

OUR FUTURE PROSPECTS

Derek J Wilson April 2006

- The Four Laws of Ecology:
- Everything is connected to everything else.
- Everything must go somewhere.
- Nature knows best.
- There is no such thing as a free lunch. (Barry Commoner, 1971.)

Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it. (Mark Twain)

If we continue ... to consume the world until there's no more to consume, then there's going to come a day, sure as hell, when our children or their children or their children's children are going to look back on us – you and me – and say to themselves, 'My God, what kind of monsters were these people?' (Daniel Quinn, 2000.)

Do we *have* a future? At least Quinn thought there would be someone around after we had collapsed our civilisation. Many authorities don't. We have been repeatedly advised by a lengthening list of learned bodies and individuals over time that global catastrophe in some shape or form is inevitable and that the effects of this can be softened only if all of us, but especially the wealthy countries who have the means and ability, very rapidly take suitable action. As Jared Diamond puts it in his 2005 book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*: "The processes through which past societies have undermined themselves by damaging their environments fall into eight categories, whose relative importance differs from case to case: deforestation and habitat destruction, soil problems (erosion, salinization, and soil fertility losses), water management problems, overhunting, overfishing, effects of introduced species on native species, human population growth, and increased per-capita impact of people." Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal, explores the scientific and technological aspects of our development in his 2003 book *Our Final Hour* and issues a scientist's warning as to "how terror, error, and environmental disaster threaten humankind's future in this century – on Earth and beyond." Robert Fisk, on the other hand, in his monumental 2005 work *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*, has someone telling him that what we learn from history is that we don't learn. But what if this is true, what if we have already failed to learn the lessons of the past? It's easy to believe that the Precautionary Principle has still not been accepted by officialdom, let alone acted upon. Had it been, especially with regard to peak oil and climate change, we would now be in a much more advantageous position. What if we have already crossed the Rubicon? Shouldn't all our energies be concentrated on working towards a sustainable retreat, a survivable collapse? Which they surely should have been decades ago, given the available knowledge. The question must be asked: Why has the response been so inadequate, so unequal to the task before it? The answer is quite simply because the Western and westernised world is in a state of denial – individual and collective – the prevalence of which makes an adequate response impossible. Denial is our principle defence weapon without which we would be exposed to reality, and, as T S Eliot says: "Humankind cannot bear very much reality." (*East Coker*.) And of course, Thomas Gray made the point back in 1742 that "where ignorance is bliss, 'Tis folly to be wise."

Distinguished economist Herman Daly, until recently senior economist with the environmental department of the World Bank in Washington, explains it this way: "This shift [one which involves replacing our economic norm of quantitative expansion, i.e., growth and consumption, with that of qualitative improvement] is resisted by most economic and political institutions. Enormous forces

of denial are aligned against it, and to overcome them requires a deep philosophical clarification, even religious renewal.” (*Beyond Growth: An Economics of Sustainable Development*, 1996.)

Our civilisation is now between a large mountain and a very hard place. On the one hand we are exhorted at every turn by most politicians, economists and the business world, as exemplified by Business Roundtables, to have more growth at such and such an annual percentage for without this our global economy, already on the shakiest of ground, will collapse. On the other hand, as Daly himself explains: “It’s really been only in the last 200 years that growth has been really a part of our lives [since the start of the Industrial Revolution]. Prior to that, on an annual basis, growth was negligible. The idea that we must either grow or die is just not supported by history [see Martin Rees, Ronald Wright and Jared Diamond] and I think that the contrary is much more likely: if we continue to grow then surely we will die.” (Anita Gordon and David Suzuki. *It’s a Matter of Survival*, 1991.)

You don’t have to be a first year economics student to understand that the sacred mantra of continuous economic growth, as against a zero growth economy, as it is understood is totally unsustainable. We live on a finite planet within a closed ecosystem of finite resources. If we continue to profligate, to grow and to live on Earth’s material capital our civilisation’s collapse is assured. (See www.derekjwilson.co.nz *The Growth Syndrome – Economic Destitution*.) Yet our basic problem of denial is exceptionally difficult to overcome for as a leading eco-philosopher, Joanna Macy, writes: “The perils facing life on earth are so massive and unprecedented that they are hard to believe. The very danger signals that should rivet our attention summon up the blood and bond us in collective action, tend to have the opposite effect. They make us want to pull down the blinds and busy ourselves with other things.” (John Mead. *Gaia and Psychology*, February 9, 2006.)

How did we come to be sitting on this time bomb? If we want to understand our future prospects we must at least try to gain some knowledge of our past. Generally, history texts, especially military ones, are economic with the truth as to origins of upheavals, revolutions and wars, and fail to mention that down through the ages they have been largely contrived, organised and manipulated by Freemasons, Brotherhoods, Grand Lodges, Round Tables and other secret societies under the direction of what has been aptly called a Global Elite. As John Ralston Saul tells us, “the exercise of power, without the moderating influence of any ethical structure, rapidly became the religion of these new elites.” Their purpose in life was, and is more than ever today, the acquisition of power, the increase of wealth and influence, and the creation of the New World Order. These organisations go back a long way, beyond the “Mystery Schools of Babylon, Egypt and Greece, which guarded their knowledge with enormous secrecy. The smallest violation of the oath of secrecy was punishable by death. From this foundation came today’s massive secret society network.” The 12th and 13th century Cathars of Southern France and The Knights of the Temple (Knights Templar) will strike chords for some people. The symbols of this Brotherhood of early times – the pyramid, all-seeing eye, swastika, lamb, obelisk and many others – have not changed. Is it an accident that the Great Seal of the United States includes the pyramid, at the apex of which reside the Global Elite, and the all-seeing eye? Above and below this are the Latin phrases *Annuuit Coeptis* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum* meaning “Announcing the birth, creation, or arrival”, and “New Secular Order”, i.e., the New World Order.

This part of the seal is now found on every one dollar bill, a decision made in 1935 by Franklin D Roosevelt, who was brought to power through a Wall Street-created depression and ensured of election by Wall Street financial and media ‘arrangements’. The American people were conned by Roosevelt’s backers who actually set up an organisation to oppose him – a normal Global Elite

strategy – the Liberty League which was branded as ‘extreme Right Wing’ and ‘anti-Semitic’, thus enabling all opposition to Roosevelt to be dismissed. More recent presidential elections obviously repeat history.

We could go back to the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries which set in motion Capitalism and profoundly changed the very nature of society, but for our purposes the concentration of control of world financial resources started with the Industrial Revolution. The 18th century saw the emergence and rapid rise of the House of Rothschild, the largest and most powerful financial empire built on money embezzled by Mayer Amschel Bauer (later Rothschild) from William IV, who had stolen from the soldiers he had hired out to the British government to fight Napoleon’s armies. Rothschild sent the money to England, bought vast quantities of gold from the East India Company, used this to finance the Duke of Wellington’s exploits and, working through the Brotherhood network, manipulated governments and created wars and revolutions and lent money to both sides of the conflicts in what became a standard practice for the banking elite. Rothschild’s influence can hardly be overstated, for it was the precursor of today’s vast transnational corporations, described by John Ralston Saul as “the seat of contemporary feudalism”, and banking empires which have extended their control to the four corners of Earth in a long-term agenda of the Brotherhood. As historian John Reeves puts it:

Little could Mayer Amschel have anticipated that his sons would in after years come to exercise such an unbounded sway that the peace of nations would depend upon their nod; that the powerful control they exercised on the European money markets would enable them to pose as the arbiters of peace and war, since they could at their pleasure withhold or furnish the pecuniary means required to carry on a campaign. But this, incredible as it may seem, was what their vast influence combined with their enormous wealth and unlimited credit, enabled them to do, for no firms existed strong enough to oppose them for any length of time, or rash enough to take up a business which the Rothschilds had refused. To reach this exalted position, Mayer Amschel and his sons required the cooperation of the states, but, when once he had climbed over their backs and reached the height of his ambition, he was independent of all aid and could act with the greatest freedom, while the states remained in a suppliant attitude at his feet. (*The Rothschilds: The Financial Rulers of Nations*, 1887.)

The Rothschild approach was reportedly summed up by Mayer Amschel himself: “Give me control of a nation’s currency and I care not who makes the laws.” When Rothschild’s son Nathan died, his eldest son, Lionel, took over, making massive loans to the British and American governments and others, including some \$80 million to Britain to finance the Crimea War. Lionel was succeeded by the second Nathan, the first Lord Rothschild, who took his seat in the House of Lords in 1885. He became the governor of the Bank of England with unlimited power over the world’s financial system. That power has not diminished – far from it – it has simply expanded with new empires like that of Morgan and Rockefeller, so that at the start of the new millennium the power and control of the world’s financial system behind its many ‘fronts’ is completely in the hands of the Global Elite. That power is enormous. As Bertolt Brecht put it: “If you want to steal some money, don’t rob a bank – open one.”

No wonder historian Ronald Wright recently saw fit to comment on how we might get out of the dire situation we now find ourselves in: “What it will take to get us there is an emergency that galvanises everybody and makes it clear – to everybody, without room for evasion – that things have to change - we can only hope that the emergency is severe enough to produce that effect, but not so severe that it gets beyond our control. That’s asking for quite a lot.” (*Listener*, March 11 2006.) In answer to a question at his public address as part of the 2006 NZ International Arts Festival, Wright believed that after the crash our civilisation will not collapse, as have past ones, but will be reduced to a pre-industrial state with a population of about one billion people which the Earth will adequately cope with. Some scientists believe that we are already very close to the

‘tipping point’, if we haven’t already passed it, beyond which short-term recovery is not possible. Wright’s emergency may be the energy crisis, now much worse than at first thought, (see www.derekjwilson.co.nz *The Fast Approaching Energy Crisis*), or climate change which, according to a summary of an article by Fred Pearce in *New Scientist*, 18 February 2006, states that the average increase of CO₂ in the air now stands at double the rate of those only 30 years ago, with the rate accelerating. (See Tim Flannery’s 2005 book *The Weather Makers: The History and Future Impact of Climate Change*.) Or might it be the diminishing fresh water supplies? (See *Troubled Water*, ed., Brooke Shelby Biggs, 2004.) In March 2006 Oxfam stated: “We are in the middle of a global water crisis. Two million people die each year [about 6,000 daily] from water-related diseases which account for 80% of all illnesses in the developing world. At any given time, half the population in the developing world is sick from a water-related illness such as cholera, typhoid, dysentery or worms.”

But to return to the start of the Industrial Revolution. At its beginning the ruling powers in Great Britain embarked on one of the most sustained efforts to destroy community life ever undertaken. From 1770 to 1830 some 3,280 enclosure bills were passed putting into private hands for private gain more than six million acres of commonly-held lands. By 1830 not a single county had more than three percent of its land open to public use. According to historian George Sturt: “To the enclosure of the common more than to any other cause may be traced all the changes which have subsequently passed over the village. It was like knocking the keystone out of an arch.” (Kirkpatrick Sale. *Rebels Against the Future*, 1995.) This, together with the abolition of the protective Corn Laws after 1846, led to the impoverishment of most British citizens, and to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small group called the ‘upper classes’. Today, under the control of this ‘special class’, increasing numbers of people are beginning to realise “that the most awesome and ferocious destruction centralised power has inflicted on human life lies in its destruction of the power and even the identity of localised communities.” John Papworth, writing about the future “as if all people mattered”, reinforces this view:

The virtual eclipse of these forms of localised power, and we need to grasp that this is indeed what they were, could not fail to result in the highly centralised forms of political and economic power with which we are familiar today and which we all too often assume are as natural as the stars in their courses. So modern man and woman emerges today, isolated, alienated, manipulated, disorientated, disempowered and debased, at the mercy of giant forces they can neither in many respects comprehend nor control and which are sweeping them towards an inevitable destiny of doom unless some profound changes are made in the management of human affairs. (*Small is Powerful*, 1995.)

About the same time, Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith noted in *The Case Against the Global Economy*, 1996, with regard to “economic globalisation” ... “arguably the most fundamental redesign of the planet’s political and economic arrangements since the Industrial Revolution,” that:

The German economic philosopher Wolfgang Sachs argues in his book *The Development Dictionary* that the only thing worse than the failure of this massive global development experiment would be its success. For even at its optimum performance level, the long-term benefits go only to a tiny minority of people who sit at the hub of the process and to a slightly larger minority that can retain an economic connection to it, while the rest of humanity is left groping for fewer jobs and less land, living in violent societies on a ravaged planet. The only boats that will be lifted are those of the owners and managers of the process; the rest of us will be on the beach, facing the rising tide.

It’s a familiar story, more especially where the foraging exploiters subjugated the indigenous peoples. What contributes to Aotearoa/New Zealand’s uniqueness is the pivotal role of Maori as the *tangata whenua* (people of the land), yet as Jane Kelsey and Mike O’Brien put it in 1995 in *Setting the Record Straight: Social Development in Aotearoa/New Zealand*:

After a century and a half of legal, military, political and economic repression a mere three million of the country's 66 million acres remain in Maori hands.

Most state commercial activities were built on land taken in breach of the Treaty [the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi]. Since 1987 many of those resources have been corporatised and privatised, never to be returned. Maori objections were initially ignored, and subsequently bought off with promises of future redress that saw virtually none of them returned.

... At the same time, the economic policies of the past decade continued to ravage Maori society and create greater dependency and needs.

To find the well-spring of America's thinking on foreign policy – its global imperialism – we have to go back to the Monroe Doctrine which was formulated by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and approved in 1823 by President Monroe. This stated that the New World was to be the preserve of the United States. As Adams told Cabinet, the world must be “familiarized with the idea of considering our proper dominion to be the continent of North America.” Connell-Smith comments that “the appropriation by United States citizens of the objective ‘American’, not surprisingly resented by Latin Americans, has encouraged a proprietary attitude towards the hemisphere already present in 1823.” President Grover Cleveland's Secretary of State, Richard Olney, expressed the essence of the Doctrine and summarised much subsequent history in 1895 when Great Britain was known as the Evil Empire: (How epithets get repositioned.)

Today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition. Why? It is not because of the pure friendship or goodwill for it. It is not simply by reason of its high character as a civilized state, nor because reason, justice, and equity are the invariable characteristics of the dealings of the United States. It is because, in addition to all other grounds, its infinite resources combined with its isolated position render it master of the situation, and particularly invulnerable as against any or all other powers. (Noam Chomsky. *Turning the Tide: US Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace*: 1985.)

Over the years ‘corollaries’ have been added to the Monroe Doctrine, most notably by Roosevelt and Wilson. The first was announced in 1904 by President Theodore Roosevelt after he had stolen the Panama Canal route from Colombia for military and commercial self-interest. To the Colombians, Roosevelt “made it clear how he would deal with refractory Latin Americans: he would ‘show those Dagoes that they will have to behave decently.’” (Lester Langley. *The Banana Wars: United States Interventions in the Caribbean, 1898-1934*, 1985.) Hugh Brogan puts the Corollary as follows: “... the United States had a right to do what it liked to, with or in Latin American countries, so long as it could plead its own interests or an ill-defined duty to police the western hemisphere on behalf of the civilized world.” (*The Pelican History of the United States of America*, 1986.) President William Howard Taft emphasised these basic objectives in 1912: “The day is not far distant when three Stars and Stripes at three equidistant points will mark our territory: one at the North Pole, another at the Panama Canal, and the third at the South Pole. The whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority of race, it is ours morally.” (Jenny Pearce. *Under the Eagle: US Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean*, 1981.)

The operative meaning of the Monroe Doctrine was made explicit by President Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, in a statement which Wilson described as ‘impolite’ when stated openly: “In its advocacy of the Monroe Doctrine the United States considers its own interests. The integrity of other American nations is an incident, not an end. While this may seem based on selfishness alone, the author of the Doctrine had no higher or more generous motives in its declaration.” Incident or end, six years after the Monroe Doctrine Simon Bolivar observed prophetically that “the United States (seems) destined to plague and torment the continent in the name of freedom.” In his 1927 three-volume definitive study, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823-1826*, Dexter Perkins points out that “The Doctrine is a policy of the United States, not a fixed principle of international law.”

The control of finite resources, and with it the diminution of democracy, was well advanced by 1901 when Morgan and Rockefeller, who headed the two main financial groups in America, amalgamated 112 corporate directorates, combining \$22.2 billion in assets – a massive sum in those days. In November 1910, Charles Forbes (who later founded *Forbes Magazine*), was able to make public the strange events that had taken place six years earlier:

Picture a party of the nation's greatest bankers stealing out of New York on a private railroad car under cover of darkness, stealthily hieing hundreds of miles South, embarking on a mysterious launch, sneaking onto an island deserted by all but a few servants, living there a full week under such rigid secrecy that the names of not one of them was mentioned lest the servants learn the identity and disclose to the world this strangest, most secret expedition in the history of American finance... I am giving to the world, for the first time, the real story of how the famous Aldrich currency report, the foundation of our new currency system, was written. (*Current Opinion*, December 1916.)

It was here at the private hunting club of J P Morgan on Jekyll Island off the coast of Georgia that Morgan and his 'duck shooters', particularly Paul Warburg who, not knowing one end of a gun from the other when he carried a borrowed shotgun onto the train that night at Hoboken, New Jersey, (presumably Vice-President Dick Cheney does?), proceeded to draft the basic plan for the Federal Reserve System with five objectives:

- Stop the growing competition from the nation's newer banks.
- Obtain a franchise to create money out of nothing for the purpose of lending.
- Get control of the reserves of all banks.
- Get the taxpayer to pick up the cartel's inevitable losses. (Edward G Griffin. *The Creature from Jekyll Island*, 1994.)

It succeeded brilliantly. As historian Anthony Sutton remarks about one of the more blatant scams in history: "The Federal Reserve System is a legal private monopoly of the money supply operated for the benefit of the few under the guise of protecting and promoting the public interest." (*Wall Street and FDR*, 1975.)

Enron has been described as "the largest corporate bankruptcy and crime in history." In history? This essential viewing makes one want to vomit. Said its director, Alex Gibney: "I felt that the film would give me an opportunity to explore some larger themes about American culture, the cruelty of our economic system, and the way it can too easily be rigged for the benefit of the high and mighty. Enron is important because it takes the predatory nature of 'business as usual' to its logical conclusion. Enron is not the exception to the rule; it's an exaggeration of the way things too often work." There have been many other crimes comparable to that of the Federal Reserve System and Enron. One of these is the case of the Bank of Credit and Commercial International founded in 1972 by Pakistani Agha Hassan Abedi. According to reports at the time "it was a caring bank that would nurture developing economies and provide help to the struggling Third World." The Bank's growing turpitude in a society where the acquisition of money as an end in itself equated with power was not altogether surprising. When it closed in 1991 its long list of alleged misdeeds included financing arms deals that governments wanted to keep secret, transporting the arms in their own ships and providing manpower and security. What *can* one say about greed chasing profit unabashedly through the expenditure of vast sums on the acquisition of such quantities of the implements of death rather than on the providers of life?

Space does not permit any exploration of the secret machinations and malfeasance, including the Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, organised by Montague Norman, Governor of the Bank of England from 1916 to 1944, and Benjamin Strong, with a little help from their friends. Nor is

there room to examine the wider implications of these Robber Barons and their support of Germany in the First World War, and for Hitler's subsequent rise to power. Nor of how Emile Francqui, the guiding spirit behind Herbert Hoover's rise to fortune, and Hoover himself, threw themselves into the task of provisioning Germany during that war. Nor of how one billion pounds of meat, one and a half billion pounds of potatoes, one and a half billion pounds of bread, and 121 million pounds of butter were shipped from Belgium to Germany in 1916. A patriotic English nurse, Edith Cavell, reported to the *Nursing Mirror* in London, 15 April, that 'Belgian Relief' supplies were feeding the German army. On the insistence of the British authorities, for this 'inconvenient' exposure, Cavell was shot by the Germans.

According to Eustace Mullins, the same all-powerful names, the same closed shop responsible for the foundation of the Federal Reserve System, still manage the world's closely interlinked finances, "with profits for themselves but with disastrous results for everyone else." Transnational corporations need bigger and still bigger markets to enable their profits to continue to grow. Even more frightening than the film *Enron* is one called *The Corporation*. While early colonialism was mainly about new and bigger markets, post-World War Two colonialism replaced this by the Bretton Woods form of economic colonialism, under which the troops are only sent in when a country can't get what it wants or thinks it sees some kind of threat to its sovereignty: hence US military intervention about 60 times, killing more than 16 million people.

The original intentions of the founders of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which arose from the infamous first International Monetary Conference at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, 1-22 July 1944, may well have been (though it seems highly unlikely) to lay the foundations for an open and stable post-war monetary system which would achieve ultimately "freedom from want... everywhere in the world". It was supposed to "facilitate the expansion and balanced growth of international trade and to contribute thereby to the promotion and maintenance of high levels of employment and real income." So Article VI of the IMF Articles of Agreement allows members "to exercise such controls as are necessary to regulate international capital movements." However, the World Bank is not subject to the "transient will and uncertain judgement" of the people, is a law unto itself, is immune to policy investigation and legal process, and its proceedings take place in total secrecy. The overall results of the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been devastating. This Conference hammered out the final agreement for the post-war New World Order under which in due course there would be a further massive shift in power out of the hands of nation states and democratic governments and into the hands of banks and transnational corporations. William Pitt, more than two centuries ago, summarised what has taken place: "Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it" – a dictum which is more generally known from Lord Acton's statement of 1887: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Surely a handy adage for intermittent TV use. It was former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who is reported to have said: "Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac." He should know.

Ronald Reagan expressed a similar messianism in 1980 to that of his predecessors: "I have always believed that this land was placed here between the two great oceans by some divine plan. It was placed here by a special kind of people... We built a new breed of human called American." The sentiments are consistent. President Bush Snr., during his presidency, promulgated the New World Order as "the untrammelled operation of what he would call the global 'free market'", as against 'fair markets', a world order that "represents a good deal for perhaps a quarter of the world's population, but has precious little to offer the rest." His son has carried on the good work. It is of course not a New World Order in any sense of those words but a continuation of the old order, as I have tried to show, or disorder – nationally and internationally – which "is characterized by

expansionism, competition, oppression and exploitation. Its concomitants are environmental destruction, climate change, overpopulation, starvation, super industrialism and mass unemployment. The value system underlying the old order reveals an attitude of disrespect to humans and nature.” (Klaus Bosselmann. *When Two World Collide: Society and Ecology*, 1995.) Regions are now forced to become players against each other and to run roughshod over the sentiments of their peoples.

The list of commissions, conventions, seminars, summits, official reports and in particular individual writings from many world authorities warning us of our constantly worsening situation is now so substantial as to make it impossible to review in even a single book, let alone a paper. In the light of our denial I’m tempted to ask whether a part of us, like the lemmings, is programmed to commit suicide. But I will touch on the major Summits.

The first UN Conference on Environment and Development was held at Stockholm in 1972. It achieved little of lasting significance; not surprising considering the powerful corporate conduits stacked against it. The concept of ‘sustainable development’ was first publicised in 1981 with the publication of the *World Conservation Strategy* report by the UN Environment Programme, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and the World Wildlife Fund. The report declared that nature must be used “on a basis that can be sustained into the distant future.”

In 1983 the United Nations set up under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Norway, Mrs Gro Brundtland, the World Commission on Environment and Development with instructions to formulate “a global agenda for change” in an urgent call to the general Assembly to:

- Propose long-term strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond.
- Recommend ways concern for the environment may be translated into greater co-operation among developing countries at different stages of economic and social development and lead to the achievement of common and mutually supportive objectives and take account of the interrelationships between people, resources, environment, and development.
- Consider ways and means by which the international community can deal more effectively with environmental concerns, and
- Help define shared perceptions of long-term environmental issues and the appropriate efforts needed to deal successfully with the problem of protecting and enhancing the environment, a long-term agenda for action during the coming decade, and aspirational goals for the whole community.

In 1988, J W MacNeill, Secretary General to the Committee, gave further direction to this challenge when he extended the meaning of sustainability. “Sustainable development means the kind of economic development that lives off the Earth’s interest instead of encroaching on its capital. It also means investing to sustain and even enhance our ecological capital, so that future dividends can be ensured and enlarged.”

Four years later, in 1987, the Commission published *Our Common Future* which called for “a common endeavour and for new norms of behaviour at all levels and in the interests of all. The change in attitudes, in social values, and in aspirations that the report urges will depend on vast campaigns of education, debate, and public participation.” Mrs Brundtland made it clear that “if we do not succeed in putting our message of urgency through to today’s parents and decision makers, we risk undermining our children’s right to a healthy, life-enhancing environment.” *Our Common Future*, while it elevated ‘sustainability’ to a goal, glossed over the destruction brought about by inappropriate technology transfer, capital flow and economic growth and its continuation on a finite Earth. It is doubtful whether the authors of *Our Common Future* fully understood that humankind was witnessing the deepest cultural-social-economic-political-environmental change in

all its history. This increasing diminution of nature's riches connoted an almost total failure of our stewardship of Earth.

The 1992 follow-on Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil, the largest ever gathering of heads of state, reinforced the Commission's findings and recommendations, and produced its Agenda 21 with its 40-chapter plan of action for achieving sustainable development and its 27 principles for a more balanced world. In spite of this there is little genuine understanding of the word 'sustainability' and the changes necessary to make it a reality. In that same year, two forceful statements were issued. The first, early in the year, was by the Royal Society of London and the US National Academy of Sciences.

World population is growing at the unprecedented rate of almost 100 million people every year [three per second], and human activities are producing major changes in the global environment. If current predictions of population prove accurate and patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged, science and technology may not be able to prevent either irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world.

In its 1991 report on population, the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) states that population growth is even faster than forecast in its report of 1984. Assuming nevertheless that there will in the future be substantial and sustained falls in fertility rates, the general population is expected in the UN's mid-range projection to rise from 5.4 billion in 1991 to 10 billion in 2050. This rapid rise may be unavoidable; considerably larger rises may be expected if fertility rates do not stabilize at the replacement level of about 2.1 children per woman. At present, about 95 percent of this growth is in the less developed countries (LDCs); the percentage of global population that live in the LDCs is projected to increase from 77 percent in 1990 to 84 percent in 2020.

More recent projections since 1990 have all shown gradual but encouraging reductions in population forecasts. Nevertheless, the nature of the problem is indicated by the fact that here on Earth now the number of people who are alive represent ten percent of all people who have ever lived. The report went on:

Although there is a relationship between population, economic activity, and the environment, it is not simple. Most of the environmental changes during the twentieth century have been a product of the efforts of humans to secure improved standards of food, clothing, shelter, comfort, and recreation. Both developed and developing countries have contributed to environmental degradation. Developed countries, with 85 percent of the world's gross national product and 23 percent of its population, account for the majority of mineral and fossil-fuel consumption. One issue alone, the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide, has the potential for altering global climate with significant consequences for all countries. The prosperity and technology of the developed countries, however, give them the greater possibilities and the greater responsibility for addressing environmental problems.

In the developing countries the resource consumption per capita is lower, but the rapidly growing population and the pressure to develop their economies are leading to substantial and increasing damage to the local environment. This damage comes by direct pollution from energy use and other industrial activities, as well as by activities such as clearing forests and inappropriate agricultural practices.

Scientific and technical innovations, such as in agriculture, have been able to overcome many pessimistic predictions about resource constraints affecting human welfare. Nevertheless, the present patterns of human activity accentuated by population growth should make even those most optimistic about future scientific progress pause and reconsider the wisdom of ignoring these threats to our planet. Unrestrained resource consumption for energy production and other uses, especially if the developing world strives to achieve living standards based on the same level of consumption as the developed world, could lead to catastrophic outcomes for the global environment.

Some of the environmental changes may produce irreversible damage to the Earth's capacity to sustain life. Many species have already disappeared, and many more are destined to do so. Man's own prospects for achieving satisfactory living standards are threatened by environmental deterioration, especially in the poorest countries where economic activities are most heavily dependent upon the quality of natural resources.

If they are forced to deal with their environmental and resource problems alone, the least developed countries (LDCs) face overwhelming challenges. They generate only 15 percent of the world's GNP, and have a net cash outflow of tens of billions of dollars per year. Over one billion people live in absolute

poverty, and 600 million on the margin of starvation. And the LDCs have only 6-7 percent of the world's active scientists and engineers, a situation that makes it very difficult for them to participate fully in global or regional schemes to manage their own environment.

In places where resources are administered effectively, population growth does not inevitably imply deterioration in the quality of the environment. Nevertheless, each additional human being requires natural resources for sustenance, each produces by-products that become part of the ecosystem, and each pursues economic and other activities that effect the natural world. While the impact of population growth varies from place to place and from one environmental domain to another, the overall pace of environmental changes has unquestionably been accelerated by the recent expansion of the human population.

There is an urgent need to address economic activity, population growth, and environmental protection as interrelated issues. The forthcoming UN Conference on Environment and Development, to be held in Brazil, should consider human activities and population growth, in both the developing and developed worlds, as crucial components affecting the sustainability of human society. Effective family planning, combined with continued economic and social development in the LDCs, will help stabilize fertility rates at lower levels and reduce stresses to the global environment. At the same time, greater attention in the developed countries to conservation, recycling, substitution and efficient use of energy, and a concerted program to start mitigating further build-up of greenhouse gases will help ease the threat to the global environment.

Unlike many other steps that could be taken to reduce the rate of environmental changes, reductions in rates of population growth can be accomplished through voluntary measures. Surveys in the developing world repeatedly reveal large amounts of unwanted childbearing. By providing people with the means to control their own fertility, family planning programs have major possibilities to reduce rates of population growth and hence to arrest environmental degradation. Also, unlike many other potential interventions that are typically specific to a particular problem, a reduction in the rate of population growth would affect many dimensions of environmental changes. Its importance is easily underestimated if attention is focused on one problem at a time.

What are the relevant topics to which scientific research can make long-lasting contributions? These include: development of new generations of safe, easy to use, and effective contraceptive agents and devices; development of environmentally benign alternative energy sources; improvements in agricultural production and food processing; further research in plant and animal genetic varieties; further research in biotechnology relating to plants, animals, and preservation of the environment; improvements in public health, to understanding the nature and dimensions of the world's biodiversity, especially through development of effective drugs and vaccines for malaria, hepatitis, AIDS, and other infectious diseases causing immense human burdens. Also needed is research on topics such as: improved land-use practices to prevent ecological degradation, loss of top soil, and desertification of grasslands; better institutional measures to protect watersheds and groundwater; new technologies for waste disposal; environmental remediation, and pollution control; new materials that reduce pollution and the use of hazardous substances during their life cycle; and more effective regulatory tools that use market forces to protect the environment.

Greater attention also needs to be given to understanding the nature and dimensions of the world's biodiversity. Although we depend directly on biodiversity for sustainable productivity, we cannot even estimate the number of species of organisms – plants, animals, fungi, and micro-organisms – to an order of magnitude. We do know, however, that the current rate of reduction in biodiversity is unparalleled over the past 65 million years. The loss of biodiversity is one of the fastest moving aspects of global change, is irreversible, and has serious consequences for the human prospect in the future.

What are the limits of scientific contributions to the solution of resource and environmental problems? Scientific research and technological innovation can undoubtedly mitigate these stresses and facilitate a less destructive adaptation of a growing population to its environment. Yet, it is not prudent to rely on science and technology alone to solve problems created by rapid population growth, wasteful resource consumption, and harmful human practices.

The application of science and technology to global problems is a key component of providing a decent standard of living for the majority of the human race. Science and technology have an especially important role to play in developing countries in helping them to manage their resources effectively and to participate fully in worldwide initiatives for common benefit. Capabilities in science and technology must be strengthened in LDCs as a matter of urgency through joint initiatives from the developed and developing worlds. But science and technology alone are not enough. Global policies are urgently needed to promote more rapid economic development throughout the world, more environmentally benign patterns of human activity, and more rapid stabilization of world population.

The future of the planet is in balance. Sustainable development can be achieved, but only if irreversible degradation of the environment can be halted in time. The next 30 years may be crucial.

Five months after the 1992 Summit, the Union of Concerned Scientists sponsored its *World Scientists Warning to Humanity*, which was signed by 1,670 of them, including 104 Nobel Prize winners – a majority of the living recipients of the Prize in the sciences.

Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about... No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished.

Warning. We the undersigned, senior members of the world's scientific community, hereby warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the Earth and the life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated...

The Earth is finite. Its ability to absorb wastes and destructive effluent is finite. Its ability to provide food and energy is finite. Its ability to provide for growing numbers of people is finite. And we are fast approaching many of Earth's limits. Current economic practices which damage the environment, in both developed and developing nations, cannot be continued without the risk that vital global systems will be damaged beyond repair...

The developed nations are the largest polluters in the world today. They must greatly reduce their over-consumption, if we are to reduce pressures on resources and the global environment. The developed nations have the obligation to provide aid and support to developing nations, because only the developed nations have the financial resources and the technical skills for these tasks.

Acting on this recognition is not altruism, but enlightened self-interest: whether industrialized or not, we all have but one lifeboat. No nation can escape from injury when global biological systems are damaged. No nation can escape from conflicts over increasingly scarce resources. In addition, environmental and economic instabilities will cause mass migrations with incalculable consequences for developed and undeveloped nations alike.

Developing nations must realize that environmental damage is one of the gravest threats they face, and that attempts to blunt it will be overwhelmed if their populations go unchecked. The greatest peril is to become trapped in spirals of environmental decline, poverty, and unrest, leading to social, economic, and environmental collapse.

Success in this global endeavour will require a great reduction in violence and war. Resources now devoted to the preparation and conduct of war – amounting to over \$1 trillion annually – will be badly needed in the new tasks and should be diverted to the new challenges.

A new ethic is required – a new attitude towards discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the Earth. We must recognize the Earth's limited capacity to provide for us. We must recognize its fragility. We must no longer allow it to be ravaged. This ethic must motivate a great movement, convincing reluctant leaders and reluctant governments and reluctant peoples themselves to effect the needed changes.

The scientists issuing this warning hope that our message will reach and affect people everywhere. We need the help of many.

We require the help of the world community of scientists – natural, social, economic, political;

We require the help of the world's business and industrial leaders;

We require the help of the world's religious leaders; and

We require the help of the world's peoples.

We call on all to join us in this task.

When this second 'warning' was released to the media, Canada's national newspapers and television ignored it, no American television network reported it, while the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* rejected it as 'not newsworthy'. While these two warnings do not cover all our problems, they seem to be as important and as clear about our future as could possibly be broadcast. The media's reaction indicates the depth of denial and/or the power of the controlling interests. Ted Stannard, academic and former UPI correspondent, put it this way: "When watchdogs, bird dogs, and bull dogs morph into lap dogs, lazy dogs, or yellow dogs, the nation is in trouble." (Helen Thomas, Lap Dogs of the Press. *The Nation*, 10 March 2006.)

The United Nations June 1997 meeting to take stock of progress since the 1992 Summit produced much condemnation of broken promises by the rich nations, especially the United States. The UN General Assembly President, Razali Ismail of Malaysia, predicted catastrophe if appropriate action was not taken soon: "We as a species, as a planet, are teetering on the edge, living unsustainably and perpetuating inequality, and may soon pass the point of no return." The Summit participants' declaration makes disturbing reading: "We acknowledge a number of positive results have been achieved, but we are deeply concerned the overall trends for sustainable development are worse today than they were in 1992." It seemed that throughout these summits with their concerned declarations, politicians, main-line economists, heads of treasuries, financiers and the business world in general had not been listening. Nor did they appear to want to listen. Under the present system are they capable of listening? That was 14 years ago. So what's changed fundamentally for the better? The overall situation has worsened. Take population growth, one of the major factors contributing to our global deterioration. There are now over six billion people on Earth with forecasts of a 50 percent increase within the lifetime of most of those now here. Reliable scientific authorities have already stated that the Earth can reasonably support about two billion people.

Over March 3-5 2006 the Texas Academy of Science at Lamar University in Beaumont was addressed by the evolutionary ecologist and lizard expert Dr Eric R Pianka. Pianka began his talk by explaining that the general public was not ready to hear what he was about to say. He laid out his concern that the sharp increase in human overpopulation since the start of the industrial age was devastating Earth. He went on to assert that the only feasible solution is to reduce the population to 10 percent by means of the highly lethal airborne disease Ebola! On the oil situation Pianka reflected that "the fossil fuels are running out so I think we may have to cut back to two billion people." After the questioning was over, almost every scientist, professor and college student stood and vigorously applauded.

The 'sustainable development' concept results in a Catch 22 situation, for in addition to development meaning a "gradual unfolding, a fuller working out, realising the potential of, bringing to a fuller or better state," it also means "product" and "more elaborate form" – the significance of which is not lost on politicians, industry and growth agencies. Growth, on the other hand, means "to increase in size by assimilation or accretion of materials, the action or process of growing". When something develops it becomes different – quality (good, bad or indifferent) is involved. When something grows, quantity is involved. A proper distinction is essential for our well-being. Earth's ecosystem develops; it does not grow. Thus sustainable development means a qualitative improvement without quantitative growth beyond the point where our global ecosystem cannot regenerate. But most politicians, economists and industrialists, with their smooth talk of 'sustainable economic growth', repeatedly demonstrate that either they do not understand the difference, or, if they do, do not wish to make any distinction, or possibly are prisoners of the situation. Today, 'sustainable development' is supposed to provide a panacea for all our problems. Already its definitions are becoming more tunnel-like and are being equated with the idea of an 'acceptable' level of ecological destruction. In the political and business world, sustainable economic growth – an oxymoron or pointedly foolish statement – has become a catch phrase. The process is now completely out of control. As numerous writers have pointed out it is in the immediate interests of governments to collude with the transnational organisations which are primarily engaged in this continued destruction of Earth's resources. Growth, the "ideology of the cancer cell", is very likely to kill us, as Herman Daly has suggested. See Edward Abbey, *The Fool's Progress*, 1988. Also my book *Five Holocausts* – the most comprehensive combined work on the major problems facing us: militarism, human oppression, economic destitution, the population explosion, and environmental destruction - covers the 'growth syndrome' in some detail.

The Pacific Institute of Resource Management, in an opening overview to its Annual Report 1995-96, drew attention to this rapidly developing and alarming situation:

The achievements of the 1992 Earth Summit and its high hopes for a just and sustainable society are being rapidly forgotten and cast aside as the interests of big business push their agenda for economic growth through a free market, and a minimum role for government. Certainly, resistance to this fallacious doctrine is growing as realisation emerges that society is being caught in the grip of the world's most powerful crusade to shift ever more wealth to the already wealthy and powerful. The process downgrades people's welfare and the integrity of the natural world in a take-over of the global economy by the great corporations and financial institutions. Those who oppose this process are seen by the establishment as Luddites or psychopaths.

Governments decreasingly represent the needs and aspirations of their people. Instead, they relate more to the international economic players in seeking economic growth as an end in itself. NGOs and social movements worldwide are increasingly concerned about this trend in both the short- and long-term.

The onslaught on the natural world continues unabated. Obstacles to bringing the development process under control and moving to a sustainable economy are formidable, a situation likely to remain until there is a general realisation that the present global economic regime is a path to catastrophe. Familiarity with the issues only reinforces this conclusion.

Governments must be told that the present regime and economic directions are working against people's interests and the planet itself as our universal provider. They must be told what needs to be done.

The August/September 2002 Earth Summit Two in Johannesburg failed to reach agreements of any real substance. As at Stockholm (1972) and especially at Earth Summit One in Rio (1992), the United States hamstrung operations in order to incapacitate the United Nations as a meaningful international body that can place limits on global greed and corporate power. The US has continued to throw large spanners in the works with increasing frequency.

Millions continue to live far below the minimum levels for a decent human existence... the industrial countries should make efforts to reduce the gap between themselves and the developing countries. (Stockholm, 1972.)

All states and all people shall co-operate in the essential task of eradicating poverty... in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world. (Rio, 1992.)

South African President Thabo Mbeki launched the 2002 Summit with a call to end 'global apartheid'. While 10,000 peaceful protesters marched from Johannesburg's squalid shanty towns of tin shacks and open sewers, negotiators argued over whether a text would say 'including' or 'and in particular'. South Africa's Environmental Minister, top summit mediator Valli Moosa, summed it all up when he said: "The talks are going nowhere." As Christian Aid's head of policy, Paul Ladd, put it: "A poor person in a poor country has very little to celebrate after this meeting of world leaders." This failure, although not surprising, was all the more shocking in the light of the already acute *State of Emergency* existing on Earth.

In February 2005 the *Hirsch Report* was released for the US Department of Energy. It played out three scenarios – wait until peak oil occurs then take crash action; initiate mitigation program 10 years before peak oil; initiate mitigation action 20 years before peak oil. As peak oil may have passed or be very close most of the world is trapped in the first scenario which will produce the most devastating results. (Refer 'oil gurus' Campbell, Simmons, Heinberg, Roberts, et al.)

On April 2 2005, Pope John Paul II died from "extrapyramidal neurological disorder" – Parkinson's disease – which had been kept secret for 12 years. On the same day, the United Nations five volume *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* was made public. With the Pope's death much of the world stopped. The *Assessment*, put together over five years and clearly reiterating

what we had already been told so often, namely that our civilisation was relentlessly moving towards the cliff, disappeared from the news.

All this can make for acute despondency. We are already living in a grossly dysfunctional world whose New World Order has greatly diminished our social capital and led to the kind of global poverty described by Christopher Richards as “characterised by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, shame, depression and despair as well as disillusionment and sometimes aggression and violence.”

If I was to vent my inner feelings regarding our stupidity I would spit blood. But to try to sum up. At the heart of this worldwide crisis of vast and gross disparities lie two basic lethal flaws.

- An all-powerful dysfunctional economic capitalist system of greed and growth and profit before people, to which all other considerations the world’s power brokers are committed, has triggered enormous destruction through the wholesale promotion of materialism and consumption - vastly encouraged by the most insidious multi-billion dollar advertising industry - and has promoted a strong desire for the same destructive life-styles in the developing world which it has already overwhelmingly degraded and exploited.
- Earth’s varied and complex natural ecosystems, on which all life depends and on an understanding of which the whole human economy should be based, are treated as both limitless and, for the most part, free.

Political solutions cannot humanise the faulty economics at the heart of our dilemma, for being inhuman they are unresponsive to reason.

The transformation required to forestall disaster demands a fundamentally different kind of new world order from that being so loudly trumpeted by officialdom. It will amount to the greatest change in the history of Western humankind – a total transmutation from the present inherently inequitable, unsustainable, egocentric, anthropocentric paradigm to a fully co-operative, egalitarian, ecocentric one accompanied by an unprecedented moral change.

Have we progressed far enough along history’s time scale and acquired sufficient knowledge from previous civilisations to understand what we’re doing and where we’re going? Do we now have the ability and will to genuinely cope with *our* global situation? Indications are that we don’t and that we are still proceeding with increasing speed in the wrong direction. Jared Diamond, however, believes there is cause for hope: “Our television documentaries and books show us in graphic detail why the Easter Islanders, Classic Maya, and other past societies collapsed. Thus, we have the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of distant peoples and past peoples. That’s an opportunity that no past society enjoyed to such a degree.”

So what are *you* doing about our future?

Like most other people, I’d rather spend time with my family, go to the lab and do research in my field of genetics, or pursue my hobbies. But I have children and grandchildren. I have a profound stake in the future. I’m only one person, and I have no illusions or conceits about saving the world. But I hope my grandchildren will never look at me and tell me, ‘Grandpa, you could have done more for us.’ (David Suzuki. *Naked Ape to Superspecies*, 1999.)

(A selected Reading List, which it was thought would make this paper too long, will shortly be available on my web site www.derekjwilson.co.nz or on receipt of your email order.)

