

Energy Probe

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Dear Friend:

The last thing the world's two billion poorest people need is a gift that increases disease and destroys their source of food and fuel. Yet this is exactly what the federal government is spending your tax dollars on in the name of foreign aid.

The gift is huge hydroelectric dams which serve the rich at the expense of the poor. These dams flood vast tracts of fertile land, forcing the poor in the Third World off their land, depriving them of their homes and the means to feed themselves, depriving them of the woodfuel they collect from their land to meet their basic energy needs. This "gift" also endangers their health, because the reservoir and irrigation canals created by these large hydropower projects in tropical regions provide ideal breeding grounds for malaria and bilharzia, debilitating and sometimes fatal diseases that currently afflict hundreds of millions of people in tropical countries.

Canada, which spends 75% of its energy aid dollars on hydro, isn't alone in pushing this technology. Hydroelectric dams from all countries have forced hundreds of thousands off their land. But Canada has been one of the worst countries in a bad lot.

- . In Ghana, a large dam we helped build is now the country's chief energy resource. Yet most of its power is sold to Kaiser Aluminum Co., an American multinational, at a cost so low (one-twentieth of the world average) that it barely pays for the dam's interest and operating costs. Because of the dam, the people have suffered greatly. River blindness and bilharzia soared in many communities, where the infection rate sometimes reached 70%. In addition, 80,000 people were forced to move, mostly to 52 official resettlement sites. But this land was so poor that 42,000 left in a mass exodus within four years.
- . In Haiti, Canadian aid funded the initial phase of two projects that--if they proceed--will push thousands of small farmers and tenant farmers off their land to provide cheap electricity for some 250 multinational corporations. The farmers will lose their homes and their livelihood and many will be forced into the slums of the cities, where a staggering 50% of the labour force is already unemployed. Tragically, although Haiti is a country that already needs to import food to feed its poor, these projects will flood lands that currently feed at least 30,000 Haitians.

How can projects as devastating as these be promoted as foreign aid? Francois Arsenault, the foreign aid expert in charge of Canada's Haiti program, admits that the hydro-electric project will serve large industries in the short term, but says "in a generation (it) will be needed" by others. In other words, our foreign aid dollars will benefit the shareholders of multinationals operating in Haiti on the theory that in 25 or 30 years the thousands being thrown off their land will be better off!

The tragedy doesn't end here, however. Forced to leave their agriculturally rich valleys and plains, the poor often find themselves relocated on smaller, less fertile plots. Farmed under such crowded conditions, the soil rapidly becomes exhausted, and the poor must then cut down nearby forests for more land to farm.

This cutting of trees is a major cause of deforestation, and with deforestation comes the loss of topsoil and the spreading of the world's deserts. That means less food, less fuel, and the continuation of a vicious cycle that causes the destruction of the local environment and means slow death for those most dependent on it.

To add insult to injury, the topsoil lost from the land goes into the river basins and ends up filling the dam reservoirs, cutting the useful life of the dams by up to one-half. Many dams now on the drawing boards--dams which will cause so much future suffering--are designed to replace these incapacitated dams.

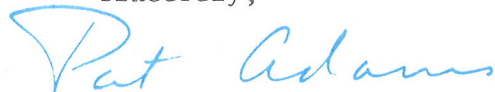
Tragically, even the power that the dams produce goes almost entirely to industries and the wealthy. According to the World Bank, only 6% of the Third World's rural poor can afford to buy power despite the billions of dollars invested by aid agencies in large-scale hydroelectric projects.

We think this colossal misuse of taxpayers' money should stop. Foreign aid should be true foreign aid, legitimately spent for the purpose for which it was allocated, and all projects should be open to scrutiny to ensure they are needed and do not unnecessarily harm anyone. Our aid dollars should benefit, first and foremost, those in greatest need.

Through Energy Probe's work with like-minded research organizations in the Third World, we're beginning to understand what alternatives to large hydro dams the Third World needs from us. Energy Probe was Canada's first energy policy group to investigate these new and badly needed approaches.

But we can't continue our research--or continue our fight for constructive, humanitarian energy aid--without your help. To prevent tragedies in the making from being inflicted on the Third World's poor, please send Energy Probe a generous donation today. We'll put your money to work fighting for the rights of millions who need a voice in Canada.

Sincerely,



Patricia Adams
Third World Researcher

P.S. Our energy aid dollars--which are supposed to do good works--have become an instrument of harm. Your tax-deductible donation can help right that wrong.