

# Foreword

I am pleased to introduce *A Kinder and Gentler Tyranny* by Mike and Peggy Rivage-Seul. It intends to develop for English-speaking audiences the latest work of the Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones (DEI) of San José, Costa Rica. In 1992, the Rivage-Seuls worked with us for a semester at the DEI. They were the first North Americans to participate in our annual workshop for invited researchers. In the fall of 1994, they returned to us for further research. In our work together, their manuscript attracted my attention as creatively interpreting for North American audiences DEI themes surrounding the free market fetishism which marks the so-called New World Order (NWO).

Since 1977 the DEI has been tracing international capitalism's drive to self-destruction inherent in its treatment of products as persons and consumers as things. All during the 1970s and 1980s, the system's necrophilia necessitated unprecedented human sacrifice at the hands of the National Security States which functioned to make conditions safe for capitalism throughout the Third World. The efforts of the then-reigning military dictatorships were papered over with a "veil of appearances." The disguise enabled the cult of death to be portrayed as a celebration of life. The veil theologically misrepresented the biblical God as requiring blood libations on behalf of the worldwide system of private property.

Obviously, the world has changed drastically since the DEI's foundation. To most, capitalism now appears stronger than ever. Its alternative has apparently disappeared with the simultaneous demise of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of historic socialism. "Democracy" has reportedly displaced both National Security States and communist dictatorships. In the words of Francis Fukuyama, we have finally reached "the end of history." Utopias are dead. Capitalism has no alternatives. It stands triumphant for all to see.

These are the NWO illusions which *A Kinder and Gentler Tyranny* tries to dispel. Here the Rivage-Seuls offer nothing less than a trenchant critique of Western culture and its underlying spirituality. The book relentlessly focuses on DEI themes of the "impossibility" of the capitalist system, and of the "human sacrifice" the free market requires for its maintenance. Additionally, this book centralizes the destructive nature of "market totalitarianism" and its inevitable tendency to "marginalize" environmental concerns. It shows how the New World Order creates a global underclass of "debt slaves" "excluded" from a "utopian" universalization of the American Way of Life. Yet the system persists,

legitimated by a bastardized Christianity which exacts payment rather than forgiveness of debts.

Emphasizing historical perspective, the argument here is that the New World Order is not that new. Of course, there is the new technology -- information superhighways and the accompanying publicity. There is also the intensified internationalization of markets. Such developments are novel to some extent. But the theory and practice which accompanies them are dreadfully familiar. Theoretically, Adam Smith's "invisible hand" makes a reprise as President Reagan's "magic of the market place." "Trickle down" theory is repackaged as "supply side economics." International "Free Trade" refers to a highly regulated system of neo-mercantilism and colonialism-revisited which in the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement takes hundreds of pages of turgid prose to delineate.

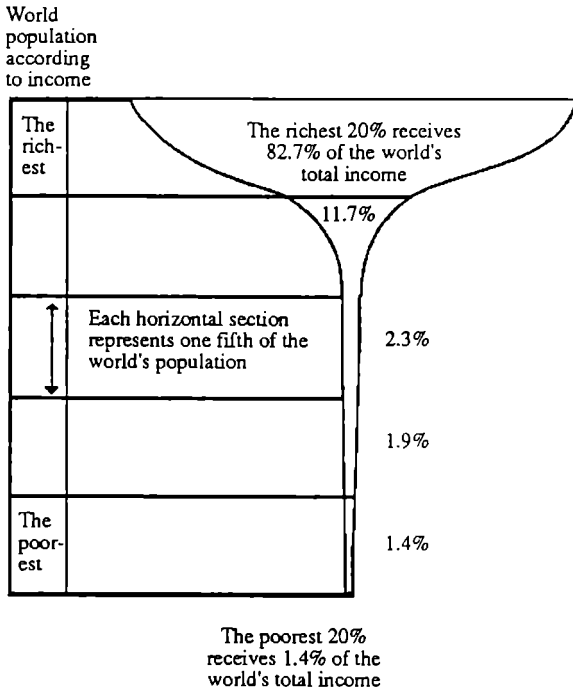
In practice, the changes of the nineties attempt to reinstitute a modernized version of the world order which preceded capitalism's own *perestroika* which beginning in the 1930s incorporated elements of socialism to insure capitalism's very survival. That older order was Darwinian -- governed by the "law of the strongest," by survival of the fittest. It was a world without legal labor unions, prohibition of child labor, provisions for minimum wage, social security, workplace compensation, public education, health care, housing subsidies, unemployment insurance, paid vacations, 40 hour workweeks, environmental protection, etc. The rich lived in opulence excluding and blaming the poor for their inability to compete. On the analysis of the Rivage-Seuls, these same conditions represent the utopian vision celebrated by today's powerful advocates of the New World Order.

So in recapturing the 1890s, "Coketowns" reappear as *maquiladora* communities featuring cardboard shacks and inhumane living conditions, all justified in terms of the "social costs" and "structural adjustments" necessary to "integrate" the Third World into a system of which it has been an essential part for 500 years. The resultant "sacrifice" of the world's most vulnerable is defended in terms of not caving in to "special interests." Allegedly these include labor union members, women, students, the homeless, sick, impoverished, racial minorities, the indigenous, the unemployed, etc. Meanwhile, the "general interest" is unquestioningly understood as represented by rich investors and entrepreneurs.

In all of this, the overriding fiction maintains that "Growth" is the answer to worldwide poverty. Uncontested New World Order math implies that the Third World can achieve the level of consumption self-righteously flaunted by the U.S. where 40% of the earth's product is already devoured ravenously. The earth itself is assumed capable of absorbing the garbage produced by the universalization of consumption levels achieved in America's shining "city on a hill."

More particularly, NWO calculations overlook the "champagne glass" distribution of world resources reflected in the U.N. Human Development Report of 1992. It pointed out that 20 percent of the world's population controls nearly 83 percent of the world's income. Only 6 percent is left for the bottom 60 percent. Moreover, the gap is widening rather than narrowing, as NWO rhetoric might lead us to believe. This is shown in the following Figure:

# "The Champagne Glass"



Commenting this reality, DEI scholar, Xabier Garostiaga observes<sup>1</sup>:

It is impossible to "universalize" the world under these circumstances, to "globalize." If the poorest 80 percent of humanity were to adopt the patterns of consumption presently enjoyed by the richest 20 percent, we would face an ecological social and political disaster. Even so, the sole intent of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the North American Free Trade Agreement and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is to create a so-called homogeneous, global world. Such a feat is structurally and politically impossible under the present scheme. You cannot liberalize markets and create a level playing field for trade when an elite 20 percent of the world controls the bulk of the wealth, the technology, the military and political power available to humanity. Globalization in this context is like placing a shark and a sardine on the same fish scale: the sardine is being devoured. (12)

The Rivage-Sculs' *Kinder and Gentler Tyranny* elaborates these points in the clearest possible way. The authors present analysis of market triumphalism sadly lacking in the dominant culture's mainstream sources. In easy to understand language, they show how the market's logic (its "invisible hand") indeed supplies rich rewards for the few. However, it does so (inevitably) at the expense of the world's impoverished majority. At book's end, the Rivage-Sculs suggest

bold new directions for correcting the market's automatic tendencies. The key, they hold, is found in rescuing the Judco-Christian tradition from its perversions which since Augustine and Anselm have increasingly legitimated human sacrifice, the payment of crushing debt and the devastation of the natural environment.

Mike and Peggy are educators and peace activists of the kind we attempt to nourish at the DEI. Their familiarity with Third World thinkers makes them excellent conduits for the ideas and visions of those they present as living outside the West's "cultural cave." Having listened carefully to "outsiders" not sharing their own culture's allegiance to shadow and illusion, they challenge North Americans to re-envision their world and its reigning spirituality.

Franz Hinkelammert  
San José, Costa Rica  
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## NOTE

1. See Xabier Garostiaga. "World Has Become a 'Champagne Glass' " *The National Catholic Reporter* (27 Jan. 1995): 3. See also Heinz Dietrich Steffan, "América Latina entre el capitalismo utópico y la democracia mundial." *Pasos* 51, (Jan./Feb. 1994): 9-13.