

5. THE FUTURE-ORIENTED AGENDA

With the large number of pressing economic and political problems competing for the attention of the leaders during their three day summit in Toronto next month, there will be little time left for seriously addressing the host of fundamental social, environmental and long-term challenges that together confront their advanced industrial societies as the turn of the century approaches.

At past summits, the convenient solution to this dilemma was to simply attach to the final communique, accompanying declarations and closing summaries bold statements, drafted by officials, on a catalogue of such issues. The hope was that publics would neither notice or care that the leaders had been too busy to actually explore these topics and thus to thus endow the cleverly crafted words with even a modicum of high level political will.

At Toronto this year things promise to be different. The leaders have vowed that this summit's communique will be an authentic one. It will contain only subjects that the leaders themselves have thoroughly discussed and statements that they are genuinely committed to. Moreover to give themselves the necessary time to focus on the broader, long range, but vitally important issues, they have come up with a useful innovation. Responding to a Canadian initiative, they have rearranged their summit schedule to include a mini-retreat, or "think-in", about the future their countries share.

Thus on the late afternoon of Monday, June 20, they will leave the hothouse, fishbowl atmosphere of the Metro Convention Centre and retire, appropriately, to the contemplative, ivory tower surroundings of Hart House on the University of Toronto campus for a 90-minute focus-on-the-future.

Critics will complain that time allotted allows each leader only a dozen minutes apiece to ponder the future challenges faced by his or her country. Moreover the leaders will be tempted to touch on every good topic that has been stuffed into past communiques, lest vigilant domestic constituencies complain that their pet concerns have been forgotten. Indeed, it is difficult to see how immediate concerns such as AIDS can be avoided, while the familiar issues of affordable housing and youth unemployment will exert their claim.

But there is every chance a properly structured discussion can zero in on common fundamental issues, and even spill over into the leader's dinner conversation in the hours that follow.

There are certainly no lack of subjects to fill the time. The Japanese will press, as they have at the past few summits, for major multilateral megaprojects in science and technology, particularly in areas relating to biotechnology and human frontiers. In response, the

wary Americans will wonder if such a superficially attractive, visionary mating of Japanese money and United States knowledge is really just a trojan horse that will erode America's, and increase Japan's, competitiveness even further.

The American's themselves have a topic in the domain of science and technology. At last fall's annual dinner of the summit seven foreign ministers on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, American Secretary of State George Shultz mused about the likely impact of new communication, transportation and information technologies on the conduct of international relations in the future. The summit bureaucracies sprang to life to prepare ideas on the topic, and West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher proposed that the summit's foreign ministers meet in March to follow up. While scheduling difficulties prevented a March meeting, the topic remains alive.

For Ronald Reagan, however, the key topic is likely to be drugs. It was he who helped introduce it to past summit discussions when Margaret Thatcher, trying to make conversation during a pause in the dinner time chatter, innocently inquired of the President how his wife's campaign against drug abuse was coming along. Reagan lit up with enthusiasm at the topic, which then found its way into the final communique. As drugs are now one of the major topics in the U. S. presidential election campaign, the incentives to deal with it at Toronto have increased. But Prime Minister Brian Mulroney will have to be cautious. The last time he endorsed a passionate presidential proclamation on drugs, by rhetorically declaring an miniature replica epidemic in Canada, he was roundly criticized for slavishly following Uncle Sam at the expense of scientific facts.

Another topic of major interest is the dilemma imposed by the aging populations in the summit countries and throughout the western world. The problem is most

acute, and least-well addressed, in Japan. Aging populations, composed of articulate, politically powerful seniors used to the best of everything, will place a heavy burden on pension plans, social security funds, health care facilities, medical costs, and traditional ethics, especially as scarce, life-enhancing, but enormously expensive medical technologies come on line. Both Reagan and Mulroney have already felt the political power of the seniors, and beat a retreat with their beloved deficit reduction plans before the monolith of the social security sacred trust. But neither has yet fully considered how the greying population and baby bust will affect such basic and ethically charged issues as retirement, immigration, access to hospital beds, family allowance funding, and the role of women in society.

Perhaps the most valuable issue the leaders will focus on in their ninety minutes together in Toronto - and in their following twelve months alone back home - is the global environment. It is an issue which, if handled

properly, would show the seven plutocrats of the north at their best - as temporary custodians and leaders of the entire global community. It would take the impressive agenda masterfully sketched by the Brundtland Commission and endow its recommendations with real political and economic force. It would expand on the recent success of the summiteers and their middlepower partners in forging agreement to protect the world's fragile, vital and slowly disappearing ozone layer. It would respond to the aspirations of domestic publics who, as recent polls and the Canadian commitment to acid rain reductions show, are turning from individual acquisition to collective well being in a harmonious natural environment as their dominant passion. And as an essential ingredient in the path to sustainable development for the world's poorest people, it would continue the leadership on north-south issues that has historically been Canada's raison d'etre in, and major contribution to, the summit forum.