

# THE GRAND BARGAIN

*The tangible prospect of global environmental collapse has elicited some new approaches to international cooperation.*

BY DAVID RUNNALLS

**A**S AN ILLUSTRATION THAT 1988 WAS definitely the year of the environment, that bible of middle class American propriety, *Time* magazine, nominated Earth as planet of the year (one wonders which one is in the running for next year's award) and devoted almost an entire issue not only to environmental matters but to international environmental matters. *Time's* more affluent stablemate, *Fortune*, capped things off by describing 1988 as "The year the earth spoke back."

To put this development in perspective, let us remember that Margaret Thatcher was elected for the first time as Prime Minister only ten years ago on a platform that could generously be described as being contemptuous of the natural environment and those who cared about it; Ronald Reagan believed fervently when he was elected in 1980 that many of the so-called pollution problems were caused by trees; and the Conservative government assumed office in Canada in 1984, confident that it could substantially cut the budget and staff of Environment Canada with impunity. At one point, the Nielsen Commission seriously considered abolishing the department completely. On the other side of the political spectrum, the Soviet Union had always maintained that environmental problems were fundamentally caused by the structure and operation of capitalism and were largely absent from the Soviet system.

These perspectives were all changed during one extraordinary week in October of last year when the following cast of characters each made an environmental speech: George Bush (remember the "I have always been an environmentalist" address?); Michael Wilson (to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund of all people); Edouard Shevardnadze (who told the UN General Assembly that the Soviet Union viewed global environment change as the single greatest threat to its national security) and even the redoubtable Margaret Thatcher – the Iron Lady told the Royal Society that atmospheric change was the single greatest challenge facing the scientific community for the remainder of the century.

Not only had a number of these people been converted along the road to environmental Damascus, but some of the conversions seem to have been truly miraculous. George Bush and Michael Dukakis had not become born-again environmentalists; they had become, through some miracle of alchemy, life-long environmentalists.

WHY ARE ALL THE POLITICAL LEADERS OF THE Western (and increasingly the Eastern) world looking to don cloaks of various shades of green? The answer is perhaps best found in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development – the Brundtland Commission. The Commission points out that no matter what we do, during the next decade the planet's population will double and that feeding, housing and clothing both ourselves and our five billion new neighbours will require an expansion of five to ten times our present economic production. An expansion of anything like this size will place such enormous strain on natural systems that the Commission concluded that the natural environment would become a significant constraint on economic growth.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the earth's natural systems speaking back is the increasing evidence that we are changing the world's climate. As the participants in last summer's Toronto Climate Conference pointed out: "... the rates and magnitude of climate change in the next century may substantially exceed those experienced over the last 5,000 years. Such high rates of change would be sufficiently disruptive that no country would likely benefit in toto from climate change."

The participants were speaking of the changes resulting from further destruction of the earth's layer of protective ozone caused by CFCs commonly used to blow foam, run cooling devices, and by the electronics industry. They were also referring to the "greenhouse effect" in which the build-up of carbon dioxide and other gases leads to an overall warming of the earth's climate, with accompanying major rises in sea levels within the next thirty to forty years.

Negotiations on ozone have proceeded rapidly since the discovery of the first ozone hole over Antarctica in 1986. In September 1987, Canada hosted a meeting which produced the Montreal protocol – an agreement to cut consumption of CFCs in half by the turn of the century. Before the protocol had fully entered into force, a flurry of diplomatic activity, culminating in meetings in London and Helsinki earlier this year, called for a halt to production of the substances by the year 2000.

Canada also opened the batting on global warming with the 1988 Toronto Conference. It set a goal of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by at least twenty percent by the year 2005. It was followed by a meeting of legal experts in Ottawa in February of this year and by meetings of the preparatory groups for the next World Climate Conference to be held sometime in 1990. It is hoped that drafts of legal instruments for regulating at least some of the greenhouse gases will be ready by the time of that meeting.

There is a growing realization, however, that none of this is enough. Atmospheric change is a genuinely global problem, demanding global solutions and some sort of burden sharing. When countries had agreed on the need to eliminate ozone destroying chemicals, the problem arose of how to help developing countries to achieve the new standards. Countries such as China and India have ambitious plans to provide refrigerators on a large scale to their massive populations – a goal which it would be difficult to fault. Why should they, they reason, have to cut back on these plans or replace the cheap freon now used in refrigerators with more expensive substitutes?

This problem of equity is even more pronounced in the case of global warming. The US and the USSR between them produce almost forty percent of the CO<sub>2</sub> released by the burning fossil fuels. China and the other developing countries produce a small fraction of that amount. Chinese development plans call for the construction of some two-hundred new coal-fired generating stations in the medium-term future. Any gains from major cutbacks in energy production by the superpowers, Japan