

# International VIEWPOINT

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## Did Rio save the world?



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# Carry on as before

**THE RESULTS of the Rio Earth Summit were as predicted: less than nothing. An initial balance-sheet by**

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**T**HE benefits of the big show in Rio de Janeiro bore no relation to its cost. Essential questions such as the world economic order were not on the official agenda. The Bishop of the Brazilian See of Xingu, Erwin Krautler, came to this conclusion: "After Rio the developed countries will go on as before. Neither the debt burden nor the problem of low raw material prices were seriously discussed here".

The gross output of texts was certainly impressive, but their content much less so:

- The 900 page all-embracing Agenda 21, which is to show us the ecological path into the 21st century, was considerably watered down. The vexed question of the financing of the relevant measures by the industrialized countries was covered by the formula "0.7% [of their Gross National Product to be made available] as soon as possible" (at the moment the figure is 0.3%).

- The Rio Declaration gives us 27 arid principles. Some feel of their vacuity is given by principle number three, which calls us to rally to a worldwide social partnership: "All states and peoples should work together to eliminate poverty, and income inequalities should be reduced".

- The Declaration of Principles on Forestry keeps up the pace on empty phrase-making: "The safeguarding of the forests will be connected with the provision of financial aid from the North".

- The Biodiversity Treaty was not signed by the United States.

- The Climate Convention is so wholly toothless that even George Bush felt able to sign it. The Austrian liberal *Standard* did not mince its words: "Bush only voted in favour because before the summit he had succeeded in blocking a binding timetable for reducing the emission of greenhouse gases".

Bush's presence in Rio had of course nothing to do with the environment and everything to do with the forthcoming

American presidential elections. He acted like the proverbial bull in the china shop. The script for his thundering about was provided by the ultra-conservative Heritage Foundation think tank. The US negotiators at Rio were given a rule of thumb to follow: "Avoid any detailed plans which tie us down to a definite reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases within a definite timespan". "Or: Third World countries must themselves create enough wealth to finance their own environmental programmes".

Delegations which pressed for a more serious climate convention were put in the diplomatic wringer. According to a delegate from Iceland: "US pressure on our country was stronger than in the turmoil in the Gulf War".

While the USA came across unmistakably at Rio as the world's number one anti-ecological country, the "ecological awareness" of the other capitalist industrialized countries, is, despite all their rhetoric, hardly more developed. Thus much noise has been made about the stated intention of countries such as Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, the EEC and Japan to bring down their greenhouse gas emissions to the 1990 level by the year 2000.

In fact, to meet the emergency a much bigger reduction is required, but in any case the promised "undertaking" is built on sand: back in 1988 Austria and other industrialized countries promised in Toronto to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) by 20% by 2005. However, at present such emissions are 14% up on 1988.

The Austrian chancellor Franz Vranitsky was chosen as the West European spokesperson in Rio owing to his supposed "sympathetic attitude". In fact, he hauled the Third World countries over the coals and made it clear that they had to take more heed of the iron profit-driven logic of the capitalist market. "A solid and durable environmental policy cannot be formulated against or without the economy".

The lack of concrete results of the conference at least allowed a perceptible improvement in the atmosphere in the rarefied zone where the politicians live. According to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the Earth Summit saw "a new definition given to the notion of solidarity". The German newsweekly *Der Spiegel* felt able to talk of "a step towards an eco-change", while Brazil's former environment minister Jose Lutzenberger stated: "despite all its deficiencies, the conference led to a raising of awareness". Other, more hard-headed assessments of the outcome of Rio exist — expressed immediately by protests after the conference. According to Wolfgang Lohbeck, Greenpeace's climate expert: "The industrialized nations will carry on as before". ★

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