

-< CLIMATE AND SOCIETY >-

Note 14.0

Provocations No. 275

No replies

SIS::WROBERTS "Walt Roberts"

76 lines 19-AUG-1989 14:44

Memo to: The Climate Club -- C759

19 August 1989

From: Walt Roberts

Provocation No. 275

Strategies for a Better Future in a Warmer World

Perhaps the strongest characterizing trait of the human race is adaptability. Most other forms of life on earth live moment by moment far more at the mercy of chance vagaries of the physical environment. Through a couple of million years of existence "homo sapiens sapiens," our own subspecies of homo sapiens, has begotten extraordinary skills for survival in the face of natural hazards. Only a couple of millenia of this time span are in written records, and the rest has been deduced from prehistoric digs.

It's sad, of course, that with the technologies for adaptation to the hardness of nature, we have also generated combat tools of unparalleled destruction. As we develop new skills to improve the quality of life in a changing global environment we must not forget the imperative to avert the ultimate catastrophe of all-out nuclear war. But we need also to remember it will take equal ingenuity and wisdom to prosper in a warmer earth of doubled population, which is virtually inevitable for the next century.

As populations grow, and as industrial might reaches larger percentages of our burgeoning numbers, we see the likely prospect of a global warming unprecedented since beyond the birth of mankind, indeed since extinction of the giant dinosaurs some 60 million years ago. What is the key to a good life in this not so distant future? It is, I think, to cultivate purposefully that characterizing trait of humans, adaptability.

To realize an enhanced life quality we must learn the secrets of adapting to an altered world. There are many ways to accomplish this. I list a few below. I urge the Climate Club members to add items to the list, and to think about the ways to bring them to actuality.

--> Attain more with less. Go more miles per tank of gasoline; do more of our conferring electronically; build homes that are warmed and cooled with less energy, using shade and sun and not so much oil and electricity; etc.

--> Build forests on lands where the plow should not have broken the plains; return marginal lands to perennial grasses; etc.

--> Use water more efficiently; use fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides more judiciously; practise agroforestry where possible; etc.

--> Genetically engineer new species of food and fibre crops that thrive in warmer climates; seek out and enhance natural plants already adapted to warmer weather or drier growing seasons; etc.

--> Create institutions and infrastructures that demonstrate conservation, adaptation and risk reduction in the developing and the industrialized world; bring more-with-less consciousness to our educational system from K to College; etc.

--> Pioneer novel technologies to do conventional tasks without use of diminishing resources, such as seawater irrigation of food and fibre crops as Carl Hodges and associates are doing; invent ways to use conventional resources more efficiently, as in fresh water irrigation; etc.

--> Turn wastes into new resources, as with recycling of paper, metals, glass and organic wastes; etc.

--> Internalize the costs of cleanup through taxation for carbon dioxide and other gaseous waste and pollutant emissions; tax use of rivers and landfills for industrial wastes, sewage, domestic trash; etc.

--> Promote a stronger environmental ethic at all levels of public perception; elect officials committed to conservation of nature; etc.

This is but a beginning. Many of these strategies will bring benefits of a less polluted world even if there is no change in climate. But most of them will also provide still greater benefits if there is a hotter world ahead. They are sound insurance for better life in a worst case global climate warming scenario.
