

## *Reflections on South Africa:* **The Tragedy of Polarization**

Three recent and troubling images have etched themselves into my thinking on South Africa: one of a revered American black civil rights leader, one of a Pretoria government which is stubbornly resisting the continuation of desperately needed reforms, and one of a courageous white anti-apartheid South African religious leader. Together these images tell a story of suffering and tragedy, of unnecessary polarization and of retrenchment with explosive potential. Yet, there are also signs of hope.

### **Insights of a Civil Rights Champion**

A thin, wiry, distinguished black gentleman extended his hand graciously to me as we met in a Manhattan office. Though it was our first meeting, Bayard Rustin's warmth and transparency were infectious and soon we were deep in discussion about the blight of apartheid in South Africa.

There was an unmistakable sadness in his eyes as he shook his head in dismay when U.S. church involvement in the affairs of South Africa came up. It was not that Rustin was unwilling to confront -- indeed, this was the man who organized Martin Luther King's historic "March on Washington" in 1963 when King gave his "I have a dream speech." It was just that Rustin was painfully aware that so much of the sensationalized rhetoric and the recent bandwagon enthusiasm for indiscriminate disinvestment and divestment were undermining the very forces in South Africa which had successfully strengthened blacks economically and spurred reform.

Bayard Rustin supported constructive pressures on South Africa, but he recognized that much well-intentioned U.S. religious verbiage and action were playing into the hands of extremists on the Right and Left. To someone who cared deeply about both ending apartheid and creating a democratic post-apartheid state, such ill-considered religious intervention was doubly tragic.

After our visit, Rustin rose to leave. He was on his way to his 75-year birthday party being hosted by Mayor Ed Koch. I never saw Rustin again; within a few weeks he was dead. Over the years Rustin had had occasion to irritate and delight allies and enemies across the political



RNS Photo/Wide World

*The Rev. Allan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, speak out against the recent government restrictions.*

spectrum, but virtually all would agree that he was a man of integrity and independence. His words on South Africa still haunt me.

### **Retrenchment in Pretoria**

A second image is that of an increasingly recalcitrant South African government which has slowed its reforms and itself heightened polarization by oppressive new authoritarian moves. The recent decision to place virtually unrestricted power into the hands of the Minister of Law and Order is a case in point.

On February 24, the Minister of Law and Order was given the authority to prohibit "any activities or acts whatsoever" by any of 17 anti-apartheid organizations, plus one trade union (COSATU). To be sure, some of these groups have extremist tendencies and an uncertain commitment to democracy. However, granting one individual, or agency of the government, such sweeping authority is also a decisive step away from democratic ideals.

(Reflections, continued on page 2)

The obligation of a government to protect its people from violence and terrorism is not disputed, but this recent action threatens peaceful activities of opponents of the government. It will fuel the claim, however false, that violence is the only option. The reforms the South African government has made during the course of the past nine years have been promising. The repeal of apartheid legislation such as the Mixed Marriages Act and the Influx Control or "pass laws," as well as the passage of legislation permitting black property ownership, are all progressive developments.

More recently, in November 1987, the Joint Executive Authority (JEA) was established in response to requests from the KwaZulu government and the Natal Provincial Council. The JEA represents the first step towards a truly multi-racial provincial government in South Africa.

In light of these incomplete, but positive moves, the present retrenchment in Pretoria is particularly regrettable and counterproductive.

Clearly the reforms which have occurred in recent years have prompted a domestic political dilemma. The reaction from South Africa's Conservative Party attests to the authenticity and importance of some of the reform efforts. Nevertheless, to pander to the right wing at the expense of moving closer to a democratic, post-apartheid society is short-sighted and will perpetuate the polarization of South Africa.

Many of the more moderate anti-apartheid organizations were not named in the recent government restrictions. However, these groups are also placed under additional pressures and become susceptible to the insidious process of polarization.

Furthermore, recently proposed South African measures to restrict funds from abroad for political activities are cause for concern. It is not at all certain that these bans will properly discriminate between funds for illegitimate and legitimate activities, the latter including those peaceful activities which befit free societies.

### **American Intervention through the Eyes of a South African Religious Leader**

The third image on South Africa comes from a breakfast meeting here in Washington with Johan Heyns, the Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, and the head of the theology department at University of Pretoria. There is a grim determination and steely quality about this white-haired professor which suits him well for the difficult task in which he has been engaged.

For it was Johan Heyns who led the fight to get the Dutch Reformed Church to abandon its earlier view that apartheid was biblically defensible. The 1.5 million-member church, which counts among its members many of the political leaders of South Africa, thus took a major step in clearing the way to right a very great wrong.

As we talked about relations between Americans and South Africans, a nerve was struck in the conversation. All of a sudden this tenacious foe of apartheid turned to me with restrained, but very noticeable, anger and declared: "You Americans often let us down. In 1948, when the apartheid legislation was being constructed piece by piece, you said nothing. But then when we began to dismantle it piece by piece beginning in 1979, you began to attack us and undermine the very forces which were successfully dismantling apartheid."

There was nothing I could say. He was right. Many of us have cared about ending the obvious injustice of apartheid, but we have often not done the hard work of considering what the consequences of our moral rhetoric and guilt-relieving actions are. We have been so anxious to do something, anything, that we have strengthened simultaneously both the extreme Right and extreme Left. This does not bode well for South Africans, black or white.

As disturbing as these images are, there is hope for South Africa. The slide towards polarization need not be permanent.

The government of South Africa can and ought to remove the sweeping powers recently granted to the Minister of Law and Order. It can and ought to permit anti-apartheid groups to engage in non-violent political activities, to lift the State of Emergency, and to enter into discussions and negotiations with all interested and willing parties as soon as possible.

And anti-apartheid groups genuinely committed to democracy also have an obligation to resist the polarization of South African society. Christians both in South Africa and outside will have to do their part as well. We can and ought to act responsibly to bring an end to the unjust apartheid system. We can and ought to respond in ways which do not strengthen the political extremes.

For if we are to succeed in ending the infamy of apartheid while at the same time securing a democratic future for this troubled land, we must defeat both those who cling to apartheid -- and those who would destroy one injustice while paving the way for new forms of oppression to take its place.

-- Kent R. Hill

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# Religious Liberty Alert

## Psychiatric Hospitals Are Still Political Prisons

Almost a decade has passed since I met Peter Vashchenko in the American Embassy in Moscow, but the memories are in many ways as fresh as yesterday. With eyes flashing, this patriarch of a stubborn family of Pentecostals told me of his personal encounter with a seamy underside of Soviet psychiatry.

The year was 1968. Leaving the American Embassy, Peter was apprehended by plainclothes KGB officers within a stone's throw of the U.S. compound. By nightfall he found himself in a psychiatric hospital. When Peter protested that he was completely sane and just wanted to emigrate to the West to secure religious freedom, the "psychiatrist" was ready with the government's official explanation: "By opposing the Soviet State you are banging your head against a wall. No one bangs his head against a wall unless he is mad. Therefore you are mad and that is why you are here!"

Fortunately, Peter's head proved tougher than the wall, and in 1983 he realized his long-held dream by gaining religious freedom for his family. But Peter's encounter with the abuses of Soviet psychiatry was far from unique. Vladimir Bukovsky smuggled information to the West about this insidious Soviet practice in the 1960s, and he paid a price of years in prison as a result. Western scholars such as Peter Reddaway, director of the Kennan Institute, have done much to document the situation.

In 1983, faced with imminent expulsion from the World Psychiatric Association, the Soviet Union withdrew its membership. It is not without irony that international secular bodies of psychiatrists and scientists have been far more courageous and effective in protesting Soviet human rights abuses than their counterparts in the ecumenical religious world.

But the warming winds of *glasnost* have now begun to reach even into the lonely cells of prisoners of conscience in psychiatric hospitals. After years of claiming that all the Western talk of the political abuse of the Soviet psychiatric profession was nothing more than malicious Cold War propaganda, this past November a number of Soviet periodicals began to publish acknowledgments of major abuses in the psychiatric system.

Noting that "high, impenetrable fences" had protected psychiatric institutions from *glasnost*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* charged that "behind those fences, illegality is in progress." The newspaper went on to describe the case of a young Leningrad woman who was diagnosed as schizophrenic and confined to a psychiatric hospital because she openly criticized her supervisor and the factory working conditions.

On January 4, 1988, Soviet officials announced the first major changes in 27 years in the regulations governing psychiatric institutions. According to the new provisions, it will now be a crime to commit a sane person to a psychiatric hospital. For the first time an appeals process has been established allowing the "patient" or the family to challenge the validity of disputed judgments of mental incompetence or illness. And finally, the so-called "special" psychiatric hospitals (for those guilty of allegedly violating criminal, as opposed to civil, statutes) will now be ultimately responsible to the Ministry of Health and not to the Ministry of the Interior.

All of these changes are encouraging, though Western human rights monitors are quite right to insist on a "wait and see" attitude before passing final judgment. After all, the Soviets have committed themselves in international covenants to numerous high standards on religious freedom matters and have consistently fallen well short of implementing their promises. Still, it is a step forward to acknowledge shortcomings and to establish more responsible legal statutes.

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power three years ago, there were an estimated 300 political prisoners in Soviet psychiatric institutions. According to Helsinki Watch, that number has now dropped to about 85. Late in 1987 Keston College (England) still knew of at least 30 Christians confined in psychiatric hospitals. There have been some notable releases, including Anna Chertkova, a victim of more than 14 years of compulsory abusive drug treatment in psychiatric institutions.

Christians in the West ought to continue to be concerned about three critically important cases which have yet to be resolved. Vasili Shipilov, a Russian Orthodox believer, has spent over 46 years of his life confined by the Soviet state; he is presently in a psychiatric hospital. Gederts Melngailis, a Latvian Lutheran, was accused of helping in a Baptist relief project called "Action of Light."

He has been undergoing compulsory psychiatric treatment since August 1983. Hanna Mikhailenko, a Ukrainian Catholic, was convicted of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" -- a charge often lodged against religious activists considered troublesome by the



Keston College Photo Archive

Gederts Melngailis

(Prisons, cont'd on page 4)

(Prisons, continued from page 3)

Soviets. Since 1980 she has been in at least three different psychiatric institutions.

The encouraging news about legislative changes and some recent releases must not lull us into inaction or apathy. We must not forget that some of the most protracted and painful cases of Christian suffering continue to the present day. In addition to remembering these courageous Christians in your prayers, you may express your concern to:

The Honorable Richard Schifter  
Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights  
and Humanitarian Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

His Excellency Yuri Dubinin  
Soviet Ambassador to the United States  
The Embassy of the Soviet Union  
1125 16th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Please mention by name Shipilov, Melngailis, and Mikhailenko, and ask for a general amnesty for all prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union.

-- Kent R. Hill

Every four years United Methodist clergy and laity convene their General Conference, the only body which speaks officially for the denomination. The April 1988 issue of *Religion and Democracy* is accompanied by an "IRD Special Report" which examines some of the international concerns to be considered by the General Conference. Each of the conference delegates and each of the UM bishops will receive a copy of this special issue of the IRD newsletter.

## Letters

To the Editor:

During the past month, the media played up the F.B.I. investigations into various domestic political organizations. I was appalled that not a single report indicated that at least one of these groups, CISPEP, has very real ties to foreign Marxist-Leninist groups. This is not a "bunch of harmless nuns" as James Kilpatrick (a person I thought would have known better) claimed on the television program "*Inside Washington*."

But once again IRD came through. Alan Wisdom's article in February's *Religion and Democracy* assured me that someone out there is telling the other side. As Alan pointed out, the F.B.I. was correct in assuming that this is a group to keep tabs on. Kudos to Alan and the IRD.

Diana Scudder, Arlington, VA

To the Editor:

Excellent analysis of the Lawson committee report! (*Religion and Democracy*, Feb. 1988) I would like to second your points. It would have helped if you had given me and other readers the name and address of those to write to express our support for your analysis and get in our own licks, so to speak.

Holt Ruffin, Seattle, WA

To register your concerns regarding the Episcopal Church's involvement in the NCC and WCC, you may write: The Right Reverend Edmund Browning, Presiding Bishop, Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

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# IR D Special Report

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## The 1988 General Conference: An Analysis of United Methodist Foreign Policy Resolutions

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In a recent survey, nearly one half of the delegates to the forthcoming 1988 United Methodist General Conference identified "homosexuality" as their top concern for the conference. An outside observer might well wonder why *that* particular issue. The answer, at least in part, is that the homosexual issue has become a symbol of a host of other questions facing the church -- questions about biblical and church authority, about the exclusiveness and inclusiveness of the gospel, about sin and human nature.

This broader debate is, of course, essential for the United Methodist Church (and the Episcopal Church, the National Council of Churches, and others embroiled in the controversy). Still, one hopes that the UM delegates to the St. Louis conference (April 26 - May 6) will find the time, emotional energy, and moral courage to deal with other issues critically important to the church.

In this special report, *Religion and Democracy* surveys some of the major foreign policy proposals prepared for the General Conference by the General Board of Church and Society and General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church.

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### On the Cutting Edge: Propagandizing New Ways of Thinking

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Resolutions to General Conference in part serve the purpose of indoctrinating church members in the latest, often trendy, causes of the political left. This year, United Methodists are to consider "self-determination" and "new" issues in human rights.

**Self-Determination and Non-Intervention:** Relying on United Nations and Organization of American States (OAS) guidelines, this resolution opposes international "intervention." Intervention is defined as "the knowing and willful intrusion by one nation into the affairs of another country with the purpose of changing its policies or its culture. It includes any activity, military, economic, political, social, and cultural; covert or overt; designed to stabilize or de-stabilize an existing government."

Such a broad definition of intervention simply does not deal with the realities of the interdependent world. And these sweeping prohibitions, of course, fly in the face of the incessant appeals by some in the UM bureaucracy to impose the broadest possible sanctions on South Africa.

Missing from the document is any understanding of the Christian tradition of "Just War." This tradition teaches that there are indeed times when the search for justice and ultimate peace compels non-pacifist Christians to condone military intervention.

The resolution, obviously written to critique the United States and its policies toward Nicaragua, proposes "self-determination for all nations and peoples" as the alternative to "intervention." Unfortunately, the document does not make clear the connection between democracy and self-determination. How can a people exercise self-determination, if not through democratic processes?

The document seems to assume that the conditions for self-determination are improved if the U.S. does not intervene.

But is this necessarily so? Intervention (economic, political, or military) can either undermine "self-determination" or enhance it. Most would argue that U.S. actions against the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 promoted "self-determination," and yet they were clearly "interventions." And most Americans and Panamanians view the present U.S. intervention in Panama against General Noriega's illegitimate government as supportive of "self-determination."

**New Issues in Human Rights:** This resolution is something of a mixed bag. The initial language is unobjectionable. We do indeed have "a mandate," as the draft resolution states, "to seek justice and liberation."

But how does one seek "justice," and what is "liberation"? (And how can any of this be accomplished without violating the non-intervention principle?) Specifically, the resolution calls on the church to "critically analyze trends and developments which may impinge upon human rights." It particularly highlights the growth of racist and paramilitary movements such as the "National Fronts" in Britain and France. These neo-fascist organizations do indeed spell trouble, and they need to be criticized at every juncture. But why does the resolution only name the far Right as a threat to human rights? Groups on the Left -- the Red Brigades, the African National Congress, the Hezbollah, and the Organization for the Oppressed on Earth -- are equally threatening to human rights, but are never mentioned.

On the positive side, the resolution does call for "all governments to fulfill their positive obligations to human rights by ratifying and implementing international conventions, covenants, and protocols addressing human rights." The resolution could be strengthened by mentioning the Helsinki Accords, giving a brief background on how the Soviet Union has failed to live up to this international agreement, and then calling on the Soviet Union -- by name -- to live up to the accord that it has signed.

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## A Prophetic Word to the Nations

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The 1988 General Conference will deal with fewer comprehensive resolutions focusing on particular countries or regions of the world than the 1984 conference did. The General Board of Global Ministries has prepared resolutions on the Philippines and Korea.

**Philippines:** The Philippines resolution starts off on the right foot by expressing satisfaction over the fall of Marcos and hope regarding the ascendancy of President Corazon Aquino. The resolution then discusses remaining "disturbing trends" within Filipino society, attributed to "Filipino and multinational businesses" and the influence of the military.

The resolution ominously suggests that "there are signs that the doctrine of 'Low Intensity Conflict' is being applied in the Philippines." The proper definition of a "Low Intensity Conflict" is of a conflict which is limited to avoid unnecessary violence. The resolution inaccurately defines this strategy as one which "pits Filipinos against each other by supplying arms to opposing groups within the country." No evidence for these allegations is offered. Nor does the resolution offer the slightest hint as to why anyone would consider continuing conflict and instability in the Philippines to be in the U.S. interest. In fact, U.S. congressionally-approved policy in the Philippines is to support a democratic government against a brutal communist insurgency.

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The drafters of the resolution obviously have at least heard of the militantly communist New Peoples Army -- they point out that negotiations between the government and the insurgents "have given way to hardened hostility." (The resolution does not mention that the NPA broke off the talks and is calling for a "prolonged people's war.") But the UM resolution carefully avoids suggesting any criticism of the NPA, in contrast to its criticism of right-wing vigilante groups which bring "terror and murder to the countryside." And so, in spite of the NPA threat, the UM resolution blithely calls for an end to all military aid to the Aquino government.

One frequent (and annoying) characteristic of proposed General Conference resolutions is the use of innuendo. The Philippines resolution links unnamed "international militantly anti-communist organizations" and "fanatical religious and para-religious groups" as entities which destabilize Filipino democracy. Furthermore, it claims that "many electronic church programs, originating in the U.S., seem to be set over against the pastoral and prophetic ministries of Filipino Protestants and Catholics." Other than the Unification Church's CAUSA, which is named, what are the groups to which the resolution refers?

One suspects that the accused "destabilizers" may include virtually any who disagree with the drafters of the resolution on the legitimacy of U.S. military aid to the Aquino government or on the prudence of a continued U.S. military presence in the Philippines. Undoubtedly, these unnamed "destabilizers" include many General Conference delegates.

The United States role in Philippine history is defined in almost exclusively negative terms. These stark black-and-white depictions of U.S. involvement in other countries reflect ideological bias far more than they do fidelity to the historical record.

Though the document does concede that "the support of the United States and other countries for the principle of democratic civilian government in the Philippines has been very important," it goes on to charge that "parallel with this support have been forms of U.S. involvement which continue to strengthen forces contrary to democracy and the welfare of the Filipino people. Such forms include military aid and pressures solely for military solutions to counter the threat of popular protest and communist insurgency." These are strong allegations obviously at odds with the strong consensus of a Democratic-controlled Congress which believes both economic and military aid are vitally in the best interests of the Filipino people.

**Korea:** The proposed Methodist resolution on Korea parallels the current initiative of the National Council of Churches on behalf of the reunification of North and South Korea. The pathos of a divided people is compelling portrayed. The United States and the U.S.S.R. are depicted as sharing a rough equality in villainy.

No one could fault the recommendation "to facilitate the reunion of separated Korean families." Still, there is about this resolution the air of stark unreality. The lengthy resolution nowhere acknowledges the nature of the North Korean regime. Movement toward reform in South Korean democracy is noted with appreciation, but the antithetical political system to the North, one of the most repressive governments on earth, is simply ignored. How can reunification of two such opposite regimes be achieved? And who will pay what price to achieve it?

**Southern Africa:** Opposition to apartheid in South Africa will apparently be dealt with largely in terms of calls for disinvestment. But what may emerge at General Conference is a debate over the relative freedom and stability of neighboring Zimbabwe. The conference will be asked to approve a \$20 million fund to establish a Methodist university in Africa. One proposed location is a 100-year-old mission station in Zimbabwe. But some officials of the UM General Council on Ministries have raised questions about the security of the site and whether or not students from other African nations would be assured of obtaining visas. The UM evangelical caucus, Good News, has suggested, according to the UM News Service, "that consideration be given to a central and politically stable location for the university, in an environment where the government encourages a free press, unlimited assembly and open expression of ideas." (For more information on religious freedom in Zimbabwe, see *Religion and Democracy*, Nov.-Dec., 1987.)

## Religious Liberty: Blurring the Edges

The UM church establishment was chagrined in 1984 when an IRD-drafted resolution on religious liberty, presented as a minority report to the conference plenary, carried the day. Four years later the General Board of Church and Society has drafted a replacement resolution which, on its face, appears innocuous enough, but which leaves out key points of the original church policy statement.

Both resolutions use the United Nations Declaration on All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief as a basis for minimal standards of religious rights. The proposed revision, however, omits any explicit mention of the right to train children. Nor does it include any explicit right to "promulgate beliefs to others" (as did the original IRD resolution) -- a right which any church with an evangelistic mission would certainly hold dear. On the other hand, the new resolution would add another right: "the freedom to doubt or to deny the existence of God, and to refrain from observing religious practices."

The proposed resolution then goes further and pledges "to work toward conditions where governmental units neither inhibit nor encourage religion." What makes this curious is that usually UM agencies try to avoid positions which so narrowly reflect the American democratic experiment. Yet here the resolution takes the American notion of the wall of separation between church and state -- a solution to church/state conflicts which is not without controversy even in the United States -- and elevates it to a universally applicable principle.

The new resolution on religious liberty would also delete several significant points which were included in the action section of the original, IRD-drafted resolution. For example, it

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**The proposed religious liberty resolution...ignores systemic causes of religious repression, and in so doing fails to promote the political system which best protects freedom of religion.**

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drops an explicit commitment on the part of the church to offer public advocacy on behalf of persecuted believers. This leaves only "silent diplomacy." The new resolution also omits a special obligation to work not only with government-sanctioned religious institutions, but also with, in the words of the original resolution, "those brave souls who refuse to succumb to the state's efforts to control and subjugate them."

Why does the proposed resolution not include these points contained in the original? Perhaps because in each case the original resolution implied a strong criticism of the anemic way in which the mainline churches and the ecumenical movement have addressed other international religious liberty questions.

Finally, the proposed religious liberty resolution exists in the same kind of political vacuum as does the Korea resolution. It avoids specifically targeting totalitarian systems as particularly repressive of religion. And it cuts out the pledge of the original

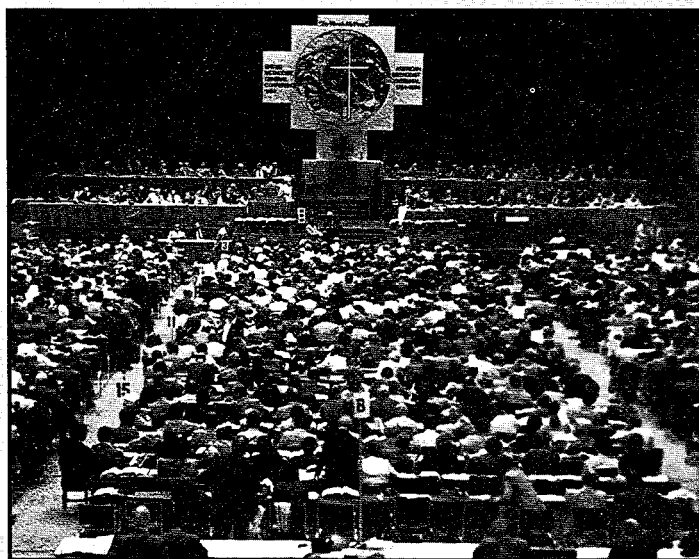


Photo courtesy of Good News

*Nearly 1000 delegates (one-half clergy and one-half lay) attended the 1984 General Conference where the denomination's policies were set for four years.*

resolution to "advocate freedom of association, speech, and free and competitive elections, as the best guarantee that people will have a say in structuring and maintaining their own political, economic, and cultural institutions, including religious institutions." Likewise, it omits the original resolution's warning against those "who would substitute a new form of repression in the name of change."

UM policy statements typically have a fixation with "root causes" of problems. So it is particularly inconsistent that this proposed resolution ignores systemic causes of religious repression, and in so doing fails to promote the political system which best protects freedom of religion.

## Economic Justice: Questionable Assumptions and Warm Feelings

Finally, the UM General Conference will consider resolutions dealing with the international economy. In 1984, an "economic justice" resolution and an IRD proposal for a church-wide study on economics were referred back to the Board of Church and Society. This year the general agencies are trying again with two resolutions, neither of which show any appreciation for a market economy.

**Global Debt Crisis:** The current international debt situation is a very convenient and easy target in this resolution prepared by the Board of Global Ministries. It is convenient because the "global debt crisis" is a vehicle for the board to propagate its belief in the "dependency theory" (the notion that Third World poverty is due to First World wealth), to attack the U.S. private sector (multinational corporations and banks), and to throw a few stones at the free marketers at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), all in the name of "strengthening... advocacy for the poor."

This resolution contains lots of warm, fuzzy phrases, but demonstrates little understanding of international economics. It attributes the current debt situation to the "legacy of colonialism." (Even the Organization of African Unity has ceased using such worn-out rhetoric.) It attempts to explain how the international trading system is "unequal," in that exporters of raw materials always get the short end of the stick. It does not bother to mention that the Third World nations are not the only commodity exporters. (In fact, the United States is the largest raw material exporter in the world.)

The "recommended actions" within the resolution reflect ubiquitous and simplistic emphasis on redistribution, rather than production: "The U.M. Church must work towards measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few." For the most part, the resolution only comes up with bland generalities, rather than specific solutions. The methods it opts for include "speaking tours" for international guests "to talk about the human side of the debt crisis" and special courses in UM seminaries on "economic justice." In the short run, the resolution will probably encourage the funding of a number of travel junkets for the defenders of the "dependency theory."

**Economic Justice:** The economic justice resolution begins with a moving affirmation of the biblical and theological mandate for believers to be agents of compassion and justice in their world. (To be sure, many biblical scholars will want to quarrel with an exegesis which reflects as much about the drafters' economic presuppositions as it does about Scripture.) There is also an appropriate and inspiring reminder that John Wesley is an impressive model of Christian stewardship of resources.

What is sadly missing in the resolution is any transition from discussion of divine mandates for individuals (be it God's people

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**The UM resolution on economic justice is long on compassionate rhetoric and short on what would help the poor most -- a solid knowledge of history, economics and common sense.**

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in ancient Israel, eighteenth-century England, or contemporary America) to broader economic laws and world history. If we truly care about the poor, it is important that we soberly examine the world as it is: the drives which motivate creativity and work and the systems which have the best track record in terms of producing wealth broadly distributed. Furthermore, we ought to pay close attention to which political and economic systems have preserved God-given human dignity. The poor have no less right to this than do the rich.

The UM resolution expresses a strong antipathy for free markets and an obvious preference for centrally-planned economic systems. Once again, the "background" section of the resolution reflects a socialistic preoccupation with the redistribution of goods and services: "Covenant people are committed to equitable distribution of resources." The question of who

*produces* these goods -- and what incentives motivate production -- is not responsibly addressed.

Perhaps the only positive element within the resolution is an apparent understanding that protectionism is not healthy for anyone. But it then lambastes U.S. companies that have off-shore production facilities (factories located outside the United States). Though the resolution calls for increased employment opportunities for Third Worlders, it cannot bring itself to acknowledge any benefit which comes from the creation of new jobs by U.S. companies which set up production in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. The establishment of off-shore production units does often mean at least the temporary loss of some U.S. jobs. Still, it is interesting to note that in the last seven years, the United States has created over ten million *new* jobs, while Europe -- for instance -- had stagnated employment.

Instead of attempting to understand these dynamics of international business, the resolution simply ascribes all the world's economic problems to the multinational corporations, while failing to appreciate any of their beneficial effects.

One of the most peculiar parts of the resolution describes (incorrectly at times) how hunger and poverty have increased, how corporations have eroded workers' rights, and how "competition underlies much of the international economic order." This "competition," according to the resolution, is clearly a negative feature throughout the world economy, and it must be stopped. Then, in a most amazing fashion, the resolution attempts to describe how competition and other factors have an impact on families: "The spiritual and psychological impact of these economic effects upon persons, families and communities can be seen in the increasing incidence of suicides, child and spouse abuse, family breakdown, drug and substance abuse, and other forms of antisocial behavior."

What it appears the resolution is trying to imply is that a capitalist economy even leads to child abuse and drug use.

Perhaps the only significant action recommended by the resolution is a call for the churches to be "more energetic in using their investment portfolios to strengthen developing national economies...." (Again, how this could be done without "intervening" in the affairs of other countries is a great mystery.) If the church really wanted to help develop Third World economies, it would invest in agricultural projects, petroleum and mineral exploration opportunities, and other private-sector-building initiatives that create jobs and wealth for our brothers and sisters in the Third World.

It would also study seriously the history of western industrial development in order to learn the salient keys to economic growth. And one of the most significant lessons that would be learned is that competition, properly tempered by government regulation and non-government mediating forces (churches, families, communities), has been a major factor in raising the standard of living of the masses who have historically lived in poverty. But, sadly, the UM resolution on economic justice is long on compassionate rhetoric and short on what would help the poor most -- a solid knowledge of history, economics and common sense.