

comment

International Women's Year

By Betty Reardon

Futurists need to become more aware of the relationship of present policies to the quality of all possible futures. We need to formulate criteria to measure how the values of our preferred futures can be maximized by present policies. These criteria should include such questions as: does this policy serve the global interest or does it favor the interests of one nation, region, culture or class over others? Is this policy likely to reduce the possibilities of violence? Will this policy contribute to a healthy environment? What are the long and short range consequences of the policies likely to be?

In raising questions such as these about the positions being prepared for presentation by the U.S. delegation to the International Women's Year Conference, several futurists and women's movement activists concluded that these positions would have very negative effects on attempts to achieve a future with even minimal increase of social justice and economic equity on a global scale. And would if anything be detrimental to the chances for world peace.

The U.S. positions were attempting to direct the discussions toward issues of legal equity for women with little or no reference to larger issues of social justice, toward specific ways in which women could be trained to participate in development carefully avoiding examination of the structures responsible for underdevelopment, and openly opposing the central aspects of the new International Economic Order seeking to redress the economic imbalance in world society by giving primary rights to resources to the nations in which the resources are found. There was also in one paper a passing reference to the irrelevance of peace and disarmament to the status and condition of women as reason for precluding discussions of those issues at the conference.

The lack of vision of the American government in regard to the relation of women's movements to the range of global issues is reflective of the same male mind set that produces the "technological fix," most especially in the isolation of one set of problems from another. Fortunately the visions revealed at the unofficial meeting in Mexico, the Tribune, were more female, more global in recognizing certain universal conditions of women and their relationship to the socio-political world structures, and more futuristic in their deep concern for future generations, particularly among those women working on the problems of the environment and disarmament.

There was much attention given by the press to the disagreements and disruptions which took place at the Tribune as well as the Conference with little acknowledgement that these came from two main sources; first the imposition of traditional, male, competitive, nation-state politics on the discussions, along with various shades of Western, male economic and political ideology; and second the failure of some women of the industrialized nations to acknowledge their own part in exploiting the women of the developing nations in their roles as primary resource consumers, nor to admit that the middle class standard of living to which many attribute the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement was in large part the consequence of the inequitable world economic structures.

Little or no attention was given to the general interrelated concerns around which the women of the Tribune were for the most part united. There were none who would not agree that all societies discriminated against women as a group, and that efforts should be made to overcome that discrimination as well as the outright oppression of women in the impoverished sectors of world society. The central cry was for social justice and for a direct attack on three major world problems: economic development and poverty; political oppression with special reference to the plight of political prisoners and the use of torture as an instrument of repression; and the arms race which draws resources away from development and threatens the lives of this and succeeding generations. Women were actively mobilizing around these issues on a global basis and began a dynamic which may well be the most positive force yet organized for the future of world society. On this issue of disarmament alone over 1,000 signatures were affixed to a petition calling upon the U.N. to set the date for a world disarmament conference. Women's issues were not separated from the general human condition.

Clearly the majority of women in Mexico were acting out of their direct human experience to influence present policies toward a more human future. With specific concrete proposals they were moving toward a general, as yet unspecified vision of the future, but certainly a vision informed by a set of human values which celebrates life and seeks community through human dignity for all people.