minority in the Jura region within the Canton of Bern in Switzerland had long felt regularly overruled in the cantonal parliament by the Protestant German-speaking majority. The simmering resentment erupted in 1950 when Bern rejected a candidate from the Jura for minister of public construction, arguing that as French-speaker he would have difficulty overseeing construction in the mostly German-speaking canton. This infuriated people in the Jura. Street demonstrations were held and a separatist movement formed. The Bernese government kept telling the people of the Jura that they were much better off remaining part of the Canton Bern since they received more subsidies than they paid in taxes. But only the people of the Jura knew which they value more, subsidies or self-determination.

Some cases of politically motivated arson began to appear. Nobody had been killed yet, but if the problem had remained unsolved, it might have escalated into a full-scale civil war.

Finally, the Bernese government agreed to let the people in the contested region decide their own future in a referendum. The first vote was almost evenly split. No matter what the decision, half the affected people would have been deeply dissatisfied. This is similar to what happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Serb minority boycotted the referendum on independence.

The government of Bern organized another referendum in each of six districts. In three districts, a majority preferred forming their own separate canton; three other districts chose to remain in the Canton Bern. Each community along the new borderline was then allowed to vote whether it wanted to switch sides. Some switched. In 1978, the new Canton Jura was welcomed into the Swiss Confederation, essentially ending the conflict.

Democracy is no guarantee that people will always make the optimal decision. But if they make a mistake, they have nobody else to blame and can learn from it. However, if a government forces them to do something against their will, and it turns out wrong, they will hate those authorities. Democracy helps avoid such conflicts.

If such a solution had been tried in Yugoslavia before the current war, dividing the country and its provinces into semi-autonomous cantons according to the preferences of the inhabitants of various regions, war might have been avoided. This solution, allowing people to choose their own future, can still be tried now, but it is probably necessary that an international peacekeeping force, with the means and authority to separate warring factions, guarantees that the outcome of such a vote be respected by all parties. Once violence has erupted, it is much harder to stop it.

Does the international community have the right--or even the duty--to intervene in a country if the rights of minorities are violated? Under ancient Roman law, the head of a household, the "pater familias," had absolute authority over his family. He could sell his children into slavery or beat them to death and the state had no right to intervene in this "internal affair." He could not hurt someone else's children without getting in conflict with the law, but his own family was his to rule. Today we consider that notion absurd. This does not mean that we break into a neighbor's home and tell a family how they should solve their problems whenever we hear an argument. But if a spouse or children are beaten, they must have a right to seek protection from the police if necessary.

At the international level, we still cling to the obsolete notion of absolute state sovereignty. Yet that concept makes no sense if a government is unable to protect its own population from brutal violence such as "ethnic cleansing," or even massacres its own people. We need an international criminal court to which minorities--or in some cases majorities--who cannot find justice within their own countries can resort. We also need a mechanism to enforce such a court's decisions, preferably a new United Nations peace-enforcement unit. Protecting the rights of minorities, at their own request, is totally different from unilateral intervention by one country in the internal affairs of another.

Dietrich Fischer, a Professor at Pace University, is author of Nonmilitary Aspects of Security.
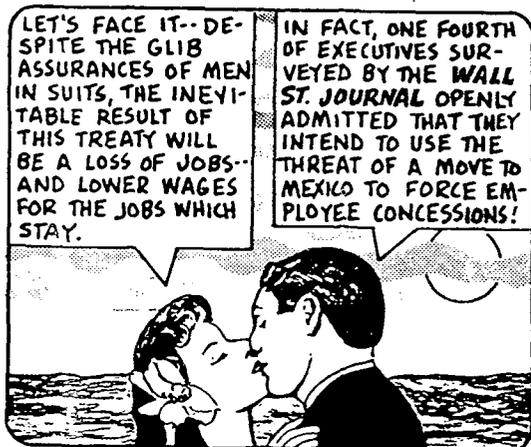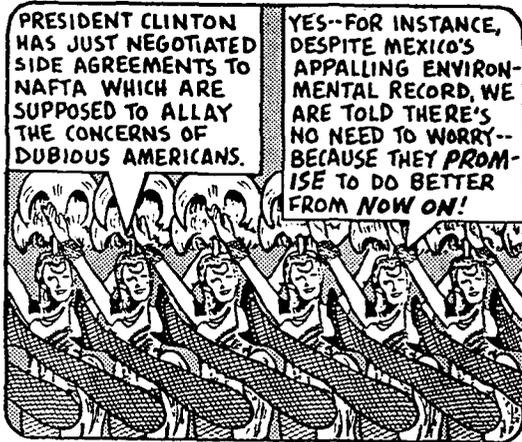
Speaking for the unrepresented

Thomas S. Martin

It has only half a dozen full-time staff members, and a budget approximating the annual income of a high school teacher. Nevertheless it speaks for more than 130 million people around the world, mostly members of ethnic groups that do not appear on maps and are unknown to most Americans. It has sent mediators to Abkhazia. It has been praised on the floor of Congress and denounced in the UN General Assembly. It advocates values and objectives that might appropriately be called "post-Western." At its meetings Masai warriors sit across the table from Tibetan lamas or turbaned Sikhs. It is the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization.

Minority movements for devolution and decentralization have been around for a long time, but three developments in the 1970s changed the rules of the game and produced a shift from romantic nostalgia to dead-serious activism. The first event was the great stride

THIS MODERN WORLD by TOM TOMORROW

Panel 1: PRESIDENT CLINTON HAS JUST NEGOTIATED SIDE AGREEMENTS TO NAFTA WHICH ARE SUPPOSED TO ALLAY THE CONCERNS OF DUBIOUS AMERICANS.

Panel 2: YES--FOR INSTANCE, DESPITE MEXICO'S APPALLING ENVIRONMENTAL RECORD, WE ARE TOLD THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY--BECAUSE THEY *PROMISE* TO DO BETTER FROM *NOW ON!*

Panel 3: WE ARE ALSO TOLD THAT WE NEEDN'T FEAR MASSIVE JOB LOSS TO MEXICO--NOW THAT U.S. CORPORATIONS WILL BE REQUIRED TO PAY THE MEXICAN MINIMUM WAGE...

...WHICH IS, OF COURSE, ABOUT *FOUR DOLLARS* A *DAY...*

Panel 4: LET'S FACE IT--DESPITE THE GLIB ASSURANCES OF MEN IN SUITS, THE INEVITABLE RESULT OF THIS TREATY WILL BE A LOSS OF JOBS--AND LOWER WAGES FOR THE JOBS WHICH STAY.

Panel 5: IN FACT, ONE FOURTH OF EXECUTIVES SURVEYED BY THE *WALL ST. JOURNAL* OPENLY ADMITTED THAT THEY INTEND TO USE THE THREAT OF A MOVE TO MEXICO TO FORCE EMPLOYEE CONCESSIONS!

Panel 6: UH...TOM... WHAT EXACTLY WAS *THAT* ALL ABOUT?

LISTEN--*YOU* TRY TO BE ENTERTAINING ABOUT SOMETHING AS MIND-NUMBINGLY DULL AS *U.S. TRADE POLICY*, PAL...

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toward European unity represented by the Treaty of Rome and its ensuing agreements, most notably the Single European Act. In the 1960s the drive toward European unity had faltered; then it was taken over by multinational corporations, who saw in it a capitalist utopia, a vast unified market that could compete with the United States and Japan. Many Europeans saw only the erosion and McDonaldization of their own cultures as later would people on other continents as they awakened to similar hazards.

The second event was the rise of ecological awareness, which quickly took on a radical political hue. The movement sensed that destruction of the environment is inextricably tied to the economics of growth and the politics of domination. Even a cursory study of indigenous and decentralized cultures reveals that their way of life is much easier on the planet and its resources.

The third event was the explosion of new communications technologies: computers, copy machines, and the like. Here is a powerful irony: the global corporate economy, in its never-ending quest to create new consumer needs, actually invented the technology by which its enemies have been able to organize and communicate their ideas.

In 1976, concerned about the centralizing potential of the European Community, a group of liberal and radical politicians met in Copenhagen to discuss ways of resisting the trend. Prime Minister Pol Schlüter of Denmark presciently noted that new information technology could promote decentralization and individual freedom. This Conference on a Europe of Regions, which has continued to meet in one form or another, also recognized the aspirations of such disenfranchised people as the Lapps and the Frisians. In 1985 the Assembly of European Regions grew out of the conference, with 112 founders, some of them states but most of them provinces, cities or ethnic regions. While it does not encourage full independence, the assembly has called for devolution of authority, which it calls "subsidiarity." Taking it as given that a united Europe will soon emerge, the assembly hopes to counterbalance its inevitable centralizing forces. It has clearly influenced the more radical UNPO organizers.

UNPO held its third General Assembly in January, and the membership has risen to thirty-nine. The organization grew out of a discussion in 1989 between Lodi Gyari, foreign minister of the exiled Dalai Lama, and Estonian professor Linnart Mäll. Together they approached Washington attorney Michael van Walt, who had represented Tibet's interests at the UN Human Rights Commission. The trio did not have to go in search of unrepresented nations; they were quickly besieged by frustrated representatives from every continent. The