

# FAIR OF PRACTICAL UTOPIAS

Città di Castello, October 7-10, 1993

## WEALTH AND POVERTY

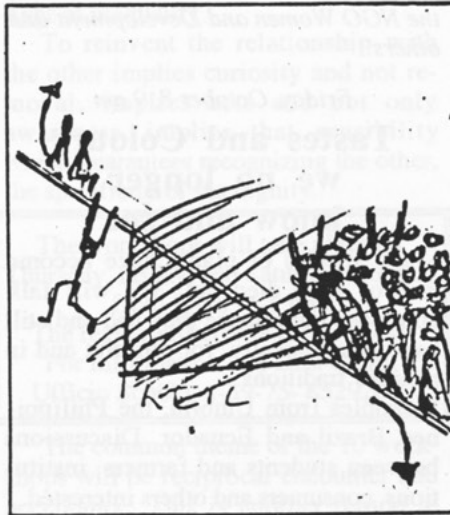
What will be the subjects of the seminar of October 7, 8, 9 and 10?

**Wealth!** No other ideal has kindled such hopes and desires, passions and ambitions, rivalries and jealousies. Wealth is without doubt a keyword of our times. Everyone - the national economies, the peoples of the world, individuals - makes every effort to reach that goal which seems to remain just ahead of us with every step we take towards it. But what is wealth really?

**Poverty!** A condition that, like no other, evokes anxiety and fear, defence and closure, presumptuousness and arrogance. Poverty, without exaggeration, is the spectre that haunts individuals and peoples. In Italy, the poor exist, but they are a minority in a large group of privileged people. In general, the needy, the underprivileged, the oppressed are "the others" and are to be found "elsewhere". They are the other side of wealth in two ways: they are excluded from the rich/wealth and at the same time they can be the carriers of skills and values which the rich feel in need of. Could it be that in some sense one can speak of the wealth (even if ambiguous) of poverty?

In a situation where the crisis of nature and of justice in the world takes on increasingly serious dimensions it becomes ever more difficult to speak with certainty of "wealth" and "poverty": the old contraposition does not work any more. Our wealth is hardly sustainable and takes us further and further away from well-being, while poverty, apart from its many terrifying aspects every so often conceals some lesson for those who are searching for a peace with nature and among men.

The seminars that will take place from October 7 - 10 will offer an occasion to ask ourselves about the meanings of "wealth" and "poverty". We intend to avoid the common model of conferences with avalanche of speeches and rather invite the speakers and the public to enter into a common debate, interconnecting experiences, debates,



work groups and lectures. This is why we would like everybody to feel encouraged to participate in all the seminars which will roughly take the following course:

### Thursday afternoon **HOW SUSTAINABLE IS THE CONSUMER SOCIETY?**

This is the fundamental dilemma of the consumer society: the extension of our way of life to the rest of the planet would destroy the biosphere irreversibly, but it is politically not possible and morally not defensible to limit wealth to those that already have it.

To reduce the levels of consumption in the rich societies, on the other hand, while morally acceptable, would reverse the trend which has reigned in the last centuries.

In any case it may be the only possibility.

What is the challenge for the rich societies in relation to Nature and the peoples of the Third World?

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### **INTRODUCTION TO A NEW CYCLE OF THE FAIR**

Ever since we started to prepare this new edition of the Fair of Practical Utopias with "Wealth and Poverty" as our topic many of the processes which are related with the problems we want to talk about have taken a turn for the worse: the economic crisis, the new racism, the civil war in ex-Yugoslavia, to mention just a few.

All of this has not diminished the importance of the subject we have chosen, on the contrary. But it has made even more evident what was already clear, namely that the complexity and often the dramatic quality of the problems which are connected with this subject renders it impossible for anybody to offer easy solutions, least of all for an initiative like ours. What the Fair can do is to ask the right questions, an indispensable precondition for beginning to find some answers, knowing that the ways we find out of the current crises will determine not only our but also the destiny of the next generation.

We want to create an occasion where - free from the necessity of an immediately utilisable product of our work and independent from particular interests, legitimate as they may be, we can reflect and confront different points of view and different experiences. Our hope is that this will also result in a further elaboration of the topic we have proposed - a vast theme independently from the crises mentioned - that will provide a basis for a new cycle of the Fair of Practical Utopias

Therefore we would like to think of the meeting of October 7 - 10 as an introduction to a new cycle: our common efforts will be all the more productive the more they bear fruits in those days while at the same time opening new horizons for future encounters, indicating possible contents and subjects.