

Canada and the World's Environment

Canadians are concerned not only about the state of their environmental back yard but about the rest of the global biosphere.

They realize that what happens in one country often affects the environments of many others. At first Canadians were drawn to the plight of the great mammals — the whales, elephants and rhinos. Attention was then riveted on major environmental incidents such as oil spills, and chemical and nuclear accidents.

In recent years, Canadians have begun feeling a strong personal concern about the global atmospheric changes being triggered by "normal" development activities around the world.

The atmosphere recognizes no national boundaries. Acidic and toxic chemicals from one country are blown hundreds, even thousands of kilometres to land on other people. Global emissions of ozone-eating chemicals are destroying the planetary sun shield and exposing everyone to more harmful solar radiation. Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases combined with the effects of deforestation are altering the climatic balance of the entire planet.

Common threats to the biosphere are apparent, but they have been predicted for a long time, and Canada's involvement in discussions about the future of the global environment goes back many years.

The Brundtland Commission

Canadian environmentalist and businessman Maurice Strong chaired the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the first such meeting in history. Mr. Strong then became the first head of the newly formed United Nations Environment Program.

Canada was also instrumental in getting the United Nations to create the World Commission on Environment and Development, the Brundtland Commission.

The group's 22 members came from 21 nations around the world. They included Mr. Strong and fellow-Canadian James MacNeill, who served as its secretary-general. Canada gave \$1 million in support of the commission's work and was the site of one of its major visits in 1986.

The Brundtland Commission's final report, *Our Common Future*, issued in April 1987, has become a landmark document for promoting the idea that nations can and must find ways of doing business that do not destroy the environment. The concept is



M. Rousseau, Publiphoto

Industries continue to pollute the atmosphere.

The commission, headed by Gro Harlem Brundtland, began work in 1984. Dr. Brundtland was a former Norwegian environment minister who went from leader of the opposition to prime minister during her work with the commission.

summed up in the phrase "sustainable development." The commission said the world needs development that will alleviate poverty and suffering around the world, but this development must be different from the kind that causes massive environmental damage.

Thirty Per Cent or Bust

While no one has found a simple key to sustainable forms of development, many nations have been attacking specific, major environmental problems. Acid rain has been one of the great threats to Canada's environment with half the acidic sulphur pollution blowing north from the United States. Weather patterns in the far north drop acids and other pollutants from several nations onto the fragile Arctic environment.

As a result Canada has been pushing for controls of transboundary air pollution for many years.

Canada was a member of what became known as the 30-per-cent club, so called because signatory nations agreed to reduce their emissions of sulphur dioxide by 30 per cent by 1993. At a March 1984 meeting in Ottawa, Canada and nine European countries declared their intent to reduce acid rain and therefore long-range air pollution. The statement came just weeks after Canada announced plans to cut domestic sulphur emissions in half within a decade.

This led to the signing in 1985 of the Helsinki Protocol to reduce sulphur pollution.

Ozone-Eating Chemicals

Deterioration in the ozone layer has loomed as a major threat to the world's environment in recent years. Canadian atmospheric scientists have been part of an international effort to understand