the summit failed to set the necessary economic and ecological limits to globalization." The *Johannesburg Memo*, issued by the radical green Heinrich Böll Foundation before the summit, summed it up this way: "Poverty alleviation cannot be separated from wealth alleviation."

The greens are right about one thing: The extent of global poverty is stark. Some 1.1 billion people lack safe drinking water, 2.2 billion are without adequate sanitation, 2.5 billion have no access to modern energy services, 11 million children under the age of 5 die each year in developing countries from preventable diseases, and 800 million people are still malnourished, despite a global abundance of food. Poverty

eradication is clearly crucial to preventing environmental degradation, too, since there is nothing more environmentally destructive than a hungry human.

Most summit participants from the developing world understood this. They may be egalitarian, but unlike their Western counterparts they do not aim to make everyone equally poor. Instead, they want the good things that people living in industrialized societies enjoy.

That explains why the largest demonstration during the summit, consisting of more than 10,000 poor and landless people, featured virtually no banners or chants about conventional environmentalist issues such as climate change, population control, renewable resources, or biodiversity. Instead, the issues were land reform, job creation, and privatization.

The anti-globalization stance of rich activists widens this rift. Environmentalists claim trade harms the environment and further impoverishes people in the developing world. They were outraged by the dominance of trade issues at the summit.

"The leaders of the world have proved that they work as employees for the transnational corporations," asserted Friends of the Earth Chairman Ricardo Navarro. Indian eco-feminist Vandana Shiva added, "This summit has become a trade summit, it has become a trade show." Yet the U.N.'s own data underscore how trade helps the developing world. As fact sheets issued by the U.N. put it, "During the 1990s the economies of developing countries that were integrated into the world economy grew more than twice as fast as the rich countries. The 'non-globalizers' grew only

half as fast and continue to lag further behind."

By invoking a zero sum version of sustainable development, environmentalists not only put themselves at odds with the developing world; they ignore the way in which economic growth helps protect the environment. The real commons from which we all draw is the growing pool of scientific, technological, and institutional concepts, and the capital they create. Past generations have left us far more than they took, and the result has been an explosion in human well-being, longer life spans, less disease, more and cheaper food, and expanding political freedom.

Such progress is accompanied by environmental improvement. Wealthier is healthier for both people and the environment. As societies become richer and more technologically adept, their air and water become cleaner, they set aside more land for nature, their forests expand, they use less land for agriculture, and more people cherish wild species. All indications suggest that the 21st century will be the century of ecological restoration, as humanity uses physical resources ever more efficiently, disturbing the natural world less and less.

In their quest to impose a reactionary vision of sustainable development, the disappointed global greens will turn next to the World Trade Organization, the body that oversees international trade rules. During the summit, the WTO emerged as the greens' *bête noire*. As Friends of the Earth International's Daniel Mittler carped, "Instead of using the [summit] to respond to global concerns over deregulation and liberalization, governments are pushing the World

Trade Organization's agenda." "See you in Cancun!" promised Greenpeace's Steve Sawyer, referring to the location of the next WTO ministerial meeting in September 2003. That confab will build on the WTO's Doha Trade Round, launched last year, which is aimed at reducing the barriers to trade for the world's least developed countries.

The WTO may achieve worthy goals that eluded the Johannesburg summit, such as eliminating economically and ecologically ruinous farm and energy subsidies and opening developed country markets to the products of developing nations. Free marketeers and greens might even form an alliance on those issues.

But environmentalists want to use the WTO to implement their sustainable development agenda: global renewable energy targets, regulation based on the precautionary principle, a "sustainable consumption and production project," a worldwide eco-labeling scheme. According to Greenpeace's Sawyer, nearly everyone at the Johannesburg summit agreed "there is something wrong with unbridled neoliberal capitalism."

Let's hope the greens fail at the WTO just as they did at the U.N. summit. Their sustainable development agenda, supposedly aimed at improving environmental health, instead will harm the natural world, along with the economic prospects of the world's poorest people. The conflicting goals on display at the summit show that at least some of the world's poor are wise to that fact. ■

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Ecumenical Intolerance

The sin of extremism is neither common to all Muslims nor limited to Islam.

PRESIDENT BUSH HAS stressed repeatedly that America's war on terrorism is not a war on Islam, which, he asserts, is a "religion of peace" perverted by fanatical extremists. But from the start dissenting voices have said that Islam itself poses a threat to Western civilization and that its inherently violent and oppressive nature was being whitewashed for the sake of political correctness.

One of the first salvos was fired by the Rev. Franklin Graham, who in October 2001 called Islam "a very evil and wicked religion." (He later insisted he was denouncing Islamic extremism, not all Muslims.) More recently, the Rev. Jerry Falwell told *60 Minutes* that Islam's founder, Mohammed, was a "terrorist." Curiously, in this debate the defense of Islam is usually the province of secularist liberals, while the harshest criticism comes from religious ultraconservatives whose views sometimes overlap with those of Islamic fundamentalists.

In fact, the question "Is Islam a religion of peace or a religion of violence?" is virtually meaningless. Like any major faith, Islam has many faces.

The religion's critics argue that the Koran itself provides the foundation for bigotry and aggression toward non-Muslims, pointing to Mohammed's bloody wars against infidels. "In my opinion," Falwell told *60 Minutes*, "Jesus set the example for love, as did Moses, and I think that Mohammed set an opposite example."

Yet as the religious scholar Alex Kronemer has pointed out, Mohammed was no bloodier a figure than Moses—and the Bible contains plenty of language no less violent than the Koran's. At one point, Moses takes the Israelites to task for sparing the women and children of a vanquished enemy tribe and instructs them to

kill all the male children and all the women, except for virgins, who can be taken as slaves and concubines. Mosaic law also makes idolatry or the worship of other gods a capital offense, along with a host of other crimes, including adultery, cursing one's parents, and sodomy.

In his new book *The Name*, Graham writes, "Islam—unlike Christianity—has among its basic teachings a deep intolerance for those who follow other faiths." Yet the basic Christian teaching that salvation can be found only through Jesus Christ can surely be seen as a foundation for intolerance. Throughout history, people professing to follow Christ have killed, tortured, and persecuted countless men and women (most of them also Christians) in the sincere belief that they were not only protecting good Christians from the danger of being seduced by heresy but saving their victims' souls from eternal damnation.

While witch hunts and the persecution of heretics are generally associated with the Catholic Church, Protestantism does not have a stellar historical record either. Early Protestant leaders urged rulers to root out Catholicism in their domains, just as the popes urged Catholic princes to suppress Protestantism. In Calvin's 16th-century Geneva, even private practice of Catholic rites was punishable by expulsion from the city, attendance at sermons was mandatory, and the theological dissident Michael Servetus was burned at the stake for rejecting the doctrines of the Trinity and infant baptism.

Christian history is also marred by often brutal persecution of the Jews, including forced conversions. Indeed, it is a little-disputed fact that in the Middle Ages, Jews in Islamic countries, while relegated to second-class status, enjoyed far more toleration than in most