

**WHERE NOW, AFTER TEXAS TOES?**  
by James Robertson, back from Houston

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TOES 1990 was a landmark.

The Other Economic Summit, which started in London in 1984, has completed its first cycle. In 1991 Britain's turn comes round again to host the annual G-7 get-together of rich-country leaders. And TOES comes back to Britain too.

Such thoughts were in my mind, as I and a thousand other people took part in the Houston meeting in July.

One of its notable features was the populist leaders' summit. Three former presidential candidates from Mexico, Columbia and Brazil called for a cancellation of third world debt. They were enthusiastically received, and well reported by the press.

But I couldn't help remembering that the Mexican border is a bare 200 miles from Houston. We have no Latin American neo-colonial neighbours whose opposition leaders would attract that kind of attention here. Our nearest parallel may be a summit of public figures from Central and Eastern Europe, as they face up to the prospect of economic domination by the West and by the West's international institutions like GAT and the IMF.

Jesse Jackson was billed to take part in the populist leaders' summit, but spoke by telephone to the conference at dinner instead. Again, his involvement in TOES 1990 was valued by many of the American participants. But would it be wise to try to link any comparable mainstream British politician with TOES next year?

Following the French example last year, the Houston meeting included a summit of seven of the world's poorest countries. This time representatives of Bangladesh, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico were joined by observers from Native American communities.

It was a pity that the *Wall Street Journal* reported one of the French organisers of last year's 'Summit of the Poorest' lamenting 'the shrunken participation at this year's event and the shrunken publicity'. I didn't discover exactly what lay behind this. But I hope national chauvinism won't creep into the worldwide TOES movement. All peoples share ownership in it.

Crammed into the three-day programme at Houston were an enormous number of workshops and seminars. These ranged from such topics as the peace economy, the feminist economy and Gandhian economics - through energy and the environment, redefining prosperity, environmental accountability, and sustainable development - to alternatives to structural adjustment in Africa, a sustainable and just economy in post-apartheid South Africa, the GATT Uruguay round, affordable housing, the Valdez principles for socially and ecologically responsible investment, sustainable cities, and many, many others.

All who put themselves forward had been welcomed as panel members, and room had been made in the programme for workshops on every topic proposed. This meant that an impressive number of American academics - as well as non-academics and invited workshop leaders from other countries - took part and maintained a high level of energy throughout. But it also made for a fairly disorganised timetable - on one day the programme had me doing simultaneous workshops on three different topics in three different places - and some people found some of the proceedings rather academic.

Many of the TOES organisers and participants this year came from Houston itself. Each day there were sessions on 'Houston as a Microcosm' - half a million people in that super-affluent city live below the poverty line. This local emphasis was important. TOES participants joined in locally organised marches and tractorcades. The Texas media were interested.

The immediate physical environment for the meeting provided an object lesson in rich-country maldevelopment. Nonetheless, I hope TOES 1991 will be held in more congenial surroundings than the noisy freeways, concrete car lots, and neon-lit drags of Houston's Astrodome district. This year's organisers were forced to go there when Houston University cancelled their original bookings at short notice - amid suggestions of sabotage and conspiracy. And I hope the temperature for TOES 1991 will be lower than the upper 90s fahrenheit.

Those were some of my main impressions. I came away with two main conclusions.

First, there can be no doubt at all that the worldwide TOES movement is growing stronger year by year. Our American friends have handed it on to us in very good shape. But, second, as the next cycle begins, we need to do some rethinking.

The annual G-7 summits of rich-country leaders will become increasingly open to criticism in what those leaders themselves at Houston declared the Decade of Democracy. For the next few years they are likely to offer valuable counter-

opportunities to propagate a more democratic world economy. We should now begin to see each annual occasion as part of a longer-term, worldwide campaign. And we should now distinguish more clearly than hitherto between different objectives - since they call for different approaches.

The most important objective of each annual TOES is to convey simply and clearly to a widening public the message that a new path of economic progress is necessary and possible. This means capturing the attention of the mass media, and perhaps also securing the involvement of recognised public figures.

A different objective is to provide forums for 'experts', giving activists and academics opportunities to meet one another and discuss issues and projects of common interest. A third objective, more focused than the second, is to clarify specific questions - for example, how best to oppose certain proposals now before GATT, or how to generate public interest in a new approach to taxation - and to energise practical action on them. A fourth objective is to strengthen the commitment of existing supporters and increase their numbers, for example by holding mass meetings and rallies. A fifth, most important, is to encourage all kinds of environmental, development and social-change groups in parts of Britain other than London - and similarly in other countries too - to hold their own local counter-events to the G-7 summits. And other people may be able to think of additional objectives to these.

I believe, then, that the time has come for us to see TOES, not primarily as an event, but as a movement in which many different kinds of people and groups in many different countries now share.

The annual G-7 summit provides an occasion for all of these people and groups to mount events and campaigns in pursuit of their own objectives. It also, and most importantly, provides an annual opportunity for them to proclaim their common commitment to a new and more benign path of development for people and the Earth.