

ECOLOGY: THE GROWING DILEMMA



The platform at the conference. From left to right: Dr. Anna Bramwell, Alessandro Michelucci, Robert Steuckers (chairman), Michael Walker, Andrew Stobart, Peter Cadogan.

THE SECOND international conference to be organised by *Iona* and *The Scorpion* was held on Saturday, 25th October, 1986, in the Bonnington Hotel, London. The theme of the conference was 'Ecology: the Growing Dilemma'. Over seventy people from seven European countries took part. All the speeches were followed by wide-ranging debate. The speakers were Andrew Stobart, a chemical engineer who has been involved in resource conservation and renewable energy research since 1970; Dr. Anna Bramwell, professor of History at Corpus Christi College, Oxford; Alessandro Michelucci, assistant to Dr. Marco Tarchi, the editor of the review *Diorama Letterario*; Peter Cadogan, a well-known activist in neutralist and environmental causes; and Michael Walker, editor of *The Scorpion*. The meeting was chaired by Robert Steuckers, editor of *Vouloir* and *Orientations*. The meeting was reported in *Vouloir* (Belgium), *D.E.S.G. - Inform* (West Germany) and *Time Out* (Britain). Dr. Bramwell's talk is not available at the time of publication but the other speeches are printed here in full. Dr. Bramwell spoke about the rise of the green movement with particular reference to Germany. Much of her talk was based on the theme of her

recently published biography of Walther Darré (which is reviewed by Padraig Cullen in this issue of *The Scorpion*). She emphasised the contribution which Darré made to the development of what might be called 'ecological awareness' and drew attention to the many similarities between Darré's aims and those of post-war environmentalists.

The conference was followed by a lively social in the evening and the general consensus was that the day had been a great success. We were delighted that so many people came, many from a great distance. As always, we make no extravagant claims as to our potential, but we have good reason to hope that the numbers coming to our conferences will continue to grow, just as the readership of *The Scorpion* is continuing to grow. We intend to hold at least one conference a year in conjunction with *Iona*. As the barrenness of party politics becomes more and more apparent, our course seems set to remain as one of unsensational but steady growth, a growth which is likely to accompany an unsensational but steady decline in support for the parties of the political and economic *status quo*.

MICHAEL WALKER

The Greenhouse Effect and the Cost of Pollution

Andrew Stobart

UPSETTING the world's environmental balance costs money to do it, and will cost a lot more money to undo it. Two courses are open to mankind: either to insure against trouble, and possible disaster, or to invest in means of containing or even reversing the trend towards ecological calamity. Is mankind prepared to pay the price? Do our rulers even know what price

may have to be paid, and for what? Have governments, besotted by the supposed enmity of their neighbours, considered that their expenditure on arms may have to be replaced by expenditure on protection from another peril, a rise in sea levels? Or do we just sit idly by and, like King Canute, tell the tide to retreat. It didn't for him and it won't for us. A 'Canute' approach could cost less

in the short run, but more in the long run.

Since the Industrial Revolution started some two hundred years ago, mankind has increasingly used fuel and power sources which involve burning carbon compounds. Before then, wind, tides, flowing water, oxen, men, horses and elephants provided most of the power. In general these sources of power and energy had little effect on the

atmosphere, as the 'pollution' either did not exist, or was re-cycled. The lower numbers of the world's population also helped. Coal was used to boil kettles. It still is: a power station is a large kettle, with additions; the 'fuel' may be coal, oil, gas or nuclear, but the principle is the same, one boils water.

One view of technology can be the number of uses to which it can be put. Nuclear power has two: to make a loud noise or boil water. Renewable energy has three or more: to boil water, to create mechanical power, or to create electricity. So ecological considerations apart, there are advantages with renewable energy sources over fossil fuels.

All the industrial development has meant an increasing demand for fuel and resources, and some of these are starting to become depleted. In general, resources per head of the world's population are declining fast.¹ The more easily won sources get used up first, leaving the more costly until later. This again will mean that actions to counteract problems will be more expensive in the future.

And all this great, and increasing, burning of carbon compounds has two results: carbon dioxide and heat. The heat is useful but eventually goes to join the heat in the atmosphere; the carbon dioxide is rarely used, except in one chemical works which uses boiler house gases to make aspirin. But the world's ability to re-absorb more carbon dioxide than that generated by life forms is limited, so the amount remaining in the atmosphere increases, and has been increasing steadily over the last century. More carbon dioxide makes the atmosphere able to retain more of the sun's heat, as well as restricting the heat loss of that generated from the fuels. So the atmosphere warms up. This is known as the 'greenhouse effect'. Other gases also contribute to this effect.^{2,3,4} Even nuclear heat is considered by some to be contributing to the atmospheric warm-up.⁵ Some also cause other problems, like the destruction of the ozone layer in the Antarctic which may have dire, but different, consequences for the ecosphere.⁶

All this sounds complicated, so let's hear what a pastor in the Deep South once told his congregation when telling them about Hell. "Brethren," he said, "Ah'm going to tell you about Hell. Now de Lord set dis Earth revolving round an axis. An' to keep dat axis runnin' nice an' sweet an' cool, de Lord poured lots of oil an' grease roun' dat axis. But dere's folks in Oklahoma, folks in Arkansas, an' folks in Texas as is diggin' holes and stealin' de Lord's oil an' grease. An' one day dat oil an' grease is goin' to run out, an' dat axis is goin' to run dry, an' dat axis is goin' to run hot . . . an' dat, Brethren, is goin' to be Hell!"

So, if the world atmosphere gets hotter, what then? We will use less heating, you say? Possibly, but we might then use more air conditioning. Just as big a power consumer. The scientists tell us of several probabilities.^{2,3,4,7,8,9} One is that the sea will warm up, and thus expand. (Warm water is less dense than cold, run the cold water into the bath gently after the hot, and you will find that it stays on the bottom.) The sea level will start rising. This, plus the general heat-up,

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will start faster melting of the polar ice caps, and glaciers in general.

According to Dr. Maynard Miller, an American scientist, this is already happening.¹⁰ The rapid movements of the Mount Hubbard Glacier in Alaska are one sign. Rapid melting of other glaciers is also being reported. (One sign of a thaw is snow sliding off the roof?) This will further raise sea levels, and accelerate the process generally. A report some while back also mentioned a possible very rapid melt, once warmer seas get over a rock shallows in the Arctic and get under the ice cap. The Russians have had an Antarctic research station vanish on a huge breakaway iceberg recently. This sea level rise is the subject of investigation by such bodies as the Institute of Oceanographic Studies in Birkenhead.⁷ The time scale has been set at anything from thirty to seventy years ahead for a one metre rise. Some set it much higher, much faster.⁸

Official sources in the U.K. have in the main turned a blind eye to the invisible pollution and its possible effects, although a recent conversion to considering sulphur dioxide is perhaps a sign of some changes. Using 'Nelson's eye' is now no longer viable. If officialdom persists in this, the eventual result will be to sink Nelson with the stinks.

Some official comments are as follows: **Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution:** "We have done no studies on the problem to date."

Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors: "We have no information on the subject."

National Farmers' Union, Yorkshire: "We are concerned, and are trying to find out more from the Ministry, who tell us not to worry."

Department of Transport: "The effect (of the rise) on port operations must be highly speculative."

Southern Water Authority: "I have no idea of the effect of the changes (in sea level) that might occur."

Building Societies' Association (referring to the Thames Barrage): "The problem was identified, precautions taken, and contingency plans drawn up." (A positive approach at last.) "A house under one-and-a-half metres of water is neither mortgageable nor insurable." (Quite.)

Ministry of Agriculture: "A great deal of money has and is being spent on sea defences, but the rises in sea levels so far have been small. We will continue to devote funds to closely monitoring the situation."

Financial Times Legal Queries Service:

"You could not sue anyone for the sea level rise; it would be treated as an act of God." (Caused by man?) "The land newly covered at high tide would revert to the Crown." (At least someone gains?)

The Treasury: They referred to the remarks made by the Ministry of Agriculture, to which they had nothing to add.

Political parties: Only two of the four main political parties replied. They have "a concern about the environment and are studying the problem".

The Anglian Water Authority: "We need a major investment programme."

The Dutch have taken a different view. First, they have spent a very large amount in new sea defences, to counter the problems caused by the 1953 flooding, but it has taken 33 years to complete the work. Second, a recent conference studied the cost of raising the bridges over the canals, and other expected costs of a rise in sea levels: this seems a practical approach and further conferences are proposed.¹¹ If the U.K. Government continues to dither, as it usually does, it will be safer to move to Holland than to stay in the South East.

And the Department of Transport comments do not hold up. Replies from 64 ports to a questionnaire on what effect certain sea level rises would have, produced the following:

Four welcomed it: they were short of water depth (one was Dublin).

Eight said that there would be no problem.

Four Navy establishments had no comment (covered by the Official Secrets Act).

Eight said that the questions were too technical (mostly in Scotland).

Two said that the problem would be tidal changes silting up the port.

Thirty eight (over 50%) said that there would be expensive problems at a rise of one metre; 25% of the ports would have to shut down, and the remainder spend large sums; 16 did not know how much, two quoted "multi-million pounds", and the rest added up to some £43 million among small ports.

If the Department of Transport asked the right questions, its speculation might vanish.

If the usual U.K. time scale applies we shall be well under water before anything gets done. I know: my father designed part of the prototype electric locomotive for the East Coast main line in 1920; he died last week, aged 88, and they still have not finished that project 66 years later. Twice the Dutch time scale.

All the work needed to insure against trouble, or to prevent it, will cost money — vast sums of money. The Government, judged by its attitude to farmers' compensation over Chernobyl, will not help much. You cannot insure against a rise in sea levels: two Lloyds brokers and the Association of British Insurers tell me that. This is also a good pointer to the rise being likely to happen. If there was even a slight chance of it not happening, I cannot see the money boys missing that opportunity. But they say they will not bet on the sea level rise not happening. And Lloyds of London make a lot of money by accurate forecasting of the chances.

So who will have to pay? We all will —

WE CAN'T SEE ANY POLLUTION!!



The above is taken from a series of slides which accompanied Mr. Stobart's talk. Hand coloured copies of the four slides are available at £25 each or £85 the set of four signed by the artist. A deposit of £5 for one or £15 for the set to be sent with orders to Box A1, c/o The Scorpion, BCM 5766, London WC1N 3XX.

and perhaps, therefore, we should view prestige, energy-using projects, such as the Channel Tunnel, with less favour and turn our attention to major public works projects, to safeguard the low-lying lands in the U.K., its port facilities, and the drainage system. Sewage backing up can be very nasty. This is the cost of insuring against trouble.¹²

Sea walls, et cetera, are the insurance against the problems which may come from the 'greenhouse effect'; alternative energy sources are the investment to counteract it. The Department of Energy is half-hearted about this; major energy producers don't want to know. Out of some 42 venture capital concerns approached for possible investment in wind energy: Seventeen said that it was outside their field.

Nine said 'not interested'. Nine said that they could not help now, possibly later.

Three said that they could not help at the moment.

Four are still looking into it (having given an interim reply of 'possibly interested').

So one is not going to get much help, quickly, from the money men — in spite of the fact that renewable energy is one of the very few investments that actually creates wealth, along with agriculture and mineral extraction. It could, in some forms, be economic now¹³, and it could provide the basis for an expansion of the U.K. engineering industry, thus creating jobs.

Don't forget that legend has it that The Fiend cannot abide anything that blows hot and cold with the same breath: blow cold on a windmill and it will blow hot for you in

your house.

One final thought on the insurance approach as opposed to the investment-to-counter-the-problem approach on the subject of increasing carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. This gas is used as a stimulant in resuscitation apparatus. In very high concentrations (4% plus), one dies of an apoplexy. We are all breathing increased percentages, compared to our forebears. When (if ever) will the concentration start to affect our metabolism, and especially our mental processes? We are all part of a universal chemical system: alter one part of that system and you alter the whole. With what result I have not been able to find out. But deaths from asthma are on the increase in the U.K.—could there be a connection?

I would mention another gas which is adding increasingly to pollution, one caused in great measure by people: methane. If the population of the world continues to grow, then the production of methane grows with it. People are possibly the single greatest cause of pollution, directly and indirectly.

Mankind is rapidly outgrowing his environment, and possibly poisoning himself in the process. Prevention is better than cure. Insurance is just an expense, investment can bring a return if properly done. The cost will be enormous — are we prepared to pay for it?¹⁴ We have to face the problem and face it now, not:

*Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread
And having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.*

William Rees Mogg in a recent article said that he welcomed the "ecological pessimists as the alarm bell".¹⁵

I am pressing the bell push — now.

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