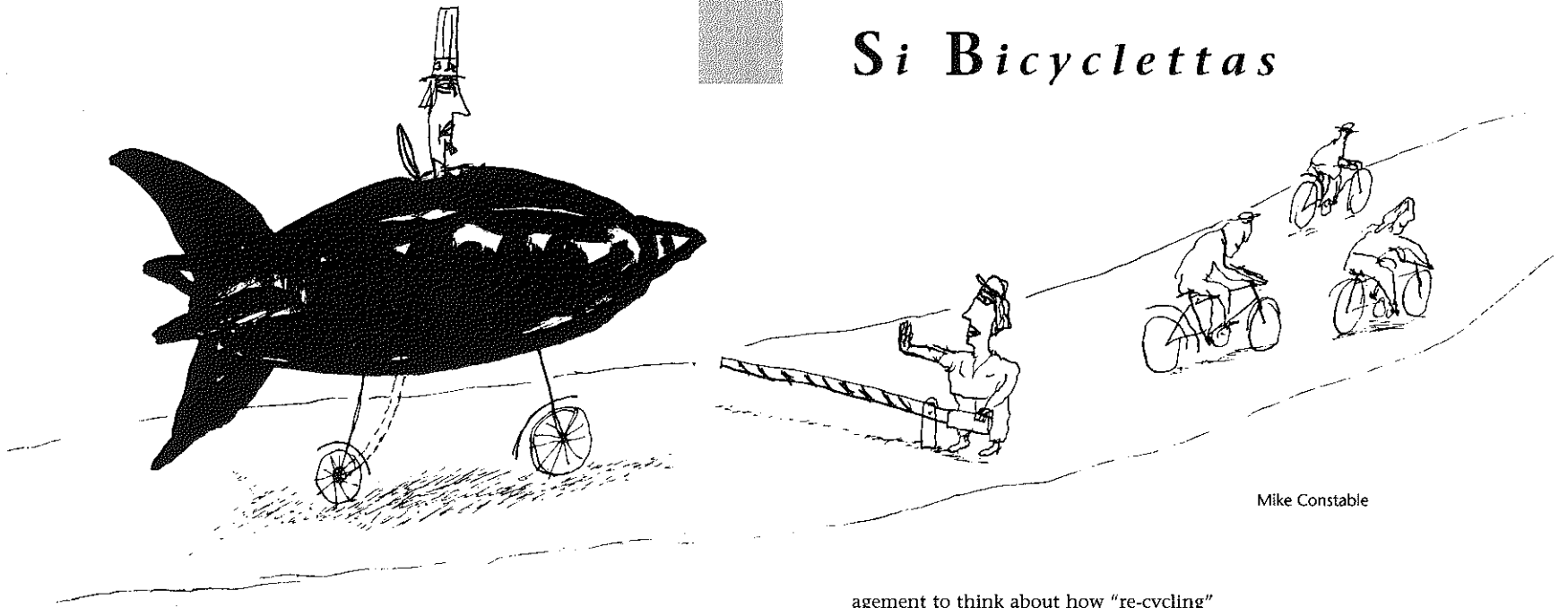


No Bombs Si Bicyclettas



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In 1984, the CIA-sponsored bombings of Nicaragua's oil storage tanks virtually immobilized the country. The sudden lack of motorized transportation which depended on that oil impeded major efforts to provide health care and education to all. Teachers, social workers, and health workers were forced to walk up to 20 miles a day in order to do their work in outlying communities.

Meanwhile, back in the States, Karl Kurz, a Boston area bike mechanic, and Michael Replegle, a Washington based transportation engineer, were devising a plan. They had been disturbed by the U.S. policy in Nicaragua, and decided that sending bicycles would be their contribution to articulating a positive alternative — Bikes Not Bombs. So they enlisted the help of the American Friends Service Committee and shipped 20 donated bikes that they had managed to collect from various garages and basements across the nation.

Since that initial shipment in 1984, over 2,400 bikes have been sent and over three dozen local chapters of Bikes Not Bombs chapters have sprung up all over North America, including a recent chapter in Toronto. The whole campaign has developed as a decentralized network of local activists — primarily community and church groups — who have some skills they want to contribute to saying that there is another way.

But why bicycles? Why not a supply of comfortable walking shoes? Surely they would be easier to ship. Well, because for

the Nicaraguan situation, the bicycle makes sense. It uses five times less energy than walking, and hundreds of bicycles can be built with the resources required to build one automobile. People can maintain a bike with their own skills and sustain it without dependence on large corporations for fuel and other supplies. The bicycle is also a tool which makes possible other kinds of development across a wide range of sectors in the society.

Nicaraguans have also realized that the bicycle makes sense. As a result of Bikes Not Bombs's initially small efforts at "bicyclization," the Nicaraguan government has just bought 50,000 bicycles to give to health workers. This policy is a major statement of independence from the recent push for motorization from U.S. corporations and local elites.

According to Michael Replegle, we are at a crucial time in the evolution of global transportation systems and policies: "A large portion of the developing world is being targeted for increased motorization by the multinational automobile industry. Substantial investments to support this motorization are being made by global lending institutions with the support of local elites."

But at least many of the developing countries still have a choice about the direction of their transportation policy. For this reason, Bikes Not Bombs has spread its efforts into Mozambique and Haiti, and its founders have formed the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy in Washington D.C. to address these global transportation development issues.

Ironically, in North America we've had less of a choice about the way we get around. We've had precious little encour-

agement to think about how "re-cycling" might make sense for us. According to Replegle, "the ideology of motorization in North America has been so successful that very few people have been aware of the extent to which our choices have been constrained by the automobile and the powers that control our transportation policy."

This is why the kind of grassroots growth that Bikes Not Bombs is enjoying is so hopeful. Bikes Not Bombs has been successful partly because the tangible appeal of taking the old clunker that's been hanging in the garage for years and imagining a nurse riding it off into the Nicaragua sunset has overridden some of the political opposition that may have been encountered by sending other kinds of aid.

But most of B.N.B.'s success in Nicaragua and now elsewhere is tied to the bicycle itself. Riding a bicycle means enjoying a lifestyle which values subversive things like individual and political autonomy, time and contemplation, human contact with nature, sustainability, and self-sufficiency. In short, it is revolutionary.

For more information about Canadian chapters of Bikes Not Bombs, call Canadian Action for Nicaragua, at (416) 534-1766, or write to Box 398, Station E, Toronto, M6H 4E3. For general information, or news about new efforts in Mozambique and Haiti, write to Bikes Not Bombs, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, Box 56538, Washington, D.C. 20011, or phone (301) 589-1810.

Sue Zielinski is an associate member of Border/Lines and works with the Toronto chapter of Bikes Not Bombs.