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EDITORIAL

AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN MAJORITY

It was fitting that President Carter decided to concede the election on the basis of "exit polls," which predicted his defeat before the voting was over in California. After all, he ran his campaign and much of his Administration with one eye on the polls and the other on his pollster, Patrick Caddell.

As a matter of fact, even before his concession speech on television at about 10 Tuesday evening (the earliest on record; NBC had projected the Reagan landslide at 8:15), the listening audience was told that Caddell had given his chief the bad news on the day before the election.

One wonders if the President entertained the idea of conceding even before the polls opened. In addition to all the money such a gesture would have saved, it might also have rescued a few of the more worthy Democrats whom the President brought down with him.

But our theory is that the President and the commentators are both looking at the wrong set of numbers when they interpret the election as a mandate for the radical right. The real story may well be that voter turnout reached a new low in 1980, and that 52 percent of the eligible voters were so alienated from the two major-party candidates that they either did not vote at all or voted for one of the third-party candidates. The Reagan "landslide" thus was a grand total of merely 26 percent of the electorate.

What this statistic tells us is that there is a disaffected majority out there whom neither Reagan's *recherche du temps perdu* nor the shattered coalition politics of the Democrats has reached. This is the new constituency. The real question is whether the best way to speak to it is within or outside the two-party system.

DEFENSE AND THE TIMES'
Alan Wolfe

CANCER FALLOUT
John W. Gofman, M.D.

JONESTOWN NATION
Penny Lernoux

APPOINTMENT IN SOMALIA?
Fred Halliday

CLASSIC BASEBALL
Wilfrid Sheed

FILMS OF EAST EUROPE
Morris Dickstein

THIRD WORLD PESTICIDES

THE CIRCLE OF POISON

DAVID WEIR & MARK SCHAPIRO

The export of banned pesticides from the industrial countries to the Third World has become a scandal of global proportions. Massive advertising campaigns by multinational pesticide corporations—Dow, Shell, Chevron—have turned the Third World not only into a booming growth market for pesticides but also a dumping ground. Dozens of pesticides too dangerous for unrestricted use in the United States are shipped to underdeveloped countries. There, lack of regulation, illiteracy and repressive working conditions can turn even a "safe" pesticide into a deadly weapon.

According to the World Health Organization, someone in the underdeveloped countries is poisoned by pesticides *every minute.*

But we in the industrialized countries are the victims too. Pesticide exports create a circle of poison, disabling workers in American chemical plants and later returning to us in the food we import. Drinking a morning cup of coffee or enjoying a luncheon salad, the American consumer may be eating pesticides banned or restricted in the United States, but legally shipped to the Third World. The United States is among the world's top food importers and at least 10 percent of our imported food is officially estimated to be contaminated. Although the Food and Drug Administration is supposed to protect us from such hazards, during one fifteen-month period, the General Accounting Office discovered, *half* of all the imported food identified by the F.D.A. as pesticide-contaminated was marketed without any warning to consumers or penalty to importers.

At least 25 percent of U.S. pesticide exports are products that are banned, heavily restricted,

(Continued on Page 514)

PCB-ARCH-EXT0375830

the evident weaknesses of the Ethiopians, produced the disaster of the following months. A considerable degree of the responsibility for the arrival of the Cubans and Russians in the Horn must therefore lie with the ham-fisted officials who flirted with the Somalis in the first months of the Carter Administration.

Nothing in his past history suggests that Siad Barre is going to keep his word to American officials not to attack Ogaden any more than he did to the Russians. The son of an Ogaden mother, Siad was a policeman in the Italian fascist colonial administration and caught the eye of the British after opening fire on a nationalist demonstration in 1948 in which about fifty people were reported killed. When he came to power in October 1969, he implemented a number of beneficial economic measures, including a mass literacy campaign and a policy for settling nomads, but he kept power firmly in the hands of his own people. All five members of the "socialist" party's Politburo were generals; his son-in-law Ahmad Suleiman was made head of the security forces; and many other members of his Daro clan were given key posts in the Government. Law and order were insured by the Law of the Twenty-Six Articles of September 10, 1970, which punished striking or absenteeism by death and stipulated a five-to-fifteen-year prison sentence for the possession of seditious literature.

In a tribal society, ruled by a nationalistic military regime, irredentist claims like Somalia's to Ogaden serve a vital mobilizing role. Siad Barre may indeed be an ass, but in enticing the Americans into Somalia to replace the Russians, he is pulling the tail of what appear to be even bigger donkeys in Washington. □

Poison

(Continued From Front Cover)

or have never been registered for use here. Many have not been independently evaluated for their impact on human health or the environment. Others, like DDT, are familiar poisons, widely known to cause cancer, birth defects and genetic mutations. Yet the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act explicitly states that banned or unregistered pesticides are legal for export.

In the United States, a mere dozen multinational corporations dominate the $7-billion-a-year pesticide market. Many are conglomerates with major sales in oil, petrochemicals, plastics, drugs and mining. Not only do they manufacture hazardous pesticides but their subsidiaries in the Third World import and distribute them.

For example, Ortho in Costa Rica is the main importer of eight banned or heavily restricted U.S. pesticides—parathion, DDT, aldrin, dieldrin, heptachlor, chlordane, endrin and BHC. Ortho is a division of Chevron Chemical Company, an arm of Standard Oil of California. In Ecuador, Shell, Velsicol, Bayer, American Cyanamid, Hercules and Monsanto are the main importers of pesticides banned or restricted in the United States—aldrin, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, kepone, mirex and toxaphene. In the Philippines, Bayer and Pfizer import methyl parathion and malathion respectively. The Ministry of Agriculture of Colombia registers fourteen multinationals which import practically all the pesticides banned by the United States since 1970. And in the Philippines, the giant food conglomerate Castle & Cooke (Dole brand) imports banned DBCP for its banana and pineapple operations there.

Worldwide, pesticide sales are exploding. The amount of pesticides exported from the United States has almost doubled over the last fifteen years. The industry now produces four billion pounds of pesticides each year—more than one pound for every person on earth. Almost all are produced in the industrial countries, but 20 percent are exported to the Third World.

And the percentage exported is likely to increase rapidly. The G.A.O. predicts that during the decade ending in 1984, the use of pesticides in Africa, for example, will more than quintuple. As the U.S. pesticide market is "approaching saturation . . . U.S. pesticide producers have been directing their attention toward the export potential . . . exports have almost doubled since 1965 and currently account for 30 percent of total domestic pesticide production," the trade publication *Chemical Economics Newsletter* noted.

Moreover, in Third World fields most pesticides are applied to luxury export crops. Approximately 10 percent of the food imported into the United States contains illegal levels of pesticides, as we pointed out. But that 10 percent figure is deceptive. The F.D.A.'s most commonly used analytical method fails to measure 70 percent of the almost 900 food tolerances for cancer-causing pesticides. (A tolerance is the amount of a pesticide allowed in any particular food product.)

In addition, the F.D.A. frequently finds mysterious, unknown chemicals in imported foods. Government investigators believe that some of these fugitive chemicals come from the millions of pounds of "unregistered" pesticides the Environmental Protection Agency allows U.S. manufacturers to export without divulging any information about their chemical makeup or their effects on people or the environment.

Knowing how little we know, we suspect these statistics from the G.A.O. probably represent only the tip of the iceberg. For example, over 15 percent of the beans and 13 percent of the peppers imported from Mexico during one recent period were found to violate F.D.A. pesticide residue standards. Nearly half the imported green coffee beans contain levels (from traces to illegal residues) of pesticides that are banned in the United States. Freshly cut flowers flown in

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from Colombia caused a rash of organophosphate poisonings among American florists. And imported beef from Central America often contains pesticide contamination. The G.A.O. has estimated that 14 percent of all U.S. meat is now contaminated with illegal residues, and imports make a significant contribution to that total.

The pesticide residue problem has escalated to such a level that all beef imports from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala have been halted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Agricultural practices in those countries, including heavy pesticide use on crops next to cattle-grazing land, have backfired on ranchers raising beef for the U.S. market.

Despite the widespread contamination of imported food, F.D.A. inspectors rarely seize shipments or refuse them entry. Instead, a small sample is removed for analysis while the rest of the shipment proceeds to the marketplace—and the consumer. The rationale is that perishable food would spoil if held until the test results were known. But by the time the test results *are* available—showing dieldrin or parathion or DDT—the food has already found its way into our stomachs. Recalls are difficult.

During one recent fifteen-month period, government investigators found that *half* of all the imported food identified by the F.D.A. as pesticide-contaminated was marketed without any penalty to the importers or warnings to consumers. Even products from importers with repeated violations were routinely allowed to pass.

U.S.D.A. officials in Dallas, for example, noticed a strong "insecticide-like smell" in a batch of imported cabbage from an importer with a record of shipping contaminated products. Despite the department's complaint, the F.D.A. allowed the cabbage to go to market. A sample that had been removed for testing later revealed illegal levels of BHC, the dangerously carcinogenic pesticide whose registration was canceled in 1976 at the request of the Hooker Chemical Corporation. But it was too late to recall the cabbage. Pepper from a shipment that was sent on to supermarkets turned out to have twenty-nine times more pesticide residue than allowed by U.S. law.

In a world of growing food interdependence, we cannot export our hazards and then forget them. There is no refuge. The mushrooming use of pesticides in the Third World is a daily threat to millions there—and a growing threat to all consumers here.

There are those who argue that we need pesticides to produce more food for the hungry, and that pesticide dangers are a necessary evil—part of the price of averting famine. "We see nothing wrong with helping the hungry world eat," says an executive of the Velsicol Chemical Company, defending his company's overseas sales of Phosvel after it was banned in the United States. "Men will not starve because there are hazards in killing pests," says a Rohm & Haas official making the same point.

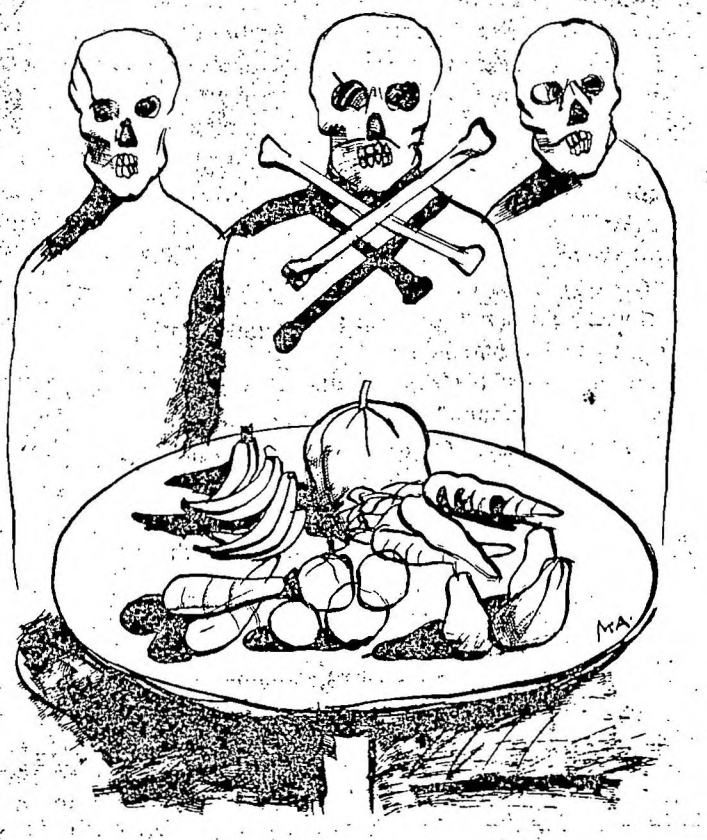
But over half, and in some countries up to 70 percent, of the pesticides used in underdeveloped countries are applied to crops destined for export. The poor and hungry may labor in the fields, exposed daily to pesticide poisoning, but they do not get to eat the crops protected by pesticides.

In Central America, 70 percent of the total value of agricultural production—mainly coffee, cocoa and cotton—is exported, despite widespread hunger and malnutrition there. Cotton is one of the biggest pesticide users. In tiny El Salvador, cotton production absorbs one-fifth of all the deadly parathion used in the world. Twenty-four hundred pounds of insecticides are used each year on every square mile of cotton field in the country. Yet cotton contributes to the global food supply only in processed cattle feed for Latin America's burgeoning beef production, almost half of which is exported to the United States and Europe. The meat remaining for local consumption is eaten by the rich and the middle classes, not by the hungry.

Herbicides like 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D (chemically similar to the infamous Agent Orange) are also used to help clear huge amounts of forest for grazing land in Latin America. Both herbicides leave residues of dioxin in the soil and water. Dioxin, one of the deadliest poisons ever developed, shows up later in birth defects, skin rashes and miscarriages.

In Indonesia, estate-style farms growing export crops—coconuts, coffee, sugar cane and rubber—consume twenty times the quantity of pesticides used by the small holders growing food for local markets. This despite the fact that small holders cultivate seven times more acreage than the estates.

Some might argue that although export crops do not directly feed hungry people, at least the foreign exchange earned benefits them indirectly: It is used to import economic necessities for development. But even the most superficial look at development in most Third World countries belies this assumption. Foreign exchange earned by



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agricultural exports does not return to improve the lives of the workers through better wages, housing, medical care or schools. Instead, the foreign exchange is most often plowed into luxury consumer goods, urban industrialization, tourist facilities and showy office buildings—all geared to the budgets and tastes of the top 10 to 20 percent living in the cities.

One reason pesticides are used more intensively on export crops than on subsistence food crops is that the multinational corporations which control the production and marketing of exports demand a blemish-free product. Nothing less, they say, will meet the discriminating standards of the consumers in Europe, North America or Japan.

"The Japs eat with their eyes" is how the manager of a Philippine banana plantation explained why they went to such lengths to produce a blemish-free fruit to ship to Japan. In the United States, too, it is estimated that 10 to 20 percent of insecticides used on fruits and vegetables serve only to improve their appearance.

Most people think of multinational food corporations in the Third World as big plantation owners. But over the last twenty years, corporations have become leery of owning land directly. As the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation warns, the possibility of "expropriation, revolution or insurrection [makes] plantations a poor risk." Multinational food producers and marketers such as Del Monte, United Brands (formerly United Fruit) and Castle & Cooke have hit upon a safer strategy—contract farming. Rather than own land directly, these companies now often contract with large local landowners to produce crops for export to consumers in the industrial countries.

A contract farming boom hit southern Mindanao, the Philippines, in the late 1960s. Before that time there were no bananas growing on its rich coastal plains. Small farmers and tenant farmers grew rice and coconuts. Then came the multinational corporations, seeking contracts with local entrepreneurs to produce bananas for the lucrative Japanese market. Within ten years the entire area was transformed: now twenty-one giant plantations cover 57,000 acres, and bananas have become one of the country's top agricultural exports. In order to fulfill their banana contracts, the local entrepreneurs had to push small holders, tenants and "squatters" off the land. (Some of the so-called squatters had worked the land for more than a generation.)

Although the multinational corporations may not own the land, they still call the shots. When a corporation signs a local entrepreneur under contract, it specifies not only the amount of fruit or other commodity to be produced but also the amount of fertilizers and pesticides to assure high yields and blemish-free products. Once locked into the banana-export contract, the plantation owner is totally dependent on the multinational firm. "Money is deducted from the banana grower's earnings to pay for things like pesticides and irrigation," explains Father Jerome McKenna, a U.S. missionary who worked in the area. "It's part of the contract. Those banana growers will be in debt to the pesticide companies for the rest of their lives."

Typically, pesticides are applied at three stages in the banana production process. Workers with heavy tanks strapped to their backs (and no masks or protective covering) routinely spray every tree. Twice a month a pesticide plane passes over the plantation, blanketing everything, including the drinking water supply. A group of banana workers recently petitioned Castle & Cooke to stop heavy pesticide spraying after local studies showed that the workers have dangerously low oxygen levels in their blood, making them more susceptible to disease.

In the packing sheds, the bananas are dumped into long water-filled troughs to remove some of the pesticides. "What bothers me most," says McKenna, "is that these people have very little protection from the chemicals they come in contact with. The women have their hands in the water up to their elbows all day long. They don't wear any gloves. Their only protection is plastic-type aprons they fashion for themselves." Finally, to protect the fruit during its long ocean voyage, women workers in the packing sheds spray every bunch of bananas with a fungus-killing agent.

McKenna checked at two nearby hospitals for reports of pesticide poisonings. One, run by Castle & Cooke, "didn't have any cases." But the other hospital, run independently of the company, had "reports all around of people poisoned by pesticides."

The contract farming system also gives the multinationals an easy way to avoid responsibility for pesticide poisoning. They can simply blame the local plantation owner for being careless.

The examples of cotton in El Salvador or bananas in the Philippines demonstrate that, in large measure, pesticides in the Third World actually feed the well-fed, but endanger the poor and the hungry. Since the mid-1950s, the growth rate of export crops has exceeded that of food crops. Between 1952 and 1967, for example, cotton acreage in Nicaragua increased fourfold while the acreage in basic grains was cut in half. Thus it is hardly surprising that the demand for pesticides in the Third World has soared. What is surprising is how many believe that their principal use is to save crops to feed the hungry.

For us, this investigation has contributed to an important realization: The problem cannot be reduced to that of the "rich countries" exploiting the "poor countries." Such a formulation turns the issue into "them versus us." The majority of people in *both* the industrial nations and the Third World are victims of the circle of poison. When we understood this, we began to understand our ties with Third World people in a new way. The differences in our material standards of living too often obscure our similarities—a common powerlessness in facing the increasing concentration of private power in the hands of a relatively few global companies. The reality of global corporate power, here reflected in the pesticide trade, forces us to seek solutions involving new ways of working *with* Third World people for a worldwide redistribution of economic power. We must begin to see Third World people not as a burden or a threat but as allies. □

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