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27 July 1985

Reflections on the Future
of the Club of Rome

Before receiving a copy of Roy Megarry's letter of 17 July 1985 to Alex King, I had been reflecting over the future of the Club, prompted by what seemed to me to have been less than satisfying meetings of the membership and the Executive Committee in Spain.

I share some of Roy's complaints (but do not accept others) and much of his frustration, although I believe that more has been accomplished in the past 15 months than is realized. Nor do I ask for all the tight organization and management which he desires. A certain amount of informality, uncertainty and modest expectations are natural, it seems to me, to the kind of loose associative network which the Club is and should be if it is to be global, holistic and representative in its perspectives.

Networks are important for the promotion of thinking about one world. We can use more of them at this stage of history. The more connections and flows there are, the more likely it is that we will stimulate (and hear about) flashes of insight and inspiration, the assembly of information into relevant pieces of knowledge or wisdom, the colliding of ideas which can give rise to the unexpected and constructive.

There are few worldwide networks as consistent and clear in purpose as the Club: transnational perspective; holistic thinking; long-term views. We do not have to be as spectacular and apparently influential as Aurelio Peccei and selected reports and conferences have made us out to be. Is gaining impact attention at the existing seats of power our principal reason for existing? Can we be more humble and selective, among other things working harder to be more broadly representative?

Some of us tend to be impatient, wanting immediate results. To cultivate realism requires seeing that the spread of integrative thinking, of a global and long-term perspective, is much like the planting of seeds. After preparation of the soil (or the broadcasting of the seeds), we need to have patience

for germination and rooting to take place (and perhaps faith that, here and there, a concatenation of circumstances will bring a sudden, serendipitous sprouting!).

I value the listening to and learning from others in the Club (and their friends) as much or more than the final product of a report. I would not want to lose those connections and relationships and welcome (and will contribute to) the arrangements which help to maintain them. For my part also, I will strive to pass on what I learn through the Club, a function which each of us accepts on becoming members.

Practical Arrangements

What are the necessary practical arrangements for the functioning of the Club? What should they assure to members so that they can participate and perform more wisely and effectively in their several vocations, avocations and community associations? At least five functions come to mind:

- (1) Dissemination of reports from those who travel around the world and pick up information and ideas. Alex King does this. We need more of such reporting from other members.
- (2) Selective dispatch of information on the initiatives which Club members (and their institutions) are taking and what ideas they are generating. The flows of such information have been sporadic.
- (3) Transmission of referrals and proposals by a member for involvement of other members in projects and requests for support.
- (4) Invitations to relevant meetings and the organization of Club conferences and membership meetings (especially assuring that they have been prepared so that every moment is well utilized).
- (5) Active watching for projects which have the potential for Club sponsorship and/or formal "reports to the Club of Rome."

I feel that we should agree as soon as possible on a three-person transition team to take over direction from Alex King who is carrying too heavy a load. This transition "college" should expect to work for a period of at least three years:

- (1) to put basic funding on a clear and sound basis;
- (2) to find and appoint members from Africa, Latin America and Asia- with emphasis on those below age 60 and to include several women;

- (3) to organize an intensive search for projects which could be "adopted" by the Club;
- (4) to animate a communications network in which there are more exchanges between conferences; and
- (5) to recommend direction after the transition period.

The present Executive Committee should be transformed into an advisory council, each member being given a topic or function for which he or she would be the animator (liaison, reports, conference preparation, etc.). The "troika" mentioned above would constitute both the administrative committee (British sense) and the executive organ.

Themes and Projects

The discussion at the membership meeting in June and that of the Executive Committee was somewhat labored as to a possible major theme on "governability" (I still prefer the term "governance" as broader and more positive). Nevertheless, the theme appeared finally to have been accepted subject to an understanding that the Club would also give prominence to themes and projects of more direct interest to countries of the South: poverty; food; terms of trade (especially for natural resources); employment; etc.. A particularly pressing subject (although perhaps not appropriate for the Club) is how the world can assist the most fragile of the least developed countries. Is a new trusteeship council needed? It is agreed that we cannot be seen focussing mainly on a subject of attraction to the industrialized world and to political scientists.

It also seemed accepted that, although the framework and plan of action sketched by Jacques Lesourne was sound, work on governability should proceed slowly, in an experimental or exploratory fashion, initially with 2 or 3 very specific projects. +

Members clearly needed more time to reflect on the draft from Lesourne and on the Santander discussions. The first evidence of the desirability of second and third thoughts is found in the "post-Santander reflections" of Jean Saint-Geours dated 3 July 1985. Those observations appear wise and practical, for example when he speaks of the importance of exploring modified relationships between government (and the related, assimilated institutions) and individual citizens.

Orientation

Roy Megarry urges an orientation which is not so exclusively intellectual and focussed (consciously or unconsciously) on the affluent sectors of our societies. He is resonating to views expressed by Elmandjra, Lemma and Thapar. No small change in mental set is required! We might begin by paying more attention to the "grass roots movements" springing up everywhere, sometimes in protest, sometimes in quest for better ways (more appropriate) of doing things. They may appear small, local and simple (often single-issue), without great influence or channels to the seats of power. Nevertheless, many are, or have the potential to be, holistic.

The most noted are the peace, disarmament, green, human rights and feminist movements. But on the list are bio-regional groups; new forms of cooperatives; self-reliant, holistic experiments; health programs; survival communities within cities; mutual support information networks for the informal, underground economy; etc. In this ferment, the unexpected ideas may emerge and gather force. Through contacts with these new movements, we can learn, become more sensitive and may occasionally be able to offer help. After all, the Club's mission implies attention to what is universal in the longings and quests of humankind: to discover and learn; to enhance and praise human dignity. The world is going to need a lot of noblesse oblige to get through a period of turbulent transition.

+ Daniel Frei - "Global State of Mind"; J. Fobes - inventory and exchanges of studies on future of international institutions. Other projects may emerge, possibly in relation to Harlan Cleveland's independent major project for a 3½-year study, "Rethinking International Governance."