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No Child Left Behind

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FOR the past two weeks we have been traveling through a developing third world country where no child is left behind. From one end of the country to the other, in cities and in the countryside, as part of a Boston College Course in Comparative Social Policy, we have talked with government officials, teachers, doctors, artists and writers as well as people on the street including children.

Not a single malnourished child anywhere. But more than that, the children are happy, healthy and calm. They walk down the street arm in arm, chattering away, laughing, in their smart looking school uniforms. Every child has a teacher, and every teacher has graduated from a five-year university program. Even in the mountains where it is impractical to gather more than three children together, teachers are assigned and are there teaching three children in one room schools.

In a city of one million a group of disabled people, leaders of their own organization, talks about how the government makes everything possible available to them. They tell us that there are precisely fifty-six children in this city who cannot attend school, because of one disability of another. Twenty-one teachers have been assigned the tasks of visiting these students at home, of developing ways of educating each of them, and with community organizations of assisting them in socialization.

In every city neighborhood and every town no matter how remote a doctor is living there providing health education and primary care, all in coordination with national public health campaigns. These doctors are a direct link to polyclinics and more specialized care. Life expectancy throughout the country is now 76 years and the infant mortality rate is comparable to the best in the world.

And all of this at first glance defies imagination when you consider that ten years ago this country lost its major trading partner overnight. The nation responsible for 80% of this country's trade (at rates far below "world market prices")



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disappeared and left this country to fend for itself.

How did they do it? Critical housing projects had to be put on hold. Food was and is rationed. But no day care center, school or clinic was closed. "We had very little, but what we had we shared." "With it all children remained our privileged citizens." It hasn't been accomplished simply with words - "Leave no child behind." And it certainly hasn't been accomplished with "free market" mechanisms and tax cuts for the wealthy. It has been accomplished through a nationwide system of universal free health care and education and a very complex process of social organization in which the society's unwavering priority has been the health, education, and welfare of the entire population.

If you want to see how it can be done, see Cuba.

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