

## **BOOK REVIEW:**

### **SHARING THE WORLD'S RESOURCES**

Oscar Schachter. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. Pp. ix, 171. Index.

Oscar Schachter who had extensive experience with the United Nations <sup>1</sup> examines the issues brought about by the current demands for a more equitable sharing of resources and the practical consequence they have to international policy, decision and public opinion. He traces the evolutionary concept of distributive justice from its abstract philosophical roots to contemporary concrete political, economic and institutional factors which finally brought about this concept to the different organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations. The current debates have two philosophical criteria: a standard based on need on one hand and on legitimate expectation and historical entitlement on the other. Need, conceived myopically in terms of charity has shifted into need conceived in terms of justice. The tremendous increase in productive capacity and potential, particularly in the developed areas of the world, by advanced technology, has not only accentuated but actually produced a sense of injustice when calamity strikes a poor nation and rich countries fail to come to the rescue. The practical consequence of such a shift cannot be overstated both in its impact to a universal perception of values and to the policies and declarations of the United Nations as well as its compelling pressure to the developed nations with the capacity to respond to a crisis.

However, need in terms of justice should not apply only in the demand for rich nations to share resources, but also within the developing nations which have to re-structure their own resource and wealth allocations to reduce inequities. Another consideration has to do with limiting present consumption and conserving resources for future generations. Ultimately, a total idea of global needs faced with the reality of depleting resources has to make use of the interdependence of states to meet common global problems. Priorities such as concern over the oceans, atmosphere, climate, weather, population and elimination of the relation of domination and subordination in the world economy, had developed and continue to evolve into increasingly acceptable norms translated into international norms and

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national legislations. The author recognizes however, that the evolution of distributive justice has not taken place in isolation of existing competing goals. An example is the dilemma expressed by the economic dictum that greater equality is antithetical to efficiency in economic matters. Other more real dilemmas can perhaps be better resolved by balancing competing goals and designing procedural measures directed to improve bargaining, negotiation and consultation among parties.

The author identifies the oceans, waterways and atmosphere as categories which bear the interplay of equitable use and just appropriation. He acutely describes the issues of the current United Nations Conference of the Sea and the proposed alternatives. An international hydrosystem, if scientific and administrative cooperation is volunteered by nations may be a significant remedy to the world's freshwater supply, source of fish and the uses of water in agricultural, industrial and energy production. Scientific studies have revealed that certain activities in the atmosphere may produce harmful effects to climate, air quality and weather. A list of relevant considerations may serve as guidelines in balancing the benefits of all parties.

But perhaps the most volatile issues in international discussions have to do with distribution of what Prof. Schachter terms, the "global product". He specifically refers to the pricing of oil, mineral, agricultural goods and other raw materials, capital goods and finished products. These issues represent the major economic conflict between the developed nations and the developing ones and which have preoccupied the United Nations in the past decade. Continuing recognition is accorded the principle that international solutions will gain wider acceptance and more effective implementation, if considerations of justice as well as economic interests must be relatively weighted. Approaches indicated by the author includes minimization or total elimination of restrictive practices of monopolies and cartels. The more fundamental solutions however lie in sharing of technology, development of agriculture and natural resources. Observations made by Prof. Schachter of the present arrangements between the wielders of technology and those badly in need of it are most realistic, and the alternatives he proposes are not only feasible and accurate but apparently imperative and appropriate.

The author has set his aims. First, "... to examine the basic normative issues raised by these demands (of equitable sharing and distributive justice) and their practical application in international decisions." (p. viii). He describes this effort with the following words: "... Perhaps 'analysis' is not quite the right word; if I may borrow a phrase... from Justice Holmes, my effort may be 'more like painting a picture than doing a sum.'" (p. 6). I disagree with this modesty. The painting is fine, but the analysis still finer

and acutely profound. According to the author, the "book's main object is to throw light on the ways in which the abstract ideal of equitable sharing can be given determinate meaning and political acceptability." (p. vii). Indeed, it has done so.

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