

FROM COMPETITION TO CO-OPERATION: THE NEED FOR GLOBAL HOUSEKEEPING

by

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In 1992 two of the world's most prestigious scientific bodies, the British Royal Society and the National Academy of Sciences of the USA, produced a joint statement about "Population Growth, Resource Consumption and a Sustainable World". They concluded by saying: "The future of our planet is in balance. Sustainable development can be achieved, but only if irreversible degradation of the planet can be halted in time. The next 30 years may be crucial". In the same year the late Erskine Childers, a very senior official at the United Nations, gave a similar warning: "In another ten years, one in three beings alive will be existing on the margins of survival. The better off 20% minority of humankind will not be able to control the world, or get off it. The full, the democratic implications of decolonisation now have to be faced - in the United Nations".

By 1997 these warnings have evoked discussion - notably in the succession of Summit Conferences inaugurated in Rio in 1992 - and some proposals, but little or no concrete action. Although politically there has been global detente, the economic and social state of the world is sliding towards disaster. The Earth Summit, "Rio Plus Five", held in New York in June 1997 was a shambles. "The G77 group of developing countries complained of the 300 billion dollars that flows from the South to the North each year, sucked out in natural resources, debt repayments and profits to shareholders of multinationals. At the same time, aid has fallen 20% in five years". (1)

THE PROBLEM

1. POPULATION

For 10,000 years until the 18th century AD, the population of the world grew at the rate of 0.1% a year. It is estimated to have reached about 500 million by 1650, and one billion by 1930. Now, in the 1990s, it has exploded to 5.6 billion, and United Nations' estimates are that by 2025 it will have reached 8.5 billion, and by 2050 10 billion - unless birth control becomes universal or monumental disasters occur.

All through the long millennia it was assumed that earth's resources were adequate to feed, shelter and provide the other basic needs of humankind. This

assumption is so deeply rooted in the modern mind, that economic "growth" has become the driving aim of political and economic policies throughout the world. The warnings given in two little books, the Club of Rome's "Limits to Growth", and E F Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful", which burst upon the world in 1972 and 1973 respectively, have gone largely unheeded. The hard fact which those who control the world's affairs do not want to face, is that the symptoms of "limits to growth" have unmistakably emerged. They must be seen in the context of the huge gulf between the industrialised countries - "The North" and the developing countries - "The South", in which 80% of the world's population live today.

Over 1.1 billion people - 20% of the world's population - live in absolute poverty, while another 20% consume 80% of its resources. A few *per caput* GNP figures, provided for 1993 by the World Bank, illustrate the depth of the gulf.

NATION	POPULATION	GNP PER HEAD \$
USA	258 million	25000
Japan	125 million	31000
Britain	58 million	18000
Brazil	156 million	3020
China	1.2 billion	490
India	900 million	310
Tanzania	27 million	100

2. ENERGY

The world stands on the threshold of a completely new energy era. For thousands of years all needed energy was produced from wood and biomass. In the past 200 years industrialisation, based on the use of fossil fuels, has transformed the situation. The trees which absorb the carbon dioxide which causes global warming are being cut down. Oil is running out. A major oil company's estimate is that reserves will last 25 years. There is plenty of coal in the world; it supplies 30% of the world's energy, but it gives off the deadly carbon dioxide. China and India are industrialising on the basis of coal. Nuclear power poses immense problems, such as the disposal of spent reactors, whose life-time is 30 years, and the bi-production of plutonium, useful only for weapons. If the world opted for major dependence on nuclear power its 456 reactors (in 1995) would have to be increased to 5-6000. The technology of fusion power, unpolluting power drawn from the sun, has not yet been solved. "Renewables" - wind, wave, waterfall power etc - are important for local energy, but may not be adequate as the sole provider of the energy needs of the 21st century. And there is no United Nations' Energy Agency to work out policies for this uncertain future. Meanwhile global energy consumption is projected to double by 2050.

3. MINERALS

The world's main resources are concentrated in six major regions, including the oceans and Antarctica. Inevitably, the rich and powerful are trying to grab the mineral resources of the poor, e.g. in some African states. As long ago as 1972 the US National Academy of Sciences stated that: "If the present divisiveness of the world persists ... nations will need to buffer their economies against external control of vital resources or else exploit the scarcities of others in those commodities which they have in exportable surplus. It would seem better for all concerned to promote policies of co-existence and co-operation".

4. FOOD

Since 1990 there has been no increase in world grain production. Fertilisers and pesticides have generally reached the limit of their efficiency. Genetic engineering of plants is so far an unknown possibility. Industrialisation increases the demand for food and simultaneously uses up the resources to provide it - soil, water, energy. Desertification affects a quarter of the world's food area. Major countries like China which have hitherto been self-sufficient in food will soon have to begin to import it, and then - if imports are available - prices will soar. All the 17 fish areas of the oceans have now been over-fished.

5. WATER

The demand for water is doubling every 21 years. Chronic water shortages affect 40% of the world's population in 80 countries. A billion people, one third of the world's population, do not have access to fresh water.

6. THE GENE BANK

The United Nations estimates that 50,000 species, many of them never recognised, will have been extinguished by the year 2000 by the cutting down of the world's forests and other industrial activities.

7. FORESTS

By 1991 tropical rain forests have been reduced by 40% since 1900. At present, according to the United Nations, 13.7 million hectares of forest - roughly the size of Nepal - are cut or burnt each year. At this rate, there may be few left in Africa, South East Asia or Latin America by the next century.

8 GLOBAL WARMING

The governments of the rich countries have now accepted the scientists' warnings about the dangers of global warming through the increase of carbon dioxide emissions. The scientists are saying that a 60% reduction in current emissions is necessary if planetary disasters are to be avoided. (The USA is responsible for 25% of the emissions). Meanwhile the El Nino hurricanes, which normally cause droughts and storms in the Pacific, e.g. the drought which has caused the Indonesian forest fires - are now spreading north, and California is threatened with catastrophe if and when these El Nino phenomena mix with the

carbon dioxide emissions of its huge fleet of cars, guzzling cheap petroleum. A Conference of 160 heads of state will be held in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997 to agree, hopefully, on a legal Convention setting targets for reducing CDO emissions. The European Community has already offered a 15% reduction by the year 2010, and Japan a 5% reduction. But the United States, pressured by the multinational corporations' lobbies, has made no firm offer.

9. TRADE AND AID

In the 1990s the rich countries have made a determined effort to create a single, integrated global market, a "level playing field". The United Nations' Human Development Report for 1997 says that "The prescription is to liberalise national and global markets in the belief that free flows of trade, finance and information will produce the best outcome for human welfare. All is presented with an air of inevitability and overwhelming conviction. Not since the heyday of free trade in the 19th century has economic theory elicited such widespread certainty" (2). An even starker statement has been made by the American strategist James Martin. He "prophesies the imminent arrival of a global market place so highly automated, so fast-paced, so ruthless, and so inescapable that Main Street business norms like caution, continuity, and conservatism will be only fading memories. In response, he calls for 'the total reinvention of employment'. Long-range planning is pointless, Martin implies, because conditions change so fast that no outcome is certain enough to plan *for*." (3)

This policy of "globalisation", combined with the "aid" policies of the rich countries and the loan policies of the World Bank and other loan sources, is having severe adverse effects on the poor countries:

(a) their markets are flooded with cheap imports from the rich countries, e.g. of cereals, which they could produce locally; This means that they have to find the foreign exchange to pay for these imports, and this gets them into debt. Meanwhile the rural economy languishes, or is diverted into cash crops for the rich countries, e.g. bananas, tobacco - and millions drift into the exploding towns where they cannot find work or become underpaid, unskilled labour producing goods for the rich countries. 30% of the world's population - the great majority in the poor countries - is totally unemployed or has not enough work for subsistence. (4)

(b) the all-powerful multinational corporations - 500 of them control 70% of the world's trade - seize upon the great reservoir of uneducated, impoverished people in the poor countries who have been jolted out of traditional work of local agriculture, building etc., to make the goods which they sell in the rich countries, often depriving the poor countries of their own needs. Here is a cry from Esiteri, a woman who works in the PAFO tuna cannery in Fiji. Targets for cleaning the bones off the fish are set, and if they are not met by the end of the week the women are laid off. "What's worse", she says, "is that now, if the conveyor belt doesn't bring the fish quickly, the women run to fetch their own

fish. And they hardly go to the toilet because they're worried about getting their target". Graham Southwick, a high-flyer in Fiji's export fisheries, comments: "You can be both a profitable operation and a social welfare set-up get back to the basic rules: make profits."(5)

THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM - GLOBAL HOUSEKEEPING

If the danger of planetary breakdown is great, the action to save the situation must be drastic. I sum up this suggested action as **global housekeeping**, based on the principles of

(i) **assessing the basic needs of all**. In the 1970s, the ILO called on all governments to commit themselves to meeting basic needs, pointing out that the "trickle down" theory had not worked. It is also in accordance with Article 25 of United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family".

(ii) **assessing the resources available** to meet these needs, and

(iii) **planning, organising and supervising** the provision and distribution of resources in relation to needs.

Much of the groundwork for global housekeeping has been laid. In the 50 years of its life, the United Nations, which now includes all the sovereign states of the world except Switzerland, has researched into almost every aspect of secular life. The problems have been explored by a vast host of experts, consisting not only of the United Nations' own officials and those of its 'family' of 31 Specialised Agencies, but of hundreds of thousands of professors and researchers attached to universities, companies, charities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). (It is odd that there is no Specialised Agency for energy; nor is a single member of the 'family' located in New York). These individuals and bodies need to be organised to carry out the global housekeeping. This must involve:

1. **Global planning** - short, medium and long-term - of what goods and services should be produced. (Many firms only plan for about 5 years ahead)

2. **Rationing**, if necessary, of basic commodities. (I well remember how efficiently comprehensive rationing worked in Britain during and after World War II)

3. **A legal system** of United Nations' Courts, provided with inspectors to supervise the planners' decisions and able to enforce them

4. **The globalisation of the Welfare State**, already accepted as a moral right in Europe. (See Articles 22 to 26 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.) This will involve not only the right to an adequate standard of living, but to care in sickness and old age, to housing, to education and to work.

5. **Trade must be organised** to promote these goals. Obviously considerable trade is necessary to transfer surpluses of goods related to basic needs from regions where they exist to regions where they do not exist. This will involve an international taxation system whereby the rich will finance the necessary purchases of the poor - when a general equalisation of wealth has been achieved, then barter can be introduced.

6. **A world currency** will have to be introduced, supervised by a world bank - perhaps a transformed version of the present World Bank and International Monetary Fund. It will make loans according to the Planners' plans based on the criteria of Basic Needs.

7. The developing countries must be helped to train **large numbers of scientists** and engineers. At present, according to the Royal Society, they have only 6-7% of the world's active experts in these fields.

8. **Global disarmament** must be organised. In 1997 the world is spending about 750 trillion dollars on arms. The World Community will require only a world police force - which already exists in embryo.

9. The rapidly developing **information technology** will greatly facilitate global housekeeping. At present there are 1.2 billion television sets in the world. Radio, fax, telephones and email are all linking people up across the world. And most important of all, perhaps, is the spread of literacy. In the developing world, about 75% are now literate. Global communication will be a major factor in removing mental fixations and aggressive practices and extending the sense of "community" from the family, the tribe and the nation to the world. Population redistribution may have to become an ingredient in global planning.

ETHICS

At the heart of Global Housekeeping is the question of ethics. Which statement is more ethical: "We must be competitive in world markets", or "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"? (*Karl Marx*) There are millions of people in the world today, who believe that men and women are innately ethical beings, that cooperation is more ethical than competition, that "small is beautiful" - or as Gandhi said: "Forget wants, think of needs"; that the parable of the Good Samaritan is relevant to the modern world. Many of these people regard the policies of the Multinationals as unethical, while many in the rich countries who support the Multinationals, despise and ignore the United Nations - which therefore has to function without 2 billion dollars of unpaid dues - half owed by the USA. For their part, the Multinational corporations are getting more and more aggressive - see David Korten's powerful book "When

Corporations Rule the World". "Of the world's 100 largest economies, 50 are megacorporations. The 350 largest corporations now account for 40% of global trade". Pressured by the corporations, which are at present subject to no international law, the Reagan administration secured the closing down of the department of the United Nations which was drawing up a Code of Conduct for multinational corporations. They have also secured the whittling down of the provision in the Law of the Sea Treaty which pronounced the minerals in the deep oceans as "The common heritage of mankind", to be mined by an executive agency of the United Nations and distributed to the poor countries in accordance with their needs. This provision would have given the United Nations a sphere of activity which it lacks - executive functions.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF GLOBAL HOUSEKEEPING

Who is to administer global housekeeping? The alternatives would seem to be to set up a number of new executive bodies within the United Nations - or to turn the multinationals into executive agents of the United Nations. Two very senior officials of the United Nations, Erskine Childers and Sir Brian Urquart, recently suggested that the Specialised Agencies should be relocated to New York to be turned into embryo ministries for the United Nations as a world government. This brings us to the heart of the matter. The modern world has produced two major economic systems: free enterprise based on competition and private profit, and public ownership - socialism. It has produced two major political systems: democracy and dictatorship. (Traditional rule by divinely revealed custom has ended). And it has produced one social system, the "welfare state". At present there is a general acceptance that democracy, embodied in the doctrine of Human Rights, is more ethical than dictatorship. There is a more half-hearted agreement regarding the ethical imperative of the welfare state - in the USA, and in the UK under Thatcherite Conservative rule, there has been a backtracking from it - though its principles are also embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And the collapse of Communism - dictatorship enforcing the welfare state and public ownership - in the former USSR and Eastern Europe has denigrated public ownership and given a huge boost to economic private enterprise, competition and profitability.

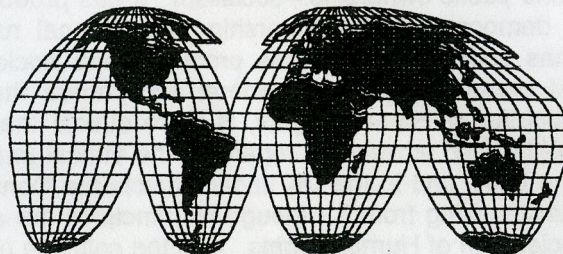
I suggest that Global Housekeeping, which is essential to avert global disaster, requires that the United Nations be turned into a genuinely democratic world government based on the public ownership of basic resources and the further development of a world welfare state. The question of how the constitution of the United Nations should be democratised falls outside the scope of this paper. My further suggestion is that the multinational corporations should be public instead of private executive bodies, responsible within the United Nations for carrying out global housekeeping, with the essential aim of promoting human welfare for all rather than making financial profits for the few. It is possible that in the 21st century the ethical issue involved in the creation and distribution of wealth will be carried out by the mass action of WOMEN.

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*Charlotte's book "The Hinge of History" was published in 1995, and can be
obtained from the author*

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