

WORLD FLASHES

N. 9 March 93

fragments from personal experiences - Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo



DEAR FRIENDS,

THIS FIRST ISSUE OF WORLD FLASHES IN '93 GIVES A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE PERSONS, ISSUES, EVENTS AND PLACES WHICH IMPRESSED ME DURING THE LAST MONTHS. TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN RECEIVING THESE NOTES IN THE LAST YEARS I APOLOGIZE FOR THE LONG INTERRUPTION. TO THOSE WHO WILL RECEIVE IT FOR THE FIRST TIME I WANT TO SAY THAT THIS IS JUST A FRIENDLY LETTER, A KIND OF IMPRESSIONISTIC WAY OF GOING OVER THE FABRICS OF MY LIFE ...

OUR OWN AGENDA, drawn up by leading Latin American personalities was an eye-opener for me. It is an overall approach to the problems of the region. On its basis a passionate discussion took place at the InterAction Council high-level expert group on "Crisis and challenges of Latin America" (Washington Feb. '92). A few basic thoughts appeared very striking:

- there is incompatibility between the length of time needed for social and economic recovery and the electoral rhythms with their built-in promises, their propaganda and opportunistic measures. How can democracy be reshaped to meet this paradox?
- the old dilemma between offer and demand is most evident in the narco-trafficking - while the big dealers are obviously developing a strategy of profit-making, the producers and small dealers of drugs get involved in it as a mere strategy of survival. What then about the demand created by the conditions of the North Hemisphere society? Isn't there a tremendous work to be carried on?
- poverty is a problem by itself which cannot be solved by current strategies of development. New and specific paths are needed.

DEVELOPMENT CANNOT ABSORB POVERTY if great masses of people live under the line of absolute poverty. If Argentina or Venezuela can do so, neither Brazil nor Mexico can. It is clear now that the worldwide market system will maintain the poor in their marginalized situation. The only way out is to elaborate diversified economic strategies: an economy of the modern sector which will allow a country to enter the international competition and, side by side with it, specific economic strategies oriented towards the poor either in rural areas or in urban zones. Since 1988 Latin American scholars have been dealing in depth with this new perspective which is a result of the

acknowledged failure of the UN International Strategies of Development. But now even politicians begin to agree with such a perspective. Some people may be afraid that this idea will create a kind of separation between poor and rich. But I ask: isn't there already a kind of unspoken social "apartheid" between rich and very poor in almost every society? If diversified strategies are devised, the only way to avoid the institutionalization of what is already there is to create at the same time incentives for trajectories of mobility. Then gradually the very poor may get into the modern economic sector. A lot of thinking is needed, most of all the conceptual change from seeing society as a whole to looking at it in its differentiated fragments. And still to make a whole of such fragments and thus to create conditions for more social justice.

INTEGRATION/FRAGMENTATION OF EUROPE has been a permanent concern since the aftermath of the collapse of communism. There were several attempts to rethink in new terms the building up of Europe. The idea of a Confederation, encompassing all countries of West, Central and Eastern Europe, was a visionary concept developed by President Mitterrand. It would enable a loose association to put on the same level all European countries and, thus, to come to decisions on the continental level. In Lisbon and Oporto (February '92) a few Portuguese and French personalities who had taken part in the launching of the idea in '91 in Prague tried to give strength to the idea. However the discussion on the Maastricht Treaty overshadowed all other issues and confined again the discussion on the then called "the architecture" of Europe to the agreements among the 12.

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

The basis of the Confederation idea shows now, by default, its importance on the deadlock of the former Yugoslavia tragedy -if all European countries had been somehow brought together Russia would have been a part of the whole process and, among other results, would have been a part of the Geneva negotiations and unanimity could be found in the Security Council.

DEEPENING VS. WIDENING OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY is still an up-to-date question. It has been the true undercurrent behind the discussions concerning the Maastricht Treaty. Though the process of integration has been delayed by the Danish "no" and by the French on-the-edge "yes", those two facts were very important. They have awakened the European citizens in all other countries to their right to be informed and to decide directly about their future. What is at stake is not only the shaping of the continent by its citizens but the capacity for individuals to make of Europe a pole of dialogue and interdependence with the South. All that in the awareness that the South is diversified and that Europe is far from discovering its own cultural and moral identity. (Salamanca, July '92)

COULD EUROPE BECOME A COMMUNITY? - What an obvious question! And yet, when Bronislaw Geremek said it, in a meeting of the European Movement at the French Senate, I felt that he had opened a door in the difficult process of building the European



Community. The logic is clear. First, why to speak about "Europe" when most people among the "12" are just referring to a small part of the whole continent? Second, once a group is taken by such divergent views on its own identity and institutions, any attempt to enlarge it ends in paralysis. Thus, the necessary leap - to start from the other end, from the bigger reality, so that every unit finds itself on identical premises. Of course, the work done at the level of the political power goes on and, little by little, the European Community will find its way into the big Europe (how many generations until it happens??). But, side by side, there is -there can be - the other movement as Geremek defined it: *Europe becoming a Community*. (Paris, February '93).

WHICH ARE THE LESSONS TO BE TAKEN FROM THE GERMAN REUNIFICATION?

- Around the table, German, South Korean and other international politicians and experts analyse the decision of reunification of Germany and its political, economic and social consequences for the West and the East Landers of Germany. (Paris, February '93) The goal is to learn what should be avoided and what should be pursued in the process of reunification of North and South Korea. The objectivity and the lucidity of the analysis of such a complex process is in itself a tremendous lesson. Obviously history does not repeat itself but after what happened in Germany everyone is ready to acknowledge the limitations of the market when left to itself and to plead for regulations, for some form of planning and control of the market. Moreover, the psychological element was very much present. How can you explain that two peoples with the same centuries old past become different because they have been during a few decades in another cultural environment?

CAN AFRICA MAKE A SHORT-CUT IN ITS PROCESS OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE?

One after the other the elements of diagnosis fall on the table - together with the decisive step of independence a relative decline in the share of the world's GNP and of world trade, too much concentration on winning power and thus obliterating the economic problem, building on people's sense of themselves as antithetic to modern world... And African experts and politicians establishing what kind of *intervention* Africa needs: recognizing that the economic conditionality is in itself an intervention, it is important to define the need for political intervention when there is a flagrant violation of human rights and of the basic ingredients of the democratic progress. As one of the South-Africans said: "There must be serious attention involving key-actors in Africa, both political and civic society, to look at core values of democracy; civic society must play a role so that democracy is not left to politicians..." What struck me most was the unanimity on the need for Africans to appropriate their own experience and not to leave it as mere field-work for non-Africans... (Capetown, January '93)

EQUALITY AND IDENTITY, WOMEN'S PUBLIC VOICE IN THE NEW EUROPE, idealism and realism in the building of Europe - these are some titles among the many topics that have been dealt with in seminars all over Europe. Two open spaces are

there for our imagination to deploy itself. *Europe as a highly complex open space* faces an equally open space - the *social territory of women*. theoretically embracing all sectors but in practice a very narrow one, still very often focused on women as recipients, objects, victims. The openness of these two spaces, their still undefined "boundaries", represent a window of opportunity both for Europe and for women. It is a time for Europe to make a quantum leap and to seize the newness created by the '89 events and their development. It is also a time for women to be actors, subjects, decision-makers of the necessary changes. And most of all it is a time for women to appropriate into their own identity the primordial cultural and spiritual traditions of the continent. (Luxembourg, July '92; Brussels, September '92; Louvain, October '92)

"THE NEXUS OF SURVIVAL" is the name I gave, in my intervention at the Rio Conference, (Rio de Janeiro, June '92) to the interplay of environment/development/struggle-against-poverty/stabilization-of-demographic-growth/scientific-and-technological- choices. The preparation of the Conference has linked decisively environment and development. We need now to go a step further and to take stock of all the studies done and evidence compiled on a much broader system of equations. They will lead us to the need, whenever we tackle one of those elements (e.g. environment), to take into account economic growth, employment, decisions on technology, poverty, etc.

When we look deeper into the different inter-connections of the "nexus of survival" we realize that they are not the same as the days when people of good-will left their complex developed countries to do "development projects" in the developing countries. Today whoever wants to do so has to come to grips first with the complexity of the *very same elements connected with development* in his (her) own society. Then and only then is she (he) ready to do a significant work elsewhere. - But if this the current thinking about the agents of development aid, how to provide the possibility for a new generation of idealistic and generous youth to go to the most difficult situations in order to help, to save other people's lives, to express their care?

A NEW WORLD ORDER? - It was long ago (1974!) the time of the "new international economic order", the famous resolution of the special session of the UN General Assembly, proposed by Mexico and Algeria. For the following 10 years the discussion of its ingredients produced hundreds of books and seminars, thousands of articles and lectures. But the whole idea was buried with the liberalism of the 80's and the growing marginalization of the greatest part of the South. Until, suddenly, at the occasion of the force deployment of the rich and powerful and not, as we could have expected, after some big decision concerning more justice in the economic life, we heard that it was the beginning of a "new world order".

In this context the InterAction Council of former Heads of Government decided to launch a process of thinking in order "to fill" in the new expression at the level of the world economy, of the problems of environment/development/population, of peace and security. (Bonn, January '92) But one year later what was discussed and agreed upon by



some outstanding politicians and experts is already out-dated, such is the speed of history development.

ARE THE UNITED NATIONS CAPABLE OF SELF-REFORM? - In the wake of the Secretary-General's election, many institutions and individuals have tried to give their contribution to a redefinition of the United Nations system. There is more and more the conviction that most politicians don't have the necessary knowledge of the system and are not able to give to it a new orientation. I still remember how in the 50's the ideal of the *international civil servant* was a kind of generous and competent person capable to be at the service of mankind. This is still true for a certain number of persons in the system. But, as in all institutions, there is bureaucracy and promotion of the incompetent, reinforced by all kinds of arrangements. Hence the question I raise concerning the need to change into another type of recruitment: to have very competent people for a certain number of years and to return to field-work after a period of 10 to 12 years. Sir Brian Urquart (UK) who has served the UN for all his life listens to me and says: "I always thought that it was a service for life, but, maybe, all commitments are subject to erosion, maybe". What to say when you know that a whole life has been spent with such an ideal? (Uppsala, December'92)

PERFORMANCE IN THE ENTERPRISE, FRUGALITY IN ONE'S OWN LIFE - More than 100 young French executives gathered at the "Cirque d'Hiver" (Paris, February '92) to discuss the demands of the performance in enterprises. The globalization of the market forces is asking every day more and more concern for productivity, for modernization of tools and processes. It is true that the logic of economics is permeating all spheres of life. (And it is not a small sign the fact that this year the Nobel Prize for economic was bestowed on Prof. Becker, an American economist who, since a few decades, has been applying the economic reasoning to all spheres of life - though in person he appears as a real humanist!) Not surprising then that these young Christian executives are concerned and ask themselves how to behave as Christians in such an atmosphere. There are no easy answers. But the growing conviction that subject and object cannot be dissociated in different spheres of life necessarily leads to the growing importance of individual life-styles.

When, several months later (October '92), I was invited by the director of Beaubourg, the popular cultural center of Paris to participate in a seminar on "New values - frugality, slow pace, vulnerability, availability", I could see that deep down in society there is a quest for new modes of coping with our civilization. In question, in my own intervention concerning *frugality*, the analysis of the production and consumption patterns of our societies and their effect on the survival of the planet. Hence frugality is called to play a role not so much as a "virtue" but as a demand of solidarity and of radical need to manage economics in a different way. It is a fabulous process to see such values coming back not as they were in the traditional Christian asceticism but springing forth as a kind of work of purification within society itself!

ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY is a recurring reflection demanding a personal response from everyone. Everyone's life is, in all our societies, mediated by technical means. As those who deal with technologies often assume their know-how as a new form of power (the power of knowing), there is a danger of a wide-spread technological illiteracy. Democratic participation is thus seriously affected. Moreover, the growing gap between North and South in terms of technological capacity is one of the key-questions of our time. In several fora it asks for solutions and for a thorough examination of the questions at stake. As a member of the Board of UNU-World Institute for Development Economics Research (Helsinki, June '92), I cannot help being confronted with the role played by the technology in the equation "environment/economics/technological-choices". There is no way out if only one of these terms is analysed and put to test. But there is no way out either if the different philosophical stands about each of these terms is not challenged. Most of all - now that the ideologies of political economy are not anymore at war - the ideology of a limitless science and technology, of its "neutrality" needs to be deeply studied from an ethical point of view.

"WHO AM I TO DENY TO A COUPLE THE RIGHT TO HAVE A CHILD?" -

The question seems generous but it is full of ethical traps. (Since two years I have been a member of the National Council of Bio-ethics. In the last 6 months the issue under scrutiny has been "the medically assisted reproduction".) It is a very common reaction of medical doctors involved in the technologies of "in vitro" and "in vivo" fertilization. First, the bio-technologies and their manipulation give to the technicians an exhilarating sense of being-like-God. Amazingly they are mostly men-doctors exercising their craft on women's bodies. Second, the idea of "the right to have a child" is a fallacy - the "need" or "desire" to have a child (which has always to be clarified) is not the same as a "right". Third, only women can decide about their own position in relation to such technologies. Finally, no bio-technology can develop itself in isolation from the psychoanalytic understanding of the human person, from birth to death.