

restrictions on their use of fossil fuels and new "green" import barriers confronting their export products to the North.

Instead, they want the conference to address the whole range of issues relating to the availability of resources for development, including debt, declining raw material and commodity prices, the problem of market access for their products, and increased funds from both development assistance agencies and from the private sector. And for once in an international negotiation, the developing countries feel that they have a reasonable card to play. None of the major global environmental problems can be solved without their full co-operation.

For instance, even if the US and the other developed countries took steps to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, this effort would be reduced to naught if India and China pursue their ambitious goals to build some three hundred new coal-fired generating stations over the next two decades. In the words of a document prepared by the South Secretariat (an organization of developing countries) for the recent meeting of the Group of 15 developing countries in Caracas: "UNCED is an international conference where the North is seeking environmental concessions from the South, and where the South can make such concessions in return for firm concessions from the North to restructure global economic relations."

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM RIO DE JANEIRO IN JUNE? MANY FEEL THAT the solution to these problems will eventually lie in some sort of "grand bargain" between the North and the South. Such a compact would involve a commitment by the developed countries to substantially reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases and to leave enough "ecological space" for the developing countries to increase their emissions as they develop.

This is emerging as a key demand from the Third World. It would involve substantial transfers of new financial resources to the developing countries to be used not only to ease the transition to more sustainable forms of energy use and forestry practices, but also to help eliminate some of the present deficits of food, housing, clean water and unemployment. Some estimates place the amount of money required at about US \$130 billions a year. In exchange, the developing countries would make commitments to more sustainable forestry practices, reductions in population growth rates, decreases in military spending and more sustainable patterns of energy use. At best, the Rio meeting will make a modest start in this direction.

How far can UNCED get in merging the competing agendas and unblocking the financial channels? At the moment, prospects look decidedly glum. In the words of Maurice Strong, "never have the rich felt so poor." The governments have agreed to talk about money at what will be the final conference preparatory meeting in New York in March. There is a rumour that Japan might be preparing a rich financial package – as much as US \$10 billions. On the other hand, the Americans are broke and the Europeans are obsessed with Eastern Europe. Technology transfer is also a staple of these international discussions, but when the developing country rhetoric of technology transfer on "preferential and non-commercial terms" and the developed country homilies on the sanctity of intellectual property are stripped away, little progress seems to have been achieved.



Michael McParlane

The substantive centrepiece of the Rio conference is an ambitious set of documents called "Agenda 21." This document runs to hundreds of pages and contains a set of action plans on everything from toxic wastes to poverty, economic growth and the environment. It will also contain a series of price tags, adding up to the sorts of billions of dollars mentioned earlier. Previous international conferences have seen most such documents "pre-negotiated" in preparatory committees, but little progress has been made with the stickier parts of Agenda 21 and governments will have to work at least minor miracles in New York to get it ready for Rio.

There seems surprisingly little pressure on governments to come to agreements at Rio. The developing countries seem determined to hold out for a comprehensive deal. In fact, many of their delegations would be given a hostile reception if they returned home with only an action plan on "northern" issues. At the same time, the multi-billion dollar price tag on this deal has allowed many of the developed countries to ignore the whole thing as unrealistic. The present US administration under George Bush, worried about a neo-isolationist opposition determined to criticize it for excessive attention to foreign issues, and leery of substantive changes in US energy policy, will attempt to block real progress on climate change.

And Canada? The Canadian delegation under John Bell of External Affairs and Arthur Campeau of Environment Canada, has been consistently among the best led and most effective in the preparatory process. However, now that the conference is entering its last, most crucial session, it is becoming clear that Canada has little to offer on many of the key questions. These require the kind of Cabinet involvement and high level political leadership that has not yet been forthcoming.

PREVIOUS UN CONFERENCES ON THE ENVIRONMENT, WATER, DESERTS AND renewable energy have concentrated exclusively on the problems of developing countries, but this time the global nature of the issues facing UNCED will require the developed countries to take the first step towards a solution. At home, there seems to be little understanding of the relationship between Canadian domestic policy and our ability to influence the course of the negotiations. Agenda 21 presents a vast array of issues, many of them areas of provincial jurisdiction. If Canada is to play a positive role, much remains to be done in setting our priorities and consulting with provinces on central issues such as forestry, climate change and fisheries.

For instance, Canada is the highest per capita user of energy in the developed world. Although the government has pledged to freeze carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000, it is well known that few steps have been taken to achieve that goal. Canada has led the discussions on forestry in the Rio preparatory process, yet our domestic forestry policies are widely perceived to be unsustainable. The epithet "Brazil of the North," coined by the Brazilian Environment Minister, is beginning to stick.

In early February, in a move that offers at least the hope that Cabinet is now seized with the problem, the Prime Minister gave his old friend Mr. Campeau, in addition to his current responsibilities at Environment, the job as his Personal Representative to UNCED with ambassadorial rank. Nonetheless, if the Prime Minister is to join his other colleagues in some meaningful actions in Rio, several mountains will need to be moved in the next two months. □