



# Friends of *Le Monde Diplomatique*

**Newsletter - April 2003**

**Price:£1**

## **Café Diplo Season – April, May and June 2003**

### **Exploiting conservation and conserving exploitation in a reformed World Bank – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2003**

Zoe Young, London-based film-maker and author of 'A New Green Order? The World Bank and the Politics of the Global Environment Facility' will talk about the role of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) - billions of dollars of aid from Western governments for the World Bank and UN to 'green' international development - in sustaining business as usual.

### **London Transport: public service or private business? – 10<sup>th</sup> May 2003**

In collaboration with London Social Forum-Transport, with Cynthia Hayes, coordinator of Capital Transport Campaign, and Bill Hamilton, Head of Public Affairs, Transport for London. The talk will explore the current situation and possibilities for transport in London. CTC was set up 20 years ago to support transport at the abolition of the GLC, and is a forum of trade unions and users.

### **The corporate/financial takeover of democracy – 24<sup>th</sup> May 2003**

Greg Palast, investigative journalist, tackles issues from his book: "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy". He is one of the 'three angry men' in the USA, the other two being Noam Chomsky and Michael Moore. Originally an undercover agent for trade unions, he also investigated corporate frauds and later applied these techniques to journalism. He acquired classified documents from WTO and IMF files, and drew attention to connections between the Bush and Bin Laden families.

### **'Zimbabwe: the present and the future' – 7<sup>th</sup> June 2003**

Dr Brighton Chireka, Chairman of the Zimbabwe Association in London, will arrange a dialogue between opponents and victims of the Mugabe's tyranny/regime.

At the **French Institute, 17 Queensberry Place, London SW7** (near South Kensington Tube station), in the ground floor café, from **11.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.** We suggest you arrive 10 minutes beforehand.

### **Articles in this edition**

#### **1. The World Social Forum moves on** by Benoit Borrits

*A subtle shift from raw anti-capitalism to the primacy of democracy over markets.....*

#### **2. No more runways for Britain** by John Stewart

*Aviation growth can easily be halted by cutting tax breaks.....*

#### **3. Missing parts to the peace puzzle** from Africa Analysis

*Peace talks in war-torn Sudan are threatened by ignored groups.....*

#### **4. The rotting cash cow** by Helena Kotkowska.....

*Dealers have reduced art to pure sensationalism in a milieu as elitist as ever.....*

#### **Contacting Friends of Le Monde diplomatique:**

Friends of Le Monde Diplomatique  
Top Floor, 9 Alexander Road  
London N19 3PF

Phone: 0709 234 8726  
E-mail: monde-diplo-friends@mondediplo.com  
Web site: www.amisuk.f9.co.uk

You can subscribe directly to the English language print edition. You will receive 12 mailed issues a year, plus access to the complete online archive. Visit [www.monedediplo.com](http://www.monedediplo.com) E-mail: [english@Monde-diplomatique.fr](mailto:english@Monde-diplomatique.fr)



## 1. The World Social Forum moves on

**Benoit Borrits, Porto Alegre, Brazil**

### **There has been a subtle shift from raw anti-capitalism to the primacy of democracy over markets**

While the theme of the first World Social Forum (WSF) was the analysis of the effects of neo-liberal globalisation and that of the second, the search for alternatives to neo-liberalism, the third Forum this February took place under the banner of action against neo-liberalism. This was timely given the looming war in Iraq. This presentation should not, however, lead one to think that the WSF has become the centre of resistance to neo-liberalism, an event that would itself be a stage for action.

It is perhaps worth recalling the WSF's Charter of Principles: the WSF provides a forum for debate between social movements who wish to resist "neo-liberalism, the domination of capital and all forms of imperialism". The alternatives proposed at the WSF "aim to generate a vision of a globalisation that respects universal human rights, those of all men and women of all nations, together with those of the environment, a vision to be supported by international, democratic systems and institutions serving social justice, equality and the sovereignty of humanity".

From the open character of this Charter, the WSF has over the last 3 years proved its capacity to unite several thousand organisations ranging from those that struggle against neo-liberalism, for the environment, in solidarity with the third world, to feminist, union, peasant, social economist and religious based groups. While not official delegates at the Forum, political parties are present as observers; their role is to listen to these social movements in order to translate into political life what is expressed at the Forum.

### **Strength in numbers**

This third Forum surpassed its predecessors with more than 100,000 delegates. All those present who had taken part in the second Forum (which had gathered together more than 55,000 delegates) were surprised by the sheer size of the Opening Day March on January 23. Those marching included many new faces: alongside local trade unions such as CUT, CONAE and MST and ecological or alternative associations such as Greenpeace, ATTAC and Oxfam, numerous European and Asian trade unions were present (CSC from Belgium, CGIL and CISL from Italy and KTCU from Korea) and religious groups such as the Readers of La

Vie, the Anglican Church of Brazil and a muslim group from Malaysia. After 3 hours marching (along a route that normally takes a half hour to stroll) the marchers descended on the Sol Amphitheatre for the Opening Ceremony.

Given the possibility of war in Iraq, the Forum opened under the image of peace. From the speeches and numerous Palestinian flags, it was clear that the Palestinian people's right to self determination was a theme close to Brazilian hearts.

This Forum will also be remembered for the significant presence of parliamentary representatives. While the theme of the Forum was action, no-one doubts that political struggle for another world forms an important part of the process of action. But if the politicians or representatives of international institutions often show themselves to be in agreement with social movements, we are often disappointed by their efforts to engage these themes in practice.

### **A new debate emerges**

From many of the round table debates I witnessed, it seems that the debate over "sovereignty or another globalisation" has become "passé". One of the strongest themes of the Forum was that of the primacy of democracy over the market. Everyone was in agreement that nation states should re-establish prerogatives vis-à-vis the excesses of capitalism and that this return to sovereignty should be counterbalanced by international democratic institutions permitting respect of fundamental human rights, which can come in a variety of forms, amongst which are civil rights, social rights and the right to possess a clean planet for ourselves and future generations.

That implies that we believe the right of developing countries to pollute must be limited. The real debate focussed on what new institutions could replace those already in existence. The International Court of Justice, recognised by 85 countries (but not the United States) is an example. One speaker proposed a World Citizens Parliament. It was interesting to see Mario Soares (from the PS in Portugal) declare this a "good idea".

The gap between politicians and social movements was most apparent during the debates on financial crises and financial alternatives. While elimination of third world debt was discussed everywhere, no initiative that would represent real action was proposed. Even more worrying, the Brazilian Minister for Social Affairs,



José Dirceu from the PT party, declared that the issue was not a problem of external debt but rather one of internal debt; it was Brazilian households who had accumulated the debt. According to him to cancel Brazilian debt would destroy Brazilian savings, which is not what his government was elected to do.

### **Recapturing democracy**

It was also noteworthy that the debate over whether to destroy capitalism was absent: it has become secondary. Everyone agrees on the need to recapture democratic space from capitalism. From this common standpoint, some think that capitalism can be subjugated while others think the opposite; that a blow struck against neo-liberalism would and should sound the death knell for capitalism. The absence of open debate on the extent to which capitalism should be reformed did not, however, mean that there were not a number of workshops whose work was clearly anti-capitalist in its thrust.

Some, notably the mass media, tried desperately to instigate a debate between the World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos. We saw Jose Maria Figueres, Director General of the WEF and former president of Costa Rica interviewed on “Terra Nova”, the official daily of the Social Forum. Even more significant was the trip by Lula between Porto Alegre and Davos. However, Candido Grzybowski (organiser of the Social Forum) repeated during the closing press meeting that there cannot be a dialogue between the Fora because there is no representative of the Social Forum. The Social Forum is, above all else, a space for debate and nobody is authorised to speak in its name (this is the reason why there is no Final Declaration).

It is too soon to try to assess the impact of World Social Forum no. 3 and indeed one could understandably ask whether this is even possible. The proposals for action which came out of the debates will be made public shortly and we will be able to form an initial impression. Whatever the case, the succession of Social Fora over the last 3 years (be they on a World, Regional or Local level) represents a new political phenomenon which favours the emergence of a world citizenship and the creation of new relations between citizens and national and international institutions; no-one can doubt that these Fora are shaping the history of our world.

**Benoit Borrits,**

[benoit.borrits@wanadoo.fr](mailto:benoit.borrits@wanadoo.fr)

**Benoit is a former chairman of Friends of LMD.**

## **2. No more runways for Britain**

**John Stewart, London**

### **Aviation growth can easily be halted by cutting tax breaks**

This year will be an important one for aviation. In December the Government is set to publish an Aviation White Paper setting out its policies for the next 30 years. In preparation for the White Paper, it is currently consulting on the Regional Air Studies, which outline options for airport expansion across the UK.

#### **Massive airport expansion**

The Regional Air Studies are based on government forecasts that passenger numbers will double by 2020 and treble by 2030. Such a huge increase would require the equivalent of almost five new Heathrows by 2030.

The prospect of such expansion has aroused considerable opposition, ranging from local protest groups around airports to the great and the good of the green movement. In a recent report the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution pointed out that aviation was the fastest growing contributor to climate change and called for tough government action to limit growth.

#### **Too many sweeteners**

But perhaps the most stinging argument thrown at the Government by its many critics centres on the privileged economic position enjoyed by the aviation industry. The industry in the UK receives tax concessions of at least £7.5 billion a year. This arises largely because there is no tax on aviation fuel and no VAT on airline tickets or the purchase of aircraft. It is these tax concessions which enable the industry to offer so many low fares. In other words, the current and projected growth in air travel is being artificially stimulated by tax concessions. Economists have shown that, if these tax concessions were removed, the current airports could cope with passenger numbers, even in 30 years time.

Two questions arise from this: wouldn't more expensive tickets stop poor people flying; and wouldn't the wider economy suffer? To take the first question: the projected trebling in passengers numbers by 2030 will be made up almost entirely of the top 10% of income earners taking more weekend breaks abroad. Social classes A and B already take up 75% of the seats on budget flights. People in social classes D and



They fly very little, if at all, because, while flights may be cheap, the overall cost of a foreign holiday is beyond their budget.

That is not projected to change significantly over the next 30 years. People in social class C, who have been able to fly more often as a result of cheap fares, may need to cut down on the number of foreign holidays. This may not be a major hardship, but it is important to the Government as many of these people are the key 'swing' voters courted by all parties.

Clearly the aviation industry has contributed to the economic prosperity of the UK. But there is little evidence that Great Britain plc would go into decline if government managed demand rather than went gung-ho for growth. The airline sector only accounts for 0.8% of UK Gross Domestic Output, with airports contributing a further 0.13%. Only 24% of trips are for business purposes. The projected growth in air travel is being driven by a leisure market that has been artificially created by tax concessions, not by the solid needs of the business community.

#### **A noisy future**

Limiting this growth would have important benefits. A removal of the tax concessions would give the Chancellor of the Exchequer a considerable amount of money each year to spend on other things, including measures that could bring direct benefit to the poorest in society. If growth could be limited to 1% a year, pollution created by aircraft would remain at current levels as the industry expects aeroplanes to become cleaner by about 1% each year over the coming decades. There is, though, no prospect of quieter planes coming on-stream in the foreseeable future. The future for people under flight paths remains grim, even if growth was to be severely limited.

In conclusion, then, what are the prospects of limiting growth? Eliminating the tax concessions - in conjunction with our European partners - is now on the agenda. High-speed rail as an alternative to short-haul flights is being discussed. But it remains very doubtful if this Government will produce a White Paper that goes against the wishes of the aviation industry and the desires of the key swing voters who enjoy flying abroad on cheap flights

**John Stewart heads the UK Noise Association.**  
[jdm.stewart@virgin.net](mailto:jdm.stewart@virgin.net)

### **3. Missing parts to the peace puzzle**

**from Africa Analysis**

#### **Peace talks in war-torn Sudan are threatened by ignored groups**

One year on and the Machakos talks in Kenya between the Sudan government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) are still seen as offering the best chance yet of ending the 20-year conflict that has killed around 2m people in Sudan.

When the fresh round of talks began in early March under the auspices of the regional intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) it focused on three disputed areas: Abyei in West Kordofan, the Nuba Mountains of southern Kordofan and the Angasana of Blue Nile province. But the talks will exclude a number of north and south political parties and groups representing legitimate constituencies in marginalised areas of the Nuba mountains, Darfur and East Sudan.

These areas also fall outside IGAD's mandate, but there remains a broad belief among those involved in the talks that the outcome will be accepted as a 'comprehensive peace agreement.' A deadline has been set for a start to be made on the implementation of the final agreement. According to the chief Kenyan mediator Lazaors Sumbeiyu, January 2004 will be the start of a nationally accepted 'transition period'.

However, IGAD Plus, a committee that includes the US, Britain, Norway and Italy, has protested that the Machakos Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Khartoum and the SPLA has fallen short of confronting the real issues. There are also predictions the Machakos and the ongoing talks are doomed to collapse, like the similar North-South Addis Ababa agreement.

#### **Marginalised regions**

Defining the Sudanese conflict as a clash between Islam and Christianity or Arabs and Africans is dangerously simplistic. It is true that the North-South clash contains very strong elements of religion and ethnicity. But oil and ideology are complicating factors.

Since independence, a northern clique has politically and economically marginalised not only the South, but also regions in the East and West. These areas are home to grievances similar to those in the South. There are no government projects to address the problems of development and economic isolation.



Given the lack of public services in these regions – not only water and electricity, but healthcare and education – as well as the centralisation of power and wealth, it is little wonder that deep-seated resentment against Khartoum exists. There is a growing sense of regional identity among diverse communities sharing the same experience of marginalisation.

Yet the government was apparently caught by surprise when 300 fighters of the newly formed Front for the Liberation of Darfur (FLD) seized the Western town of Gulu, in Jebel Marrah (central Darfur) and installed its own administration. The FLD said it wanted to eradicate ‘the marginalisation and injustices which has deprived the region of development projects.’

There have been outbursts of unrest in Darfur for years, but this is the best organised and regionally united rebellion the government has faced so far. Order in this region has traditionally been maintained by the expedient arming of the nomadic Baggara herders and allowing them to pillage and drive out more settled communities. Now the violence is directed against the government in a manner similar to the simmering rebellion in the oil-rich eastern region where there have recently been calls for the self-determination of the Beja people.

#### **A Darfurian identity**

There are obviously ethnic and religious dimensions to the unrest in Darfur. But there also seems to be a conscious effort by the FLD leadership to support, if not create, a Darfurian identity. The rebel movement has been portrayed by different supporters as both a secular and an Islamist movement.

One of the leading figures in the FLD is said to be Abdel Wahid Mohamed Nour, a lawyer and former member of the opposition Communist Party of Sudan. Well known and respected in Darfur, Nour has long been a thorn in the side of the authorities and has been gaoled on numerous occasions. The statements made by the FLD could well have emanated from Nour since they accord with what he has long been preaching. But they have also been supported by another newly formed group, the Sudanese Islamist Opposition.

This could indicate that the days of the government’s divide and rule regime may be ending. But despite this evidence, the government continues to categorise the unrest in Darfur as ‘tribal conflict’. It is also continuing to arm and sponsor gangs of nomads to ‘maintain order’. In pursuit of this goal, hundreds of people have been killed and numerous villages burned to the ground.

This is seen by the oppositionists as evidence that the government plans to drive the people of Darfur out of the mineral-rich region bordering Chad, Libya and Egypt. This, they claim, would be similar to what happened to the Nuba people nearly a decade ago. They were driven off the best agricultural land which was then taken over by business people from the North.

#### **‘Somalisation of Sudan’**

Although this new rebel movement, as well as the Eritrean-based armed rebellion in the east, clearly pose a threat to Sudan’s territorial integrity and security, they are not being taken seriously by the government. Instead, all hopes are pinned on the Kenyan talks in the apparent belief that if an agreement can be reached that ends the country’s longest rebellion, all others will simply fade into insignificance. It is obvious they will not – and they constitute a real danger of future fragmentation.

Calls are now being made to include other rebel groups in the peace process. One of the leading proponents of this is Ahmed Diraige, a former governor of Darfur and now head of the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance. He has warned that the ‘one state, two systems’ solution proposed at Machakos is a recipe for further disaster.

What Sudan needs, he says, is a ‘complete structural change with a decentralised government, real power sharing and the equitable distribution of resources.’ Anything short of this would perpetuate the causes of rebellion. The ‘one state, two systems’ solution proposal was well short of this and Diraige asks whether the international community, in supporting this solution, realises that they are promoting ‘the Somalisation of Sudan.’

**With thanks to Frank Russell, committee member of Friends of LMD, and to the editor of the newsletter Africa Analysis, who provided the article. [frankrussell55@hotmail.com](mailto:frankrussell55@hotmail.com)**



#### 4. The rotting cash cow

**Helena Kotkowska, London**

##### **Dealers have reduced art to pure sensationalism in a milieu as elitist as ever**

A ceiling made of coloured perspex tiles, extracts in red from a pornographic text copied laboriously onto a white wall – these were two of the exhibits put forward for the Turner Prize show in 2002. The exhibits were reminiscent of those featured in 2001, when the winner was an installation of a room with the light going on and off and the door opening and closing.

Ever since the Sensation Exhibition in 1997, the prized works of the art world have shown an uncanny aptitude for the repetitive, the monotonous and the pseudo-technical. Video installations, photography and films showing the same actions in endless repetition have become standard dull fare, dazzling in their lack of any meaningful content, and chosen, it seems, according to the greatest ability to induce the most soporific effect in the viewer.

##### **Craving for publicity**

The ‘Sensation’ exhibition at least stood out in one respect, in that its outstanding use of hype and publicity has surely never been matched before or since and probably owed much to the orchestration of Charles Saatchi, owner of most of the exhibits, advertising tycoon and previously PR man to Margaret Thatcher. Much to the organisers’ delight, no doubt, the ‘shocking’ quality of many of the works – Damien Hirst’s rotting cow’s head with its attendant swarm of flies, the Chapman brothers’ circle of plastic children sprouting genitals instead of noses or mouths, the portrait of Myra Hindley composed of children’s hands – became the focus of attention and was paraded in the press and television for weeks before the exhibition opened.

More publicity was guaranteed when one of the visitors to the exhibition threw eggs at the portrait of Myra Hindley. Further antics followed, with Tracey Emin appearing drunk on a TV chat-show and then walking out mid-programme, while Norman Rosenthal – Director of the Royal Academy – put in an appearance with a glossy, lipstick ‘kiss’ on his cheek. Notoriety was assured, ensuring that the exhibition would attract millions of visitors. It did. The queues of people at the doors of the Royal Academy proved the wisdom of choosing advertising over art.

One could argue that there is nothing wrong with marketing art. In a world where advertising determines the profit outcomes for most products, why should not the art world benefit? Has not art always had sponsors, benefactors and patrons?

The problem is that the arts – all of them – have, to an extent, always been the expression of what is best in humanity, a way of transmitting down the ages the things which unite us. Some artists in the past have suffered for their vision. There are those who argue that, in holding art in too great an esteem, there is a danger of inviting elitism, of art becoming elevated to a rarified atmosphere where only the privileged few can enter.

##### **The new elite**

However, in the art world that dominates today, another lie is being spun. Under the guise of making art accessible to the many, the art world remains as exclusive as ever. Ticking away behind the scenes is a money-making machine. As Matthew Collings, presenter of the Turner Prize, found out, having some talent ‘helps’ an artist to advance their career, but what really matters, it seems, is ‘where the dealer places the work’. Art dealers, galleries, curators, prestigious museums and public institutions abroad, are still pulling the strings, very much as always, except that now the media (Channel 4 sponsors the prize), advertisers and even corporations are also taking their chunk of the market.

Elitism has never been so rife. Today ‘the celebrity syndrome’ that prevails, with Madonna being asked to present the award at the Turner Prize 2001 and artists’ success being measured as to who can sell their work to Elton John. Contributors to the new ‘designer’ art have to be young and with an inclination to appear on TV. They also need to have the ability to produce such impoverished visual images that the works seem unable to stand on their own, being accompanied more and more frequently on their creators’ part by lengthy monologues and ‘explanations’, as posed and as contrived as the artists themselves. Good technicians are being elevated to the status of artists and, in order to stay in the market, are producing a dreary catalogue of one ‘sensation’ after another, of one ‘shock’ after another.

##### **Sale of the century**

‘Conceptual art’ has simply become yet another commodity to be packaged and sold and, even here, nothing new has been invented. Corporations worked out the formula some time ago. When the photograph



of Che Guevara was bought as an image to stick on T-shirts, the revolutionary figure was popularised, but also, in a way, belittled. The subversive was 'accommodated', tamed, made safe and, as a consequence, trivialised.

Worse, with not a drawing, painting or sculpture in sight at any of the prestigious exhibitions, the suggestion is that only a certain type of work is welcome, creating a no-go area for any differing views. Artists who may be producing works that are more substantial are being ignored, presumably to labour away in poverty.

Advertising may work very well as advertising. It goes for the immediate and the instant, quick to appeal and equally quick to forget. But in using similar techniques in art and treating art as a mere commodity that, like a detergent, has to be flagged and sold, something is lost. Human experience is trivialised, art is brought down to the banal and, instead of meaning or beauty, all we are left with is the cheap effect.

**Helena Kotkowska is on the committee of Friends of LMD.** [hkotkowska@hotmail.com](mailto:hkotkowska@hotmail.com)

### **Friends take a stand against the war**

The Friends of Le Monde Diplomatique has affiliated to the Stop the War Coalition. The Iraq conflict has not been a war but a punitive expedition against a country impoverished and dismantled by sanctions, with a murderous regime we helped into power and armed.

It is essential to take a stand because, quite apart from questions of legality and ethics, this conflict set new historical precedents which will transform the geopolitical configuration of the world forever. 1) It establishes the right to 'pre-emptive strikes' on the basis that a nation 'might' be able to threaten the interests and credo of the attacking nation. With the implementation of Star Wars, it would give the USA the capacity to reach every nation on earth and discipline and punish for any threat to its 'interests' irrespective of anything said nation actually did, thus blurring the boundary between reality and possibility (fiction), catapulting us into a virtual world with long-distance strikes and virtual scenarios, written by USA Inc.

2) It establishes a precedent for cleaning out a leader, and auctioning out the resources of the country to private American firms (the auction called by the US President for the reconstruction of Iraq, a country that, dictator notwithstanding, had 97% literacy and 95%

access to free public health before the sanctions.) That is, the privatisation of the country, lock stock and barrel.

Are we not, in effect, subsidising an army with public money to protect the interests of private companies? Look at the Allies. The old fascist axis: Spain and Italy plus the Anglo-Saxon neo-liberal alliance.

If we do not want a corporate-fascist world order, now is the time to oppose it. War is an admission of failure. For the Iraqi people, it's a no-win situation: stuck between a bloody dictator and sanctions and the corporate takeover of their country and assets. We have opposed this war, and the ensuing world order, whatever the final outcome.

### **Interested in becoming a member, getting involved?**

Friends of *Le Monde Diplomatique* is a voluntary association of readers of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Perhaps it appears odd to be Friends of a newspaper, especially in Britain where the idea is not a common one? Well yes in some ways it is, until one reads the newspaper, which is published in more than 15 languages. It's the quality of ideas in and independence of the paper that awakens a fresh desire to talk and act.

The newspaper is a launch pad for debating and acting upon ideas, which is where we come in. We aim to provide an independent space for debate that leads to action. The biggest battle today is not the battle against terrorism. It is, as it always has been, the battle for ideas.

Whether you want to get involved in proposing activities, submitting articles or coming along to our events we want to hear from you. A membership form is enclosed where you can provide some initial feedback.

**Adam Hayes**  
[adamhayes1@hotmail.com](mailto:adamhayes1@hotmail.com)  
0777 617 5086

### **A final word from the Newsletter Team**

Please send your comments & suggestions to the team at [monde-diplo-friends@mondediplo.com](mailto:monde-diplo-friends@mondediplo.com)  
Edited by Elisabeth Jeffries, Friends of LMD  
[elisabeth@whsmithnet.co.uk](mailto:elisabeth@whsmithnet.co.uk)

Printers: East End Offset  
Unit 7, Empson Street  
Bow, London E3 3LT



## After-thought on the new world order

Bitter after being snubbed for membership in the "Axis of Evil", Libya, China and Syria today announced that they had formed the "Axis of Just as Evil", which they said would be "more evil than that stupid Iran-Iraq-North Korea axis" President Bush warned of in his State of the Union address.

Axis of Evil members, however, immediately dismissed the new Axis as having, "for starters, a really dumb name". Diplomats from Syria denied they were jealous over being excluded, Although they conceded they had asked if they could join the Axis of Evil.

"They told us it was full," said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"An axis can't have more than three countries", explained Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "This is not my rule, it's tradition. In World War II you had Germany, Italy, and Japan in the evil Axis. So, you can only have three. And a secret handshake."

International reaction to Bush's Axis of Evil declaration was swift, and at the same time peer-conscious nations rushed to gain triumvirate status in what has become a game of geopolitical chairs. Cuba, Sudan and Serbia announced that they had formed the "Axis of Somewhat Evil", forcing Somalia to join with Uganda and Myanmar in the "Axis of Occasionally Evil", while Bulgaria, Indonesia And Russia established the "Axis of Not So Much Evil Really as Just Generally Disagreeable".

With the criteria suddenly expanded and all the desirable clubs filling up, Sierra Leone, El Salvador, and Rwanda applied to be called the "Axis of Countries That Aren't the Worst But Certainly Won't Be Asked to Host the Olympics".

Canada, Mexico and Australia formed the "Axis of Nations That Are Actually Quite Nice But Secretly Have Some Nasty Thoughts About America", while Scotland, New Zealand and Spain established the "Axis of Countries That Want Sheep to Wear Lipstick".

"That's not a threat, really, just something we like to do", said Scottish Executive First Minister Jack McConnell.

While wondering if the other nations of the world weren't perhaps making fun of him, a cautious Bush granted approval for most axis, although he rejected the establishment of the "Axis of Countries Whose Names End in 'Guay", accusing one of its members of

filing a false application.

Officials from Paraguay, Uruguay, and Norguay denied the charges. Norguays king Harald can't understand the rejection "I filled out the application myself".