

# CACOR AGM and Symposium

Ottawa, 23 May 1995

## Panel Discussion

### *The World Problematique: First Steps Towards Solution*

## 1. Introductory Remarks

by A.H. (Drew) Wilson. (Chairman).

Before introducing the three members of this Panel, let me take a few moments to set the scene.

This is not, of course, the very first time that possible 'solutions' to the 'World Problematique' have been discussed by CACOR members. We are in fact in the third stage of a project which began in September 1991.

At the end of the first stage. Art Hunter and his Working Group reported in a paper dated December 1991 (which appeared in the *CACOR Proceedings* of March 1992) on their examination and analysis of possible impediments to the resolution of the 'Problematique'. They assigned the impediments to a number of categories: economic; social; media; cultural; and political. They said, in particular, that at the heart of the 'Problematique' is the hyperbolically increasing scale of human activity, of which there are two main facets - increasing population, and increasing per capita consumption. The first is a problem for the 'South' and the second for the 'North'. Because of its 'North' perspective, the Group focused primarily on impediments to the reduction of consumption.

During the second stage, Bob Dobson and his Working Group discussed how options might be developed to overcome the impediments identified by the Hunter Group, and their report was carried in the *Proceedings* in October 1992. They listed three types of factor that are apparently challenging the habitability of the earth: the causes (the root ones of which are human); the symptoms of the problem (for example, deforestation

and ozone depletion); and the consequences of inaction (for example, starvation and the collapse of economic systems). At the end of their report, this Group identified a number of targets towards which efforts to overcome impediments might be aimed. For example, under 'Population' were: education, knowledge transfer, research and development, and communication.

Under 'Applicable to all' were: management improvement; reducing or modifying demands; and technological enhancement.

CACOR has not yet established the third Working Group to carry the project towards the development of an integrated plan to resolve the

'Problematique.' Instead, we have been examining aspects of solution development through, for example, the Global Modelling Group and, more recently, the Ecological Development Group. The question of the manageability of the solution-identifying process has been raised and some answers found, but more remains to be done. As well, the Ottawa luncheon program over the past three years has been focused on potential inputs to the substance for such a plan, as have most of the papers and articles that have appeared in the *Proceedings* and the *Newsletter*. Indeed, today's Panel discussion is intended as another input to this process.

Among the reasons for having these inputs and this discussion at this particular point in time is the realization that while much has already been said in print and elsewhere by way of high-level intellectual analysis of Aurelio Peccei's 'World, with the notable exception of the King/Schneider book, *The First Global Revolution*, relatively little attention has been

### Panel Participants

**Drew Wilson (Chairman)**

**Nicole Morgan;** *The Shrinking of Time*

**Morris Miller:** *Reconciling Environmental Commitment and Development*

**Fred Belaire:** *Governance and the Knowledge Society*

paid in print or elsewhere to the resolution of an overall, integrated solution plan. We are, of course, conscious of the fact that solutions have been proposed for dealing with aspects of the 'Problematique' – with the physical environment or with population, for example. And we are conscious of the warning that tells us there may not be a lot of time left before a significant crisis makes us wish we had worked harder and faster, and had made a more vigorous case to decision-makers who have the power to get things changed – in Canada and in the rest of the world.

At the same time, I believe we are well aware of the enormous complexity and difficulty of developing the kind of integrated plan that would deal adequately with the 'Problematique' and that even greater problems are likely to arise if – and when – such a plan is applied to the actual solution process. This becomes eminently clear when we remind ourselves of the interconnections between the main elements of the 'Problematique' – population; the physical environment; non-renewable resources and energy; and economic growth. It is, of course, quite proper to point out that these four main elements can be sub-divided into dozens of significant problem areas. Also, neither the elements nor their sub-divisions apply with equal force to all parts of the world – or even within the same parts of it – when political, economic, social, behavioural and other factors are taken into account.

But let me suggest that our task will be impossible – and, goodness knows, it is on the surface quite impossible – unless we do things that some analysts do all the time: simplify the overall problem by discarding certain factors deemed peripheral to the main argument, and make assumptions with regard to some others. But in our simplification and assumption-making we should take more care than the other analysts seem to manage. We should indeed apply Occam's Razor, but with due regard for those things that are real, earthy, possible, and achievable.

A major criticism has been applied to the Club of Rome approach to the problem analysis and solution process. With the possible exception of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, no one a hundred years ago could have forecast the kinds of technical, economic and social changes that are in place today – and especially those that have occurred since the end of World War II. So how, this argument goes, could the Club successfully predict the future? How can we in 1995 possibly predict the kind of world that people will live in a hundred years from now? The corollary of this is

that, had the doomsayers of 1895 had their way, the processes of enterprise, research, technology change and innovation, and so on, would have been stopped in their tracks to everyone's disadvantage in the longer term.

There is, of course, much we do not yet know that will affect the outcome of any CACOR integrated solution exercise, but it appears that we will not be allowed a lifetime of contemplation, or allowed even to wait until we have enough information to be fully confident of the outcome of the exercise. In truth, we will never have enough time or information. But it should still be possible for new data to be gathered as we go on what we don't now know, and for it to be fed in while the plan is under development. So what we need to know now, above all else, is what we don't yet know.

We should also be couching the plan in terms of policies rather than programs since the main objective should be to influence decision-makers. Programs will be the means through which these people take action. But different decision-making units will not necessarily use the same programs to implement the same policies.

On the question of timing, we should have some idea of when the different elements of the 'Problematique' are likely to reach crisis proportions in the different parts of the world. It can be argued with regard to the physical environment, for example, that the Planet Earth as a whole has already been laid waste irrecoverably. Or does this apply to the whole, or just to some parts of it?

Perhaps most important in our world of instant communications – much of which is becoming accustomed to hearing bad news and worse forecasts by the hour and pays little or no attention to any of them – is that the content of the message is just as important for the success of the plan as is the delivery of the message itself. So there has to be in it some hope, some reconciliation, some assurance of lessened rather than heightened difficulties for individuals as well as groups of individuals. Again, it will not be enough to say, simply, that education, or zero economic growth, or more family planning, or something else is the key. Some people can't, or won't learn, and others can be quite deaf. So the noise that is made must first be heard before it can be broadly accepted. Perhaps at the end of our discussion today we may be ready to set up the third Working Group and ask it to begin the formulation of our plan. Perhaps not.