



« Pollution Secrecy »

Although the traditional British policy of keeping secret all pollution control data has now been abandoned by both industry and government, the Nanny knows best attitude remains firmly entrenched in the Alkali Inspectorate at least. The inspectorate's recently published 108th annual report (HMSO 75p), while playing lip service to a more open policy, nevertheless contains a classic restatement of the view that pollution control is best fixed up behind closed doors among those whose education and experience fits them to comprehend such arcane terminology as grains per cubic foot and muriatic acid. «We regard communication with the public as extremely important », writes chief inspector Frank Ireland, «and we are trying to develop the best ways of putting it into practice ». However, this belief in communication apparently falls short of providing the public with facts and figures. «Many of the issues cause great controversy even amongst the experts, and lead to opposing opinions about the effect of pollution. The relationship between emissions and their effect on the environment is complicated and only a relatively few people are capable of properly assessing emission data ».

In other words, data should be restricted to those who can understand the impact of pollution on the environment. Since even the experts are liable to disagree, it is best to withhold figures and concentrate on reassuring generalities. The possibility that « the experts » themselves — ecologists, for instance — might disagree less if they were allowed access to emission data is tacitly ignored ».

(Editorial New Scientist, 23 November 1972)

MANAGING PLANETARY MANAGEMENT

The reactions to governmental and intergovernmental responses to environmental issues have ranged from optimism to scepticism. International organizations undoubtedly have a responsibility to maintain an attitude of optimistic pressure in an effort to focus support for any positive action taken. This responsibility should not however hinder realistic assessment of the progress made and problems to be encountered. The following paragraphs are an effort to note some of the apparently unresolved difficulties. Coordination : the prime characteristic of environmental problems is their interrelationship which is often hidden. Different organizations are concerned with different problems. The creation of a new United Nations body is a direct threat to the programme responsibility of other agencies in the UN family.

The coordination problem posed by the «development» issue has only been partially resolved by making the UNDP a major channel for programme funds. The same difficulty is raised in connection with the «environment» issue except that, in addition, the relationship to the «development» mechanism must be taken into account. No solution seems to be emerging which will avoid the emasculation of the environmental programme.

Location : the advantages and disadvantages of locating the new UN body in Nairobi are fairly clear.

Whether the political value of this symbolic move can be backed up by an effective secretariat operation remains a great unknown. Is this location really a deliberate political effort to isolate and emasculate the environmental programme or is it a well thought out attempt to involve the developing countries in this new problem dimension ?

Interdisciplinary linkages : a major achievement of the debate on the environment issue has been to create an awareness of the interdisciplinary nature of the programmes required. Each problem is known to have many aspects and each is linked to others which are the guarded hunting grounds of other disciplines — in fact it is less the problems taken individually which constitute the crisis of today and more the degree of interconnection which

makes any one problem difficult to solve in isolation. It therefore comes as a surprise that the new UN body is organizing its action into the following sectors : pollutants, climate, natural disasters, information refund system, genetic resources, integrated planning, land and water management, aquatic resources, energy, wild life, international economic relations, human settlements, conservation, population, education and general. On closer examination of the recommendations behind each sectoral approach it appears that no thought has been given to interdisciplinary links between the sectors. « Integrated planning » (Recommendations 60-63, 65, 68 and 100) seems to refer mainly to the interrelationship between environment and development programmes and not the relationship between the problems for which the programmes are conceived. It does not refer to an integrative perspective on the relationships between the other sectors. « General » (95, 97 and 102) is even less concerned with the intersectoral question.

The only two references to an « interdisciplinary » approach are a disappointment. The first looks almost perfect out of context : 97 (c) « Support the concept of development of an interdisciplinary and interorganizational system primarily involving centres already in existence ».

But this refers to the marine research effort only. The second is more hopeful :

96 « take the necessary steps to establish an international programme in environmental education, interdisciplinary in approach, in school and out of school... » It does however bring to mind the old cynic's view « if you cannot do it, teach it ».

It seems a pity that the new UN body's programme should itself reinforce the barriers between sectors which the environmental issue has been so helpful in breaking down. One wonders whether the well-documented inter-state political problems in wording the Declarations and Recommendations were, not in fact matched by an invisible manoeuvring in defence of territ-

ory on the part of the representatives of the stronger disciplines. The Recommendations certainly highlight the success of the lobbying by a few disciplines. The disciplines which seem to have acquired least territory from the battle are those associated with the non-physical quality of life — namely psycho-social and cultural disciplines concerned with the well-being of the individual in other than economic terms. Nongovernmental organizations : it was a great pleasure to listen to Maurice Strong, speaking as Secretary General of the UN Conference in Geneva (October 1972). Some of the forward looking phrases jotted down by this observer include :

- « new dimensions of cooperation amongst NGOs are required »
- « network of relationships, network of institutions, tapping in to all available sources of data linked into world-wide networks »
- « official networks will not function adequately without an NGO complementary network closely related to it and, in a larger sense, part of it »
- « balance between centralization and decentralization i.e. inclusive, open and involving ».
- « NGOs should speed up their contact mechanisms »
- « NGOs should organize themselves within their own community and create a dynamic input-feedback network complementary to the official one »*.

But when one turns to the Stockholm Conference results there is very little awareness of NGOs in what was recommended. For NGOs were specifically named but not as NGOs. References to « non-governmental organizations » appeared six times in the exhortive portions of some Recommendations, for example : « The organizations of the UN system, including the regional economic commissions and UNESOB, will be called upon to participate in this activity, as will other international governmental and nongovernmental agencies ».

But the degree of mention seemed to vary between Recommendations according to the power of the scientific NGO in that sector. In some Recommendations there are only vague references to « other international bodies » which could be interpreted in a very restrictive sense. The most specific reference was, as might have been predicted, in connection with the mobilization of NGOs in support of the UN :

(97) (a) To establish an information programme... In addition, the programme must provide means of stimulating active participation by the citizens, and of eliciting interest and contributions from non-

governmental organizations... »

But in the final analysis it is not clear how the NGOs are expected to contribute or whether they are to be allowed to participate. This is particularly evident in connection with the proposed information clearing house.

Information : an information Refund Service is planned. But despite all the references to participation : « The users of the Refund Service would be governments and bodies of the United Nations system. The Service could (sic) be gradually extended to other users, subject to the availability of financial resources ».

(A/CONF. 48/49, para. 131) NGOs are expected to contribute to it but are not permitted to derive any direct benefit from it. This guarantees low-quality input and an ineffective service. This whole matter has been explored in detail with reference to the development/environment issue in ; Judge, A.J.N. *International Organizations and the Generation of the Will to Change; the information systems required*.

Brussels, Union of International Associations, 1970, 89 p.

Extracts were published in « International Associations » in 1970 (pages 135-152, 221-225, 355-361) under the title « Planning for the 1960s in the 1970s ».

This approach is a reflection of a traditional governmental opinion that most problems are best solved by self-elected experts behind closed doors. The lessons of the First Development Decade still remain to be learned. It seems that forward-thinking phrases such as :

* *Voluntary associations for the protection of the environment and the defence of users and consumers should be able to play an active part — an arrangement which, furthermore, would favour the practice of democracy* .

(A/CONF. 48/49 para. 92). seem to be included purely for public relations purposes. The UN does not appear to want to assist NGOs to function more effectively as an integral part of the world-wide network of organizations. Until the UN agencies give operational meaning to the existence of this network, outside the administrative context of consultative relationships, the attitude towards « other » bodies will continue to resemble that of the feudal baronies in the Middle Ages to serfs in their outlying territories.

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