

## The Toyako G8 Summit

### Introduction

I went to Sapporo to attend the Summit-related events. I took taxis to the conference and workshop venues as I had suitcases full of books and pamphlets to sell and distribute. I told a driver that a recent TV program had claimed that deregulation of the taxi industry (allowing more taxis on the road) meant that companies were making more money but that individual drivers were making less (because of the increased competition). He replied, “Spot on!”

A friend told me she had taken a taxi to one of the marches in Sapporo. The driver told her that he felt like driving into (*tsukkomu*) the marchers — to injure or kill them. I suspect he does not realize that the G8 are behind the deregulation and that the marchers are actually marching for him and his fellow drivers. He should have been marching with them.

At the World Social Forum in Tokyo in January, a city employee said that many people do not understand the structures of society, i.e. how the world works. Unlike many of the marchers, the taxi driver did not understand the reason for deregulation. I wouldn't be surprised if he votes for the party behind deregulation.

(Few things are more important than understanding how the world works, but our present education system does not teach this. Why not? How can people receive nine or even sixteen years of ‘education’ and not understand how things work? Those who set the curriculum do not want us to know.)

I, too, came out of high school without a clue about how the world works. One of my great regrets is that I never studied economics, politics and history. Since becoming involved in the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel the debts of the world's most impoverished countries, I have found that I need some understanding of these subjects. To help the poor, to eliminate poverty, I need to know the causes of poverty. So I need to know something about economics and politics.

For some reason I don't fully understand, strong countries seem to want to exploit weaker countries. Ancient Greece created an empire. Then it was Rome's turn. (Jesus was born in Galilee when it was a Roman colony. That is why Pilate conducted Jesus' trial.) Much later we had the Ottoman Empire and

Mongol Empire. Then many European countries created colonies all over the world. Britain emerged as the most powerful: “the sun never sets on the British Empire.” After World War II it was the US’s turn. Now the US has seen off the challenge from the Soviet Empire and reigns supreme. It has its military deployed in over one hundred countries.

Why do countries create empires? Obviously, they want something from the countries they control. Rome forced the countries it controlled to pay taxes so that Roman people could live in luxury. That is one reason tax collectors were hated in Jesus’ time: they collected taxes for the colonial power. (This is the background to the story of Zacchaeus in the Gospels.)

The European powers set up an economic system called capitalism. The US continues this system. I say “the US”, but really it is big business in the US that continues the system. Big business seems to more or less control the US government which seems to be little more than a voice and enforcer for big business. This seems to be true of many other countries also, including Japan. One consequence is that US policy, for example at the UN and WTO, often is on behalf of just big business, and not on behalf of a large proportion of the US population, for example, the disadvantaged. This also seems to be true for Japan and is something of a puzzle to me: people elect the government but the government represents the interests of only big business, not the people as a whole. So the government often makes decisions that hurt many of its own people. Why don’t governments look after their own people? (Why don’t people elect politicians who will look after their interests?)

Capitalism is very complex but it seems to funnel money from the poor to the rich. I expect this is why it was set up. People want money. They set up companies to make money. They get government to make decisions that allow them to make money. So now everything, even human life itself, is valued according to whether or not it can be used to make money for big business. The hundreds of millions of people who are too poor to buy anything simply have no place in capitalism and are left to starve. Life forms which have always been seen as a gift in the care of the human race are now being monopolized and even patented!

## The Summit

The G8 Summit was established to give the governments of the world’s most powerful countries a forum to discuss what to them are the major issues of the day. The first Summit was in 1975, when it was the G6.

One commentator says the background was the economic and political emergence of countries that had been colonies. The G6 wanted to discuss how to deal with these countries, which were a potential obstacle to their aims.

(It is important to note here, as many conference participants emphasized, that the G8 does not represent the whole world and has no right to make decisions for the whole world. That is the United Nation's role, though some people claim that, to some extent at least, the UN is itself controlled by the rich countries.)

So the G8 countries all believe in the capitalist system and want to help their big companies to make money. They want to cooperate on this and solve problems that arise. These are the countries promoting globalization and economic and financial deregulation (as in the taxi industry in Japan). This is because they believe that globalization and deregulation will allow them to make more money. Korean delegates said that the G8 already has one third of the world's wealth. In other words, it is taking more than its fair share.

An example of how globalization will allow big business to make more money: if the US patent system is enforced all over the world, people and businesses in all countries will have to pay user fees to US patent holders, even if, for example, the medicinal product originated in a poor country.

An example of how deregulation will allow big business to make more money: Japan is well known for making it difficult for foreign companies to export to and set up business in Japan. Most countries have similar regulations in order to protect their industries. The G8 is forcing poor countries to allow companies from rich countries unlimited access to their markets. Of course, most companies in poor countries cannot compete with their rich country rivals.

(Foreign companies and financial institutions have been coveting Japan's postal savings for years. With the Post Office being privatized, the savings of millions of ordinary Japanese may one day become available to these foreign companies and financial institutions. Recently Aso Taro urged people to stop saving money and buy shares. This also is an attempt to make people's savings available to companies and institutions.)

Poverty

So when we evaluate the G8 Summit, we have to remember the purpose of the Summit. Their agenda is quite different from ours. If, for example, their goal is to make money, i.e. to make international rules that will facilitate the making of money by big business, we cannot expect them to try to solve problems like poverty. They want to make money from the poor countries: they want to take money from the poor, not give money to the poor.

Ana Filippini of the World Rainforest Movement pointed out that “The policies being formulated in the global power centers not only do little to solve the problem of hunger, but actually tend to ... further exacerbate it. A clear example of this point is the promotion of agrofuels. Under the guise of environmental protection (through the replacement of climate change-provoking fossil fuels) and the green label of ‘bio’ fuels, millions of hectares of land are being turned over to the production of food...for automobiles.”

Anne Petermann and Orin Langelle of Global Justice Ecology Project

<http://www.zmag.org/zmag/viewArticle/18090>

Importing nurses from impoverished countries like Indonesia and The Philippines is symbolic of this attitude. Indonesia and The Philippines need nurses much more than Japan does. Japan has one of the world’s biggest economies and could easily afford to train its own nurses. But because nurses in Japan are not respected, their salaries and working conditions are not good. This is why people don’t want to work as nurses in Japan.

I became aware of the G8’s attitude towards the poor through my involvement in the Jubilee 2000 campaign. In the thirty-three years since the first Summit, what has the G8 done to help the poor countries? About nothing. They talk about helping the poor, but this talk is just camouflage. (Ten years ago the G8 claimed that globalization would bring prosperity to all. This claim belongs in the same bin as the claim that electricity generated by nuclear power would be too cheap to meter, and that genetically engineered plants will feed the hungry. Anyone who uncritically accepts claims by the G8 is naive. These claims are like the beads and baubles handed out to the native Americans. They sound nice and we want to believe them, but they are worthless.) What has the G8 done to exploit the poor? A lot. Way back in 1976, Susan George explained in her book *How The Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger* that money flows from the poor countries to the rich countries. The money that flows from poor countries to rich countries in the form of (rich country) company profits, debt repayment, deposits by rich people living in poor countries in rich country banks, etc. far outweighs the small amount of money given

to the poor countries by the rich countries.

Organizations continuing the campaign to cancel the debt pointed out that the debt was not even on the agenda at Toyako. Although it is one of the single biggest causes of poverty, the G8 did not even bother to discuss it. We should not be surprised. For many years now the G8 has refused to cancel the debt. It has cancelled a little, but only on the condition that the countries concerned open up their economies to companies from rich countries. One condition is that countries cut their agricultural assistance programmes. This is one of the reasons why there is less food available for poor people today. So there is a clear link between debt and hunger.

One workshop was on the debt of Yuubari (the bankrupt city in Hokkaido) and the debt of the impoverished countries. There are many common threads. I was interested to see Hokkaido people learning about debt from people from the South.)

(While in Japan for the Summit, members of the Jubilee South debt campaign took the opportunity to visit some national politicians and ask their support for debt cancellation. Two of these politicians are on the Diet ODA [Official Development Assistance = money and products that the government gives or lends to poor countries] committee, yet they claimed they did not know that the debt had not been cancelled and that they had no idea of the problems associated with ODA.)

Either the G8 politicians and bureaucrats know this or they do not. If, despite the best education money can buy, they do not know, they are ignorant, incompetent and irresponsible. If they know it, they are morally required to do something about it, but as they have done nothing, they are guilty of facilitating the exploitation of millions of the poorest people on earth. They are complicit in the deaths of millions of people.

This may seem too harsh. You may be reluctant to believe that our governments, which include many Catholics, would do something like this. In 2004 John Perkins wrote *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* in which he detailed how the US uses rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex, murder, assassination, coups and military invasion to control and exploit poor countries. Perkins was writing from personal experience, but many people refused to believe him. Then in 2007 *A Game As Old As Empire* (edited by Steven Hiatt), with chapters by various authors, was published. It expands on *Confessions* and should remove any doubts about what is really going on in our world.

(This explains why before/during the Summit many people were refused visas and many who came for the Summit-related activities were refused entry at airports. Some, even Susan George, were detained for many hours before being allowed entry. It also explains the division between civil society organizations (CSOs, often called NGOs) which chose to dialogue with the G8 in the hope that they could influence the Summit's outcome, and CSOs which opposed the very existence of the Summit.)

Why be so surprised? What the US and other wealthy countries are doing is only what imperial powers have been doing for millennia. I wonder if we are reluctant to accept this reality because of our involvement in it. Our fathers (and mothers), brothers (and sisters), sons (and daughters) and friends are among the politicians, bureaucrats and business executives who make the decisions that result in poverty, hunger and death for MILLIONS of people. And our comfortable lifestyle is at the expense of the poor.

I remember my seminary teacher telling me that the crucifixion of Jesus is the ultimate revelation about three realities: God, we humans, and the world. Our world crucified the epitome of love. Our world, the world we have created, is a crucifying world. Anyone who understands this will not be surprised that the crucifying is still happening.

(On Mission Sunday 2000, Pope John Paul II addressed the largest gathering of missionaries ever to congregate in Rome. Speaking about the necessity for missionaries and the context in which they work he said: "Lawless competition, the desire to dominate others at all costs, discrimination exercised by those who consider themselves superior to others, the uncontrolled quest for wealth are the origin of injustice, violence and wars.")

## Climate Change

As with poverty, so with climate change and the food crisis. It was the rich countries (more precisely, big business in the rich countries) that made our world (agriculture, power, transportation, etc.) dependent on fossil fuel and which emit, in the burning of fossil fuels, most of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change (global warming). But at Toyako the G8 did not commit to taking any action on climate change. Again, don't be surprised. Oil companies are making massive profits. They don't want to turn off the tap. President's George Bush's decision not to sign the United States up to the Kyoto treaty was partly a result of pressure from ExxonMobil. (John Vidal, *The Guardian*, Wednesday June 8 2005). So we cannot expect

the G8 to tackle climate change. The G8 will not tackle climate change unless they believe it is in their own interest to do so, and at present they do not think it is. (This shows they do not understand the danger we face, as, in a world destroyed by climate change the G8 won't be able to make money. If they want to continue to make money they have to stop climate change.) Rather, we should be surprised if they did decide to really tackle climate change. One thing the G8 did decide was to accelerate efforts to have oil production increased! To produce more greenhouse gases!

When we think that climate change is perhaps the greatest threat we humans have ever faced (some scientists say the human race may well be wiped out) and that experts say we have not a moment to lose in reducing greenhouse gases, the lack of action by the G8 is just plain criminal. (Even the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* reported that the Toyako Summit achieved nothing [editorial, 9 July, 2008].) They failed to take action on the most pressing issue of our time. If they won't act on climate change they are obviously incompetent.

Minnie Degawan, of the Indigenous Peoples' Network for Change, said climate change is seriously affecting her country, the Philippines. "The Philippines is an archipelago, so our outlying islands are sinking due to the rising sea level. But my people, who come from the mountains, are affected by increased rainfall," she said. "For example, our indigenous calendar is no longer working. We used to greatly rely on the seasons, and now the seasons are rapidly changing."

Degawan also said climate change mitigation efforts, such as the use of biofuels, have led to use of the country's sugarcane plantations for ethanol. "My message to the G8 is, 'Stop these false solutions to climate change and engage indigenous peoples in the discussions for viable solutions.' We believe we have traditional knowledge that can be used to address climate change, and let's stop using technology to address a problem caused by technology," Degawan said. (<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/summit/20080709TDY02301.htm>)

In a talk on climate change, Alden Meyer from the Union of Concerned Scientists said that the various ministries in Japan have different positions and that the role of the PM seems to be to referee between them. Jürgen Maier, from the German NGO Forum on Environment and Development, said that at the Bali conference the Japanese position was basically that Japan is the most energy-efficient country and does not need to do any more. Other countries need to do more. Many participants were astounded to hear this. Asaoka Mie of Kiko Network said Toyota is totally opposed (正面から反対している) to setting

figures for mandatory greenhouse gas emissions cuts. The electric companies say wind power is not reliable and so can play only a supplementary role but this is not true. The reason they say this is that they don't want to lose control of the electricity market. In other countries, however, wind power is already supplying a significant percentage of electricity. In Denmark in 2005, for example, wind power provided 18% of the country's electricity. Many of the wind turbines installed in Japan were manufactured overseas.

This reminds me of an important question. Japan loves to boast about its cutting edge technology in the solar power field. Why then is only one percent of Japan's energy from renewable sources? The answer must be that Japan's technology is not so good, or is too expensive to be used, or neither government nor industry is seriously promoting it.

Jubilee South says that environmental destruction is a new kind of debt: ecological debt. The wealthy countries have caused climate change (and other kinds of environmental destruction) but it the impoverished countries that are suffering and will suffer the most. The wealthy countries have to make reparations for this.

At a workshop on ecological debt, Janet Redman of Sustainable Energy and Economy Network gave examples of how big business sees the climate crisis as another opportunity to make money. (See her *world bank: climate profiteer* at <http://www.ips-dc.org/reports/#292>) Under the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) carbon offsets have made billions for some while doing little or nothing to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

### The Food Crisis

And the same is true for the 'food crisis'. Actually, this term is an insult to the millions of poor who have already starved to death. There has been a food crisis for many years. It is not new. And, again, the 'crisis' has been caused by the policies promoted by the G8 countries. How can we expect them to do anything about it?

There are many examples of rich countries refusing to help the poor and starving. The Japanese government stores its imported rice until the quality deteriorates to the point that it is suitable only for livestock feed and then sells it to domestic livestock operators. Last year about 400,000 tons of rice were

disposed of in this manner.  
([http://japanfocus.org/\\_C\\_\\_Peter\\_Timmer-Japan\\_and\\_a\\_Solution\\_to\\_the\\_World\\_Rice\\_Crisis](http://japanfocus.org/_C__Peter_Timmer-Japan_and_a_Solution_to_the_World_Rice_Crisis)) And the government has long had a policy of limiting the amount of rice farmers could grow! Why not grow rice for the hungry people of Africa and Asia? Another example of the rich countries refusing to help the poor was the decision by the US not to supply wheat to feed starving Bangladeshis in 1974. Bangladesh had requested US wheat to avert a famine but the Treasury secretary judged that giving the wheat would be too inflationary for the US. 400,000 Bangladeshis starved to death.

One cause of the food 'crisis' is investment. Some big investors are switching from real estate and stocks to food. I suspect this is a result of deregulation. In any case, if investment in food is going to cause more of the poor to go hungry, there may be a need for a regulation to prevent this.

Many conferences and workshops called for food sovereignty (not just for food security), namely the 'right of peoples to define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems,' in contrast to having food largely subject to international market forces.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food\\_sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_sovereignty))

At a conference organized by the Japan Family Farmers Movement (Nouminren) and Via Campesina (the international movement of peasants, small- and medium-sized producers, landless, rural women, indigenous people, rural youth and agricultural workers) and attended by around 700 people, speakers told of how the G8 is using the food 'crisis' as a pretext for promoting Free Trade Agreements (FTA) and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA). (So called FTAs are not really free trade agreements. If they were, they would not need thousands of pages of explanation. One page would be enough. There would be no rules or regulations. Countries could trade anything.) FTAs and EPAs are really just attempts by the rich countries to force poor countries to deregulate, i.e. to allow rich countries (companies) to take what they want, to sell what they want, to invest in whatever they want, etc. Rich countries want to be allowed to take resources, including samples of genes. They want to be allowed to sell even pesticides and medicines that are banned in rich countries because they are harmful to people. They want to be allowed to buy companies, utilities (e.g. water) and so on. Foreign construction companies operating in Japan could be allowed to bring in cheap labour from poor countries. In short, they want to be allowed to do just about anything, regardless of the effects on poor countries. A speaker from Thailand told of how small farmers were forced off the land by agribusiness after deregulation.

Svend Robinson, policy officer for public administration at Public Services International Headquarters, stressed the importance of PSI's role in protecting public utilities from privatization. (At this conference I met a Catholic nurse from Fiji who asked for copies of the Columban booklet on genetic engineering and patenting life to distribute at the Pacific nurses' forum in Fiji in October. Md. Shamsuddoha from the Equity and Justice Working Group in Bangla Desh asked permission to translate the booklet on genetic engineering and patenting life. He gave me a booklet on global warming from the perspective of the impoverished countries. *Political Economy of Bali Climate Conference: A Roadmap of Climate Commercialization* shows how the rich countries are using climate change as a way to make money.)

When Cochabamba's water supply was privatized, the international consortium raised water rates an average of 35% to about \$20 a month. While this seemed tiny in the rich countries that the staff had come from, many of their new clients earned only about \$100 a month and \$20 was more than they spent on food.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cochabamba\\_protests\\_of\\_2000](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cochabamba_protests_of_2000))

#### Growth in Awareness

One positive from the Summit was the growth of CSO activity compared to the 2000 Okinawa Summit. There was also an increase in cooperation between CSOs within Japan and internationally. But it must be said that compared with activity at the venues of previous summits, CSO activity in and around Sapporo was tiny.

Before the Summit someone said some Hokkaido people were not keen on people from outside Hokkaido taking part in Summit-related activities in Hokkaido. The problems caused by the G8 countries are a matter for everyone and cannot be solved by CSOs in any one country.

#### Conclusion

Jesus dared to announce the present Reign of God. He dared to say, "You can live the new reality RIGHT NOW." Now that's most extraordinary. The word for living that way, living in the in-between times, is faith. Get rid of every thought you've had about faith, if that's possible. Forget for the moment about believing in the Immaculate Conception or the pope. Those are fine, but they're not what Jesus is talking about.

He's talking about the grace and the freedom to live God's dream for the world NOW  
— while not rejecting the world as it is. That's a mighty tension that is not easily  
resolved. (Richard Rohr: *Jesus' Plan for a New World*)

Living the new reality, i.e. the Reign of God, right now (!) means believing that God loves all people, that all people are our sisters and brothers, and consequently, living in a way that does not require us to exploit our sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. And also in a way that does not damage the Earth. So Christians in politics, in the bureaucracy and in big business will do all they can to protect our sisters and brothers and our Earth.