

PROCEEDINGS

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Honoring the Past and Facing the Future

The loss of two old friends cast a pall over spring. Dr. Alexander King and Kenneth Hammond succumbed to the ravages of age early this year. Each had an important influence on the development of CACOR.

Ken Hammond died in March at the age of 92 after a long illness. When I used Hammond transformers in the 1950s I had no idea that the man behind that famous brand would become a close friend and colleague in CACOR. However Ken's concern about global problems started well before he knew anything about The Club of Rome or CACOR. He established a Club of Guelph in the 1960s - a group which met regularly to discuss population growth, energy, environment, food supply, pollution, etc. They also distributed a regular newsletter. Eventually his activities were noticed in CoR circles and he was invited to join CACOR. He was a leading contributor to CACOR Annual Meetings over many years. His excellent booklet¹ about the global predicament is still well worth reading.

During his retirement Ken Hammond made many attempts to introduce the Global Problematique into the University of Guelph curriculum. He seeded several of these with substantial sums of his own money. While the attempts were often frustrated by changes in senior personnel, two of them succeeded - at least for a time. A course titled "5000 Days" was made available to students at all

levels for several years. The annual Hammond Lectures, which he also endowed, still attract to Guelph distinguished speakers on topics relevant to the global problematique. Ken's unique contribution will not be forgotten. We shall miss him.

Alexander King survived his 98th birthday and completed his autobiographical memoirs² in the weeks before his death at the end of February, in spite of severe disabilities. Late chapters of this long-anticipated work provide an account of his role in the founding of The Club of Rome in the late 1960s and his relationship to it in subsequent years, including his years as President.

As a result of discussions in his office at OECD in Paris, Alex came to Canada with Aurelio Peccei in 1970, met the Prime Minister and the Governor General and obtained their support for Canada's activities related to The Club of Rome. He also addressed CACOR Annual Meetings and participated in many ad hoc discussions over the years. It was during the key period 1969 -1974 that CACOR was conceived, born, christened and finally incorporated. We were honoured to be able to take advantage of Alex King's experience and wisdom and we have lost a distinguished and valuable friend.

We had known from private communications that both Alex and Ken had become increasingly pessimistic about the future of civilization. That is not surprising because, even in the formative stages of CoR and CACOR in the late 1960s, some of us working with Alex in his OECD Committee felt that it might already be too late to reverse the effects of unrestrained population growth, excessive consumption and the resultant pollution and waste. Now, 40 years and a few billion people later, we can no longer avoid some of the worst effects of growth.

The dangers of unrestrained growth were formulated by Dennis and Donella Meadows³ in their landmark book "Limits to Growth" in 1972, sponsored by The Club of Rome. Few will remember that their preliminary findings were first presented in Canada. The presentation took place at a full meeting of The Club of Rome, which was held in the Chateau Montebello in April 1971 at the invitation of the small group that was formalized as CACOR three years later. There was initially a strong adverse reaction to its

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“doomsday” projection of disaster if we did not change our ways⁴.

We have not changed. Today, some prominent individuals in the media are now echoing the doomsday message. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change now recognizes⁵ that climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions is in imminent danger of progressing beyond control; that huge reductions of carbon emissions are needed urgently if the danger is to be mitigated. But it is evident that politicians are not prepared to acknowledge the size of the problem, even if they understand its general nature. Their response to climate change is typically too little too late.

So-called ‘clean’ measures such as wind farms, ethanol fuels and changing light bulbs are attractive to politicians mainly for reasons other than global warming. They are popular with industry and the farming community for the subsidies they attract and the jobs they create. The magnitude and timing of their effect on global warming is indirect and can only be estimated by a complex series of calculations. While they may be appropriate in some circumstances, their harmful effects are often overlooked. We know that shutting down a fossil-fueled power station will save 100% of its carbon emissions immediately. So will grounding a transatlantic jet, laying up a ship, taking a vehicle off the road or discontinuing the use of fossil fuels in commercial and domestic premises.

How likely is it that any such direct measures will be taken while the global population continues to grow? New ‘clean’ sources of energy may not even

keep up with the growing demand, and may never replace ‘dirty’ sources at the rate we are growing. How likely is it that politicians in many countries will simultaneously take the draconian measures that are essential to avert the danger? At the time of their last communications, neither Alex King nor Ken Hammond thought it very likely. As Meadows implied, we all have to change our ways. Alex King and Ken Hammond realized the enormity and complexity of the problems ahead and were pessimistic about the ability of people and governments to change before the situation moves out of their control.

Perhaps we could best remember these outstanding individuals by doing what we can to address the pessimism that troubled them. It is already too late to debate technical fixes. CACOR and The Club of Rome should now be concerned with the human response to a critical situation that demands fundamental and uncomfortable change.

J. Rennie Whitehead

¹ *Laying Waste to Planet Earth* by Ken Hammond

² *Let the Cat Turn Round: One Man's Traverse of the Twentieth Century* by Alexander King, CPTM, December 2006

³ *Limits to Growth* Meadows, Universe, 1972

⁴ e.g. *The Doomsday Syndrome* by John Maddox, McGraw Hill, 1972

⁵ IPCC Report *Climate Change 2007: The Mitigation of Climate Change* May 4, 2007