

BODHI TIMES

December, 1998, No. 15

Newsletter of
Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI)

BODHI IN TIBET

FIRST INDEPENDENT PROJECT IN TIBET

Donors in the United States have made possible BODHI's first independent project in Tibet. Though BODHI has supported an eye-care project in Lhasa run by a US ophthalmologist, we have never before funded an independent project in Tibet. This is in part because of misgivings about the ethics of working in an occupied country governed by an authoritarian regime. A more important reason has been overcoming the practical problem of finding a safe way to channel funds to Tibet with confidence that the money will be used wisely. We believe that we have now found such a way.

We have promised anonymity to all participants, so unfortunately cannot provide identifying details. We can, however, tell you that our US\$1,000 will be used in one village to repair the cover of the water well, which has fallen to pieces, and provide such supplies to primary students as paper, ink, pads and pens. The villagers may have other uses for the funds; we hope to have details for you in the next newsletter.

BODHI decided recently to focus on Tibetan projects within rather than without Tibet. We will still support our ongoing projects among Tibetans in India. Provision of health care projects within Tibet also remains a goal.

in the world and to oppose it through non-violent means". His activism ranges over a wide field, including alternative economics, education, care for the dying and conservation.

Sulak has been involved in the formation and operation of Alternatives to Consumerism (ATC), Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB).

I BUY, THEREFORE I AM

Sulak expresses the ethos of consumerism by paraphrasing Descartes' famous words, "I think, therefore I am". He believes that consumerism and economic globalisation have undermined traditional spiritual values and widened the gap between Asia's rich and poor. Sulak's Alternatives to Consumerism (ATC) argues that we must confront the new consumerism to both confront and maintain community-based values. ATC organises gatherings so that people from diverse communities may exchange stories and share experiences, a foil to the mass media that so actively promotes consumerism.

While some may see Sulak's economic agenda as overly idealistic, he believes that these ideas are viewed with increasing sympathy by international policy-makers. He describes the recently appointed President of the World Bank, Australian James Wolfensohn, as "very well-intentioned" and observes that "in some ways, the World Bank seems to be coming around". Sulak noted the World Bank's support of a program he launched that is designed to teach peasant farmers appropriate technology. He cautions, "It will take more than gestures to relieve the unbearable suffering of the poor in Asia ... a fundamental change in outlook on the part of Western policy-makers [is needed]. And that's very difficult".

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SULAK SIVARAKSA IN SIAM

Our series of BODHI advisers continues with Sulak Sivaraksa, who was educated as a barrister in England and taught as a guest lecturer in the US at the University of California at Berkeley and Cornell University. As an outspoken human and environmental rights activist in Siam (which he prefers to Thailand), Sulak has faced exile and public burning of his numerous books. Sulak has been nominated twice for the Nobel Prize for Peace and received the prestigious Right Livelihood Award in 1995. Some of the following has been extracted from an interview by Tom Welsh with Sulak, published recently in the Korea Herald; some comes from our personal knowledge.

21ST CENTURY ACTIVISM

Sulak, educated in both East and West, exemplifies Buddhism in action. Though deeply steeped in Buddhist philosophy, and an advocate for both the renewal of Buddhism and its adaptation to the modern world, Sulak believes that meditation alone is insufficient. He is critical of complacent Western meditators



Sulak Sivaraksa.

Courtesy of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

who "meditate to achieve inner peace and a comfortable life". Sulak argues that "Buddhism compels us to confront suffering, to recognise the structure of evil

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT THE WEATHER. . .

What a six months we have seen. As I write, Hurricane Mitch, one of the strongest Caribbean storms this century, has caused at least 13,000 deaths, with more expected. Flooding aggravated by deforestation and windspeeds of up to 290 kph/180 mph caused terrible mudslides and destroyed seventy percent of Honduran bridges. Flying over the devastated nations of Nicaragua and the Honduras prompted former US President Jimmy Carter to call for forgiveness of the countries' debts, as it will take at least fifteen years to recover.

The Philippines recently experienced two severe storms in one week, and both Bangladesh and China have had very severe floods. Continuing warm weather has set new monthly records for average global temperatures, making it likely that 1998 will beat 1997's record as the hottest year since the invention of thermometers.

Global warming and more "extreme climatic events" may be not only coincidental but also causally related, just as this year's record area of Antarctic ozone depletion has been linked to global warming. Computer models predict stronger winds and lower atmospheric pressures due to warmer and therefore more energetic atmosphere and ocean. By the year 2100, global carbon dioxide levels may double pre-industrial levels, rising from 280 to 560 parts per million.

... AND THE ECONOMY

The Asian economic crisis is threatening to go global. In Indonesia, it is contributing to the impoverishment of almost 100 million people, a bizarre murder spree and ongoing political unrest. An entire generation may suffer irreparable developmental harm from deficiency of such micronutrients as iron and vitamin A. The G-7, the club of the world's richest and most powerful economies, has been forced seriously to consider how it might change international financial rules, especially to reduce the unrestrained flow of capital for speculation. Response so far has been less than inspiring.

Recently, I calculated the wealth of the world's richest people, comparing it to the income of the world's poorest, using data from the World Bank and Forbes. In 1997, the poorest fifty percent of humanity received only three percent of the annual income; a sum owned by ninety-three billionaires. If we assume that the billionaires received a return on their wealth of ten percent, then their annual income approximates that of fifteen percent of the world's population--almost a billion people.

On the other hand, one can argue that, for many of the poor, assets are less than annual income. In any case, global income distribution is grossly unequal. Business magazines that praise the "success" of the modern economy present a grossly biased picture, ignoring the evidence not only from so-called developing countries but also from the working poor in wealthy countries such as the US.

CURRENCY SPECULATORS

One strategy to reduce inequality and impart more stability to global capital movements was proposed in the 1970s by James Tobin, Nobel Laureate in Economics. He called for a one percent tax on all foreign currency transactions. Currency speculators each day generate currency flows far in excess of that needed for legitimate commerce. This tax could be used for international good, such as the United Nations.

In the best of times, economic growth rate (the production of goods and services) is limited to far less than ten percent per annum. Important limits are biological, technological and organisational. Biological factors such as the growth rate of the trees, limited sunlight and the quality and quantity of the land and water limit the harvest of an orchard or rubber plantation. Technologically, a more efficient machine may improve the speed or accuracy of production of an industrial component. Even if the rate of production of one component improves, the output of the final product will be limited by blockages at other stages of production.

Thus even a dramatic breakthrough (say a doubling of efficiency) at one stage of production is unlikely quickly to translate to a major improvement in the overall product. Economic progress is also impeded by poor management decisions, equipment failure and low worker morale. Breakthroughs in development require funding and economies of scale to really work. Infrastructure, always deteriorating with time, can be damaged further by storms and wars; social cohesion is interrupted by litigation and disease. Economic growth occurs despite these limitations, but it is not an easy pathway.

These limits further reduce the measured growth of economies to no more than two to three percent per annum over prolonged periods. Growth of what I have called "real wealth" (goods and services which preserve or improve social and ecological capital) is much lower, possibly negative. A major and frequently ignored reason for many of the spectacular economic advances of the

last 200 years has been the use of "natural capital," the running down of stocks such as coal and oil, fish and forests. Instead of adjusting to these limits, our global financial system lauds, incites and rewards the pursuit of almost instant wealth, such as that gained through currency speculation, "junk" bonds and asset stripping.

A NEW INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

To extricate ourselves from our economic, social and ecological mess requires a global social, economic, technological and financial revolution; a tall order, except that such a series of revolutions have been occurring since 1798. We will just have to do it again. When a sufficient percentage of the population clamours for change, then even a biased media will be unable to stand in the way. There are some hopes. In Britain, Germany and the United States, the most extreme policies in support of the free market have been rejected. Two multinational oil companies, BP and Shell, have withdrawn from the Global Climate Coalition, a group of powerful industrialists who work to undermine policies which might avert climate change. Sensing the coming change BP has become a major investor in sustainable energy technologies.

What are the components of these revolutions? Some we now see as embryos; telecommunications, solar, wave and wind energy, cars running on fuel cells, telecommuting, computerisation. Others are changes to our economic system, to give sensible feedbacks about social and ecological costs. Ecotaxes also loom on the horizon, on pollution, fossil fuels, unsustainably produced timber and fish.

To trigger these changes, we need a global change of thinking and renewed hope in a fair future for all of humanity, such as perhaps flowered after the dark hours of WWII. That flowering, expressed most definitely in the birth of the United Nations, the Marshall Plan that rebuilt Europe and the declaration of human rights was killed too quickly by the Cold War. Hope of a "peace dividend" returned after the collapse of the Iron Curtain but has not been realised, despite half-hearted pledges and a lot of hot air from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. There is still time to change our global course, but it will take an immense change in attitudes, especially in the rich, Western countries and a realisation that we can let go, at least a little. A fairer and cleaner world is not only a safer world, but also one of which we can be prouder.

HOSPITAL WINDMILL

Tenpa TK writes from Mundgod, South India that digging for D.T.R.'s water pump pipeline has begun. The wind pump will be installed by Aureka from Auroville, Tamil Nadu. It will pump 15,000 litres of water per day if there is a good windflow, and will be crucial to maintaining a continuous water supply. During the frequent power failures, the hospital has to go for days without water, which makes caring for the increasing numbers of TB patients more difficult.

The waste water will be used—as is customary in Mundgod—to water gardens, trees and vegetables. Tenpa plans to plant more trees to reduce evaporation and surface runoff of water. In addition to being environmentally friendly, protecting the environment and tapping the natural resource of free wind energy, Tenpa writes that the windmill's very low maintenance cost is a big plus.

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER REFRESHER COURSES

Refresher courses for Community Health Workers (CHWs), to whom BODHI is providing ongoing education, will emphasise psychological problems to complement D.T.R. Hospital's newly opened psychotherapy unit, with a trained psychotherapist. "We are also planning to start a physiotherapy unit with more emphasis on rehabilitation of the physically handicapped. We hope to train these CHWs to look for such problems and handle such cases", Tenpa writes.



JUBILEE 2000

Jubilee 2000 is a coalition of trade unions, aid agencies, churches and medical organisations who are campaigning for cancellation of the debts of the poorest countries by the year 2000. Jubilee 2000 believes that The Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, launched by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to reduce some of the debt, neither goes far enough nor acts quickly enough, as such African countries as Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda have found.

MEDACT and the British Medical Association published a statement of medical support for Jubilee 2000. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) is also a member.

The above was extracted from Peace Priorities, whose sources were Oxfam and Jubilee 2000.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Here are a few ongoing projects in which you may wish to participate.

A\$72/US\$45

1 bicycle for use by schoolchildren in Northeast Thailand. BODHI contributes five bicycles a year.

A\$262 /US\$165

Tidy Villages project: improve basic health, sanitation and environmental education in Tibetan villages in S. India for 1 year.

AS\$276/US\$173

Training or refresher course for one Tibetan monastic community health worker in India.

A\$912/US\$575

A\$1825/US\$1,150

Provision of some educational & environmental needs for 1 village in Tibet for 6 mos/1 yr.

THANK YOU

Without your help, we could not continue. Thank you very much.

Iku Bacon, United States
Richard Beamish, United States
A.K. Chaudhary, India
Dr Bryan & Anne Furnass, Australia
Professor Mark & Dian Elvin, Australia
Dr Simon Holliday, Australia
Jane Hudspeth, Australia
Doug Nichols, Australia
Dr Martin Rubin, United States
Greg Shuttlewood, Australia
Dr Gayle Welch, United States

*Please consider making
BODHI a beneficiary in
your will.*

TAX DEDUCTIBILITY IN AUSTRALIA

Readers of the last BODHI Times will recall that we asked for volunteers for a loosely defined committee, to broaden our visibility and enhance the chances of gaining tax deductible status in Australia. We are pleased to announce that the following people volunteered:

- * Phil Brown, a teacher from Canberra;
- * Jane Bell, a veterinarian with a Master's degree in Tropical Health from University of Queensland, now with the Chinese Medical Foundation in Melbourne;
- * Jane Hudspeth, a microbiologist in Hobart;
- * Jenny Porteous, an epidemiologist with considerable overseas public health experience via the Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of Newcastle, now in Sydney; and
- * Luiz Ribiero, an agricultural scientist and Buddhist function organiser, also from Canberra.

All have been involved with health, education or foreign aid. We appreciate their offers of assistance; help with time and expertise is as important as financial donations.

SISTER JESSIE BRANCHES OUT

Sister Jessie writes, "We at Massihi Gyanodhay Abhiyan have decided not to rely on any organised form of fundraising. We prefer to depend on Providence". We wish all at MGA well.

WHAT IS BODHI?

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI) focuses on sustainable ways to improve health, education, the environment and human rights, particularly in developing countries. BODHI was founded in 1989 on the principles of skilful and compassionate action.

BODHI is neither religious nor political. We have supporters and advisers from many faiths. We ask for a kind heart and practical assistance.

Realising the interdependence of all beings is in our enlightened self-interest. If we don't work together to reduce the world's much-discussed problems, then who will?

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has been able to begin some exciting and innovative programs. We need your donations to continue. Please send your cheque, payable in US or Australian dollars, to an address below.

US donations are tax-deductible.

BODHI Times is the biennial newsletter of Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI).

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We greatly value your support and keep our mailing list confidential.

... PASSINGS ...

We are very sorry to report the deaths of two longtime BODHI supporters, Lt. Col. Albert Walden and Ruth Barnes Grant, both of whom we will miss deeply. Lt. Col. Walden served in India and Burma during World War II. After a life of business in Sheffield, England, he and his wife, Babs, retired to the United States in the 1980s. Their son, Clive, followed from England.



Ruth Grant had a long association with BODHI. She was born in Minnesota in 1903 and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1926. She did post-graduate work at Columbia University and the University of Colorado (Boulder) and taught English in Pennsylvania and New York.

Upon retirement in 1968, Ruth wanted to "see what all the fuss was about", to explore what

interested her students, so she investigated subjects such as spirituality and alternative lifestyles. We at BODHI met Ruth on a trip to India in 1985. Ruth was present at the founding of BODHI in 1989 in Los Angeles. She inspired and supported us from the start.



...BEQUESTS...

BODHI is to receive a bequest from Ruth Grant. We are considering how best to use it. Because Ruth was a teacher, we will probably channel it to an educational project.

We have been named in a will in Australia, for which we are grateful.

A RECENT ARTICLE

With this newsletter, some of you will have received a copy of one of Colin's recently published articles entitled "Climate change, population health and the general practitioner" (Br J Gen Pract 1998; 48: 1806-7). Please contact us if you would like a copy.



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SPIRIT IN EDUCATION

SEM offers spiritually based alternative and experiential education, including deep ecology, living and dying and indigenous rights. The Buddhist approach considers the extent to which social and economic policies contribute to or diminish human suffering, an aspect often obscured in the quest for modernisation and Westernisation.

INEB

INEB provides a forum for Buddhists and non-Buddhists from many traditions and nations, both Asian and Western, to meet and work together for a better and more humane world. INEB unites activists working to promote the

environment, non-violence, human rights, women's issues and the integration of spirituality and activism. INEB has created grassroots leadership programs for people in South and Southeast Asia. One project is a hospice in Siam operating out of community Buddhist temples. For those with internet access, INEB hosts an on-line email discussion group at owner-bpf-ineb@igc.org.

SIAMESE-BURMESE PIPELINE

Sulak also has actively opposed the route of a gas pipeline from the Burmese border. It passes through one of Siam's few remaining pristine forests, a rare preserve of wild elephants and the only habitat for the hog-nose bat and the queen crab.

