March 12, 2025

Rummaging through archives, these pix showed up from the Rainforest Information Centre's World Bank action outside Treasury in Canberra in 1986. Recollections from Patrick Anderson and myself below.

PATRICK ANDERSON: "Great pics from the Rainforest Information Centre World Bank action, outside the Treasury building in Canberra in 1986. I got back from the India Rainforest Roadshow which the Gandhi Peace Foundation organised for us in May 1986 all fired up to challenge Australia's development aid - (AID = AIDS as like the virus, it destroys a hosts ability resist foreign domination/disease (ie foreign capital).
The immediate campaign objective was a senate inquiry into the environmental and social impact of Australia's development assistance, which we achieved in coalition with a dozen Aus groups. The Inquiry found that there was indeed, evidence of significant negative environmental and social impacts from Aus bilateral and multilateral AID, and made a series of recommendations many of which were implemented. This included Treasury, which managed Aus moneys given to the World Bank, being required to assess the environmental and social impacts of proposed projects, not just the projected economic impacts. Treasury hired specialist staff to do this, and played a role in the subsequent years at the World Bank of voting against destructive projects. Aus bilateral aid also was required to make more assessments of environmental and social impacts and AusAID was thenceforth required to obey Aussie environmental laws even when working in countries with no environmental laws of their own.

And although it wasn't one of our demands, the Inquiry recommended the creation of a fund for environmental projects that Aus groups with overseas partners could apply for, for implementation outside Australia: NGOEI. Until Howard came in and gutted it the Rainforest Information Centre   received hundreds of thousands of dollars a year for radical projects in PNG, India and Ecuador.

JOHN SEED: We were astounded that the Senate rubbed salt into AusAID's wounds by requiring them to set up NGOEI with a million dollars/year to Aussie enviro NGO's to create "new standards of environmental excellence in the delivery of Australian development assistance."

As we had been AusAID's undoing, responsible for enlisting a swathe of Aid NGO's (like Freedom From Hunger Campaign and Community Aid Abroad) as well as enviro NGO's (like Australian Conservation Foundation and Greenpeace) into a coalition that persuaded the Senate to investigate AusAID's environmental standards, I was sure that we wouldn't see any of that money.

I was astounded however, as for the next 2 or 3 years before Howard shut that funding window, NGOEI funded every proposal we submitted! We soon realised that this would create a conflict of interests and make it difficult for us to continue to hold AusAID to account so RIC organised and funded the creation of a new NGO, AIDWATCH, to monitor AusAID. This was launched by Carol Sherman (the RIC volunteer who had spearheaded both our World Bank and AusAID reform campaigns) and Lee Rhianon who was at that time working for Freedom from Hunger and later went on to become a Greens Member of the NSW Legislative Council and then a Federal Senator.

That left RIC free to accept NGOEI funding which enabled some of our most important work including our portable sawmill project which saved hundreds of thousands of hectares of virgin tropical rainforest in PNG, the reforestation of the sacred mountain Arunachala in the S of India (which we continue to support to this day) and several projects that protected over a million Ha of rainforest in Ecuador. One of the Ecuador projects was funding the creation of the Los Cedros Biological Reserve in the late 1980's and in 2021 the most recent chapter saw us ejecting a multinational mining company that had set up shop on our reserve through a Supreme Court decision which created an Ecuadorean and international precedent by establishing the "Rights of Nature" as a legal principal.