

Pepe fights for Belize's autonomy

The First Past President of the Belize Audubon Society, Jose "Pepe" Garcia scored a victory for Belize and rational environmentalists at the World Conservation Congress held in Amman, Jordan earlier this month. While the Belize Association for Environmental Non-Government Agencies (BACONGO) has touted this week on the local Channel 7 television evening news that it was a victory for them, the fact is the with the exception of BAS, BACONGO is no even a member of the World Conservation Union(IUCN). It therefore carried no influence at the Congress.

An attempt by Sharon Matola and her other gringo organizations to get the WCC to condemn the Chalillo Project backfired

big time with the support BAS received from member countries of IUCN in this region, including, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Nigaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

The resolution called on the three American NGOs including the National Resource Defence Council, Conservation International and Defenders of Wildlife to respect the sovereignty of Belize and the environmental laws of the country. The attempt by this group to put forward the resolution to condemn Chalillo was challenged by the followed counter resolution which was put forward the the meso-American environmental groups who are members of IUCN:



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RUNAWAY ENVIRONMENTALIS

NO TO "DEBT FOR NATURE" SWAP

By Norris Hall

A new book on how runaway environmentalism in the United States of America is contributing to poverty and greed and how the movement is angering millions of Americans, is off the press. It is the second edition of *Trashing the Economy: How Runaway Environmentalism is Wrecking America*. It is the result of painstaking research by a former official of the Sierra Club, Ron Arnold and Alan Gottlieb, a former fun-raiser for conservative causes in the United States.

In the book, Arnold who is still considered a strong conservationist, accuses mainstream environmental groups of "exaggerating or even inventing environmental threats in order to advance narrow personal or political goals that have little to do with safeguarding natural resources."

This publication is an expose of the leading environmental groups in the United States with inside stories on how the runaway environmental movement has become arrogant and aggressive with the millions of dollars it has earned from shake-downs, philanthropy, real estate acquisitions and profits from land which they acquired preservation and protection.

The authors say that these "environmentalists seem to think that they are above the law and they have enough money behind them". This "big money" comes from non-profit upper-class real estate firms. They then sell off most of their holdings in land they acquire, sometimes from the government, for nature preserves.

Among the leaders in the environmental scam, claims this book on runaway environmentalism, is the Nature Conservancy



(TNC). Its enterprises include commercial farms and cotton plantations, commercial housing developments on its "saved" properties, and a "save the rainforest" project with no accountability to prove it did anything beyond selling donors a promise of pie-in-the-sky.

TNC has now popped up in Belize, to take advantage of a law passed in the United States in 1998 called "the Tropical Forest Conservation Act". It allows an Environmental NGO in the United States to buy a country's debt, or debts from the US government. This big scam is suppose to help foreign governments to wipe-off or reduce their debt to the United States is so called "Debt-for-Nature" Swap. It has not worked. According to The Environmental Monitor, "it is a fundamentally flawed approach to protecting rainforest" and that indigenous people are entitled and should be guaranteed custody of the lands they occupy in order to preserve rainforest for future generations.

TNC has put forward a proposal to the Government of Belize to acquire 24,000 acres of Maya land, in the Toledo District, which primarily owned for absentee American land owners for conservation and preservation into perpetuity under the management of the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE), which will act as its local prop. This would not be a wise move. To begin with, the Government of Belize has the power to re-acquire these lands from absentee land owners under the Aliens Landholding Act.

As the book on runaway environmentalism notes, environmental groups are trashing the American economy. Perhaps the global economy, It states for instance, that the Nature Conservancy has bought more than 5 million acres of private land in the United States and 20 million acres in Canada and throughout Latin America in debt-for-nature swaps in Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. The Nature Conservancy keeps about a third of the land it buys and manages what it does keep with its own staff.

While the concept of a "debt-for-nature" swap is tied to foreign debt and natural resources degradation, such a case cannot be made for Belize. In countries where it may apply, it is also potentially danger-

ous to national sovereignty and the trade off puts pressure on many developing countries to restore income growth.

This is not an arrangement the Government of Belize should endorse as the main beneficiary in such a swap would be in this case, the Nature Conservancy, in other international environmental groups which clearly benefit in receiving more in local currency for the debt swap than they pay for the debt.

In the final analysis "debt-for-nature" swaps have contributed very little debt relief to developing countries. The World Bank confirms that there is low impact on debt relief under this arrangement

Arnold and Gottlieb describes the Nature Conservancy as "the most dangerous of all environmental groups", but also list as dangerous "Master of Illusion" groups such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, Conservation International and Defenders of Wildlife. These three groups recently failed to a bogus resolution against Belize and the Chalillo project tabled at recent World Conservation Congress and the were severely rapped by the Meso-American members of the World Conservation Union for trying ignore the sovereignty of Belize and its environmental laws by pre-empting their condemnation of the project.

They have been known to hire high-priced media firms to put 'chicken little' spins on issues and for manipulating the media as their money shakedowns continues. The not much locally supported "Freedom of Press" day ploy in last year which was an attempt to lash out at Belize Electricity Ltd. has more to it than incets the eye. And the tactics of some of these environmental groups have been compared to that of "suect gangs". It is also of some interest that one of the creators of the National Resource Defense Council was McGeorge Bundy, the chief architect of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

Protection of the global environment is essential for man and nature to live together in productive harmony, but from the movement of the 60s to 1970 when the observance of Earth Day began, the environmental movement has taken a path of destructive extremism and deception based on greed.

