

## **Barber B. Conable, Jr.**

Former President of the World Bank



### **Conable shares his worldview with students**

By Sam Segal, Cornell Chronicle

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Barber B. Conable Jr., six months out of his five-year presidency of the World Bank, gave a lecture and joined a dozen classes last week in his four-day stint as the Bartels World Affairs Fellow.

By the third day, his voice was hoarse from the continuous exchange on the theme of global change. But his personal comments on presidents and political leaders and his minutely differentiated analyses of the politics and economics of dozens of developing countries were clearly fulfilling the goals of Henry E. and Nancy Horton Bartels, who endow the fellowship "to foster a broadened world perspective among Cornell students."

Besides the general campus audiences that filled open sessions, there were meetings with students from the Johnson Graduate School of Management, the Cornell International Institute for Food, Agriculture and Development, and various undergraduate and graduate classes concerned with urban and rural planning, environment, natural resources and population. The questions and answers covered specific aspects of development - rarely bogging down in ideology - and the questioners invariably lined up to continue after the allotted time had expired.

"For me, it was stimulating," Conable, a Trustee Fellow who holds two Cornell degrees, said later. "The students were very bright, respectful but persistent." Considering youth's general anger with conditions faced by so many people in the developing world, he added, "I was most surprised by their willingness to listen to my views."

He repeatedly stressed that free markets and the end of price controls and subsidies were key to economic growth, and he voiced little sympathy with those who saw Western investment as invasive or who pleaded indigenous culture as a reason for avoiding economic reform.

At the same time, though, he resonated with the concerns of the young by stressing the sheer magnitude of the problem of world poverty and the duty of the developed world to alleviate it.

# 1992 BARTELS SPEAKER

"As an American," he said, "I have shared in the general ignorance of the human condition," which finds 400 million people living in the absolute poverty of less than a dollar a day of income.

Conable listed three areas of change that most impressed him during his presidency:

- The collapse of communism
- The growing sense of empowerment by people seeing that "they no longer have to live as their parents and grandparents did."
- The rapid maturing of old ideas, such as the need to include women in plans for development and the acceptance of environmental guardianship as "not just a rich man's hobby."

Among obstacles, he cited debt, which he said cannot be simply canceled if countries hope for future loans; population; and trade, where internal barriers deprive developing countries of twice the income that foreign aid adds.

To Ramya Parthasarathy of India, who cited Indian press complaints that new openness to foreign investment was "selling out," Conable said: "They had better consider the alternative, which is bankruptcy." He added that India is "unhappy that it can no longer play the Soviets off against the Americans."

In one Johnson School session, the 20 students represented Canada, Colombia, France, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Lebanon, Trinidad, Uganda and the United States.

In his lecture, Conable brought together his experience and the purpose of the Bartels fellowship when he said that, despite indifference to the anguish of the developing world, "the future of American influence in the world starts in places like this."