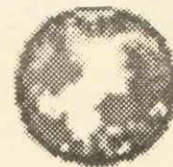




# Welcome to my world



by Adam Newman

My biology professor put an early end to the lesson about protein structure so that my classmates and I could hear Jim MacNeill speak.

Dr. MacNeill is a senior fellow with the Institute for Research on Public Policy in Ottawa, former director of environment for the Organization of Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD), former secretary-general of the Brundtland World Commission on Environment and Development, special adviser to the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit this year, author, commentator, and international consultant on sustainable development.

Now that we have slogged through some of his many and distinguished titles, you may be interested to know that MacNeill's talk on November 17, called "The Road from Rio: Setting the Compass" was the third and

final of a series called Caring for Planet Earth, this year's set of Dorothy J. Killam Memorial Lectures. The lectures were funded by a portion of the sixty million dollars that she left Dalhousie University.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce our speaker. MacNeill is active in both the environmental movement and in politics. He is a diplomat. "An optimist is someone who believes that we live in the best of all possible worlds," he said. "A pessimist is someone who fears that he may be right." MacNeill is a realist who has been working for the protection of the environment since 1977. His line of work is a new one.

"Three decades ago there was no such thing as an environmentalist. People like Rachel Carson, Barbara Ward, and others were trailblazers who opened up the movement. Then, at the end of the 60s, we got a

beautiful photograph of the Earth which was very helpful in changing people's attitudes." When people's attitudes began to change, the time was ripe for political action.

The United Nations held an important conference in Stockholm in

## "Three decades ago there was no such thing as an environmentalist"

1972, attended by Canada's Maurice Strong, the eventual organizer of this year's Rio Summit. The United Nations Environmental Plan (UNEP) was formed, calling for environmental protection. The problem was that these measures treated the symptoms, and not the sources of environmental problems, said MacNeill.

During the 1970s several countries, including Japan, Sweden, and others developed more energy-efficient technologies that were less harmful to the environment. Pressure on the Earth's resources of water, trees, and soil continued to grow. Human beings now consume almost 50% of the plants on Earth.

In 1983, the UN General Assembly called for the establishment of an independent commission to address the problem of how the developing economy and the environment could best co-exist. MacNeill was on the commission which reported to the UN in 1987.

"If the world's population is allowed to double within the next forty years, and we are well on our way, can the planet sustain such a development?" was the question they raised.

Some people believe that it can. Information technology has revolutionized the world economy, and reduced the impact that the average person has on the environment. Some point to the emerging science of biotechnology in hopes that it will further reduce human impact on the planet, and prolong our mutual existence.

But "the obstacles are not technological," said MacNeill. "If they were, then it would be easy. The obstacles are social, ideological, and political." Just the thing for a diplomat.

MacNeill and the other members of the commission found that the economy and environment are not two independent entities, as was previously believed, but interrelated and interdependent components of a single thing. They arrived at three conclusions:

1) The Earth cannot accommodate a five to ten percent increase in traditional "rape and pillage" economic activity which harms the environment.

2) Growth in world population

and consumption of non-renewable resources can be reduced.

3) Environmentally-threatening policies can be reversed and modified to improve productivity, industrial efficiency, and international competitiveness. Development will only succeed if it is sustainable, and at present it is not. Slow changes are beginning to be made.

"It is a revolution, and the good news is that it is underway," said MacNeill. "The bad news is that the government officials and heads of state at the Rio Summit left nothing unsaid, but almost everything undone...the rich, the wanna-be rich, and the poor countries all have different priorities...the members of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) would not agree on any sort of timetable to reduce energy use...experts tell me that we are using energy at an efficiency of about 3%."

Nevertheless, "there will come a time when maximum energy efficiency is realized," and we will have to be content to limit our consumption, and develop in other ways, he said. He called this a necessary "shift in values."

## The earth cannot accommodate "rape and pillage" economic activity

MacNeill is not the only Canadian who has taken a great interest in development. In 1964, Lester B. Pearson suggested that 0.7% of the Gross National Product (GNP) of developed countries should be given as aid to developing countries. That amount works out to nearly \$125 billion/year, which is what it would cost for the rich to help the poor achieve a level of sustainable development, assuming that developing countries themselves contribute over \$500 billion/year to their own development.

At present, developed countries pay about \$55 billion in aid to developing countries. At the Summit they pledged once more to meet Pearson's recommendation "by the year 2000, or as soon as possible thereafter." Said MacNeill, "There ought to be a limit on the number of times that governments can use the same commitment to get off a political hook."

In fact, a poor and underdeveloped Third World represents a threat not just to the environment, but also to world peace as countries compete for a dwindling amount of natural resources. "A year ago the oil wars began; the water wars may not be far behind," he said.

Many nations were understandably very concerned, and hoped that action could be taken in Rio. Countries such as Japan and Canada supported timetables for the implemen-

tation of the Convention on Global Climatic Change, but these were dropped in exchange for the presence of President Bush at the Summit, "probably the worst deal in the history of environmental politics," said MacNeill.

"Rio confirmed that the US, as the only military superpower, and as a dominant economy, has been given an effective veto on environmental policy." However, Vice-President Elect Al Gore is a committed environmentalist, and hopefully things will change. "The global market, currently estimated at \$200 billion/year, is available to those countries who most aggressively pursue environmentally-efficient policies," said MacNeill.

"North America is behind (the rest of the world in terms of applying the new technologies of sustainable development)...If we first put our house in order, Canada can become an international force in creating Protocols to strengthen the Conventions of the Earth Summit...We control a disproportionate amount of the world's geography (so its important that we act wisely)." There are several places to start:

1) Develop strong policies to reduce energy consumption. For every dollar the government spends to promote energy efficiency, they spend 100 on the development of fossil fuels, "and incidentally on acid rain, global warming, and more," said MacNeill. The US is worse, and other countries have similar "economically perverse" policies.

2) Use our raw material intelligently so that we can "live off the interest of natural resources." We should stop measuring our economy in GNP, and incorporate environmental efficiency into a new economic indicator. Said MacNeill, "We should stop counting GNP, and discounting our future."

3) Environment considerations must be central in policy-making and in everyday life. MacNeill is well

## The US has a veto on environmental policy

aware of this as he flies around the globe to meet with other top officials, "leaving a heavy footprint on the planet" in an attempt to save it.

Germany has proposed a gradual increase in taxes on energy, coupled with a reduction on income taxes. If implemented, it would promote energy efficiency, an idea that is "worth exploring" to see if it would work in Canada. Research could be done at a university such as Dalhousie, said MacNeill.

Time is running out. The carbon content of the atmosphere has increased by 25% in the past 130 years. 100 species are extinguished every week, dealing "a body blow to evolution...We are in command," he said, "the responsibility is ours."



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