

Dr. Alexander King, CMG, CBE

1909 – 2007

Alexander King, co-founder of the Club of Rome, died on Feb 28th 2007. He was a scientist, international civil servant, integrative comprehensive thinker and pioneering environmentalist, and at the forefront of new approaches about the role of science in public policy. He received wide recognition for his work and was accorded many awards among which were the United States Medal of Freedom, the Erasmus Medal from the Netherlands, and honorary degrees from several universities, including Strathclyde and the Open University.

King was born and raised in Glasgow, Scotland. He received a degree in chemistry at the Royal College of Science, followed by graduate studies at the University of Munich.

King's subsequent lecturing at the Imperial College of Science was interrupted by the outbreak of WWII when he became involved with scientific research at the Ministry of Supply. As a chemist, King was instrumental in the development of DDT, a pesticide that was urgently sought to counter apprehended typhus epidemics in the armed forces.

In 1943 Alexander King was posted to the US to foster collaboration on war directed research programs, becoming the Director of the British Scientific Office in Washington.

After the war, King returned to London and became head of the Central Scientific Secretariat, personal scientific advisor to the Lord President, and secretary of the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy. King then moved to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research where he extended beyond his grounding in physical sciences to promote research in economic and behavioral sciences, including a ground-breaking analysis of the social, economic, educational, technological and political aspects of automation.

Having been deeply involved with the origin of its predecessor (OEEC) that evolved into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), King became its Director General for Scientific Affairs. There, he pioneered the study of science in government policy. He also became concerned about the long-term consequences of untrammelled economic growth. Through his contacts King encountered other scientists, industrialists, and members of academe who shared his concern, leading to his becoming aware of the

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writings and then meeting with Aurelio Peccei, an international Italian industrialist. King and Peccei met to discuss their mutual interests in sustainable growth that was confronted by the threats posed by the population explosion, environmental degradation and misuse of technology.

King and Peccei co-founded the Club of Rome in 1968 with a number of like-minded individuals who shared the co-founders' concern for what became known as the global Problematique. The Club's purpose was to foster understanding of the varied components—economic, political, natural, and social—that make up the global system and especially to recognize their interdependence. To further its purpose, the Club embarked on several studies that brought forth numerous books and reports, the most famous of which is the *Limits To Growth*, based on a computer simulation, which presented projections—if present trends continued—of what could occur with respect to various components of the global system such as population, economic growth, pollution, waste creation, energy consumption and resource depletion.

After his retirement from OECD in 1974, King continued to proselytize his concerns about the Problematique. In related activities he organized the formation of IFIAS—the International Federation of Institutes of Advanced Study, a group of 15 institutes that committed themselves to dealing with aspects of the "world Problematique" and became its first Chairman. He also co-founded the Foundation for International Training in Toronto, as an organization dedicated to providing on the ground technological training in underdeveloped countries. He became head of the Club of Rome on the death of Aurelio Peccei in 1984, retiring in 1992 when his wife became seriously ill.

King's autobiography, *Let the Cat Turn Round* was published shortly before his death. His earlier books include *Science and Policy: the International Stimulus*, *The State of the Planet* (1980), and *The First Global Revolution* (1991).

King's wife, Sara, died in 1999. He is survived by two daughters.

After describing a disturbing and depressing scenario for coming decades in the last chapter of his book, King ends his reflections with the following words:

Despite all my fears for the future of man and society, I find that I am still curiously optimistic. I still believe that homo sapiens has the inner capability to develop to be something greater than itself.

Significant portions of this obituary have been extracted from the *London Times* of 15 March 2007 and the *Scotsman* of 29 March.