

THE FIRST

GLOBAL

REVOLUTION

A REPORT BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CLUB OF ROME



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Orient Longman

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Ah love! Could thou and I with fate conspire,
to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
would not we shatter it to bits and then,
remould it nearer to the heart's desire?

Edward FitzGerald
The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

Foreword

1968 was the year of the Great Divide. It marked the zenith as well as the end of the long post-war period of rapid economic growth in the industrialized countries. But it was also a year of social unrest with the eruption of student uprisings in many countries and other manifestations of alienation and counter-cultural protest. In addition, it was at that time that general and vocal public awareness of the problems of the environment began to emerge.

A number of individuals close to decision-making points became concerned about the apparent incapability of governments and the international organizations of foreseeing, or even attempting to foresee, the consequences of substantial material growth without sufficient thought as to the quality aspects of the life that unprecedented general affluence should make possible. It was felt that a group of independent thinkers concerned with the long-term and deeper issues would be useful in complementing the work of the bigger organizations.

The Club of Rome took shape that year from these considerations, and was founded by Aurelio Peccei and Alexander King at the Academia dei Lincei in Rome. It chose as its initial theme, 'The Predicament of Mankind.' Aurelio Peccei was its first president, a post he retained till his death in 1984. At present, the group comprises one hundred independent individuals from fifty-three countries. The Club has absolutely no political ambition. Its members represent a wide diversity of cultures, ideologies, professions and disciplines, and are united in a common concern for the future of humanity.

From the outset, the Club's thinking has been governed by three related conceptual guidelines:

- adopting a global approach to the vast and complex problems of a world, in which interdependence between nations within a single planetary system is constantly growing;
- focussing on issues, policies and options in a longer-term perspective than is possible for governments, which respond to the immediate concerns of an insufficiently informed constituency;
- seeking a deeper understanding of the interactions within the tangle of contemporary problems – political, economic, social, cultural, psychological, technological and environmental – for which the Club of Rome adopted the term ‘the world problematique’.

The world problematique has become, as it were, the trademark of the Club. We define it as the massive and untidy mix of interrelated difficulties and problems that form the predicament in which humanity finds itself. For our present purposes we have coined a corresponding term, ‘the world resolutique’, which connotes a coherent, comprehensive and simultaneous attack to resolve as many as possible of the diverse elements of the problematique, or at least to point out ways to solutions and more effective strategies. By ‘the resolutique’, we do not suggest a grand attack on the totality of the problematique. Our proposal is rather a simultaneous attack on its main elements with, in every case, careful consideration of reciprocal impact from each of the others. In a world in which problem-solving initiatives are increasingly immobilized by bureaucracies, there is a growing role for flexible and informal groups such as the Club of Rome.

Our first publication, *The Limits to Growth*, appeared in 1972 as a report to (rather than by) the Club of Rome. The study, commissioned by the Club, was accomplished by an international team of professors and researchers at MIT using the system dynamics methodology of Jay Forrester. This was a pioneering attempt to project in interaction a number of quantifiable elements of the problematique. The report and the controversy it generated immediately gave the Club of Rome worldwide visibility or, as some would say, notoriety. It thereby achieved its main objective: the stimulation of a great debate on growth and society throughout the world and an increased awareness of the interactions that take place between the elements of the problematique. The report has sold some ten million copies in over thirty languages and has had considerable political impact. The Club was widely criticized for what was seen as advocacy of a zero growth economy. This was never our intention. We fully accepted the pressing need for material growth in the poor countries of the world, but warned readers about the consequences of an unthinking pursuit of growth by the industrialized countries, depletion of the world resource base, deterioration of the

environment, and the domination of material values in society.

Since 1972, the Club has published eighteen reports on a wide variety of issues (see Bibliography). The second among these, *Mankind at the Turning Point* by professors Pestel and Mesarovic, was a computerised growth model which also took regional situations into account. It included a strong warning of the high costs in terms of money and human suffering which would result from delays in taking action.

Two decades later, the contemporary problematique remains the same in its underlying causes as that of 1972, but differs in its mix of issues and its points of emphasis. Humanity will always have to live with the problems of its time, no matter how effective the resolutique has been in the past. Changing situations, notably those arising from the solution of past problems, give rise to new difficulties which, as always, interact. Furthermore, in times of rapid change such as the present, the mix of problems and the understanding of their relative importance is likely to change rapidly. This is partly because some of our perceptions have become clearer and partly because new knowledge has identified new dangers. Of course, the two most dominant elements are probably those of the population explosion in the South and of the only recently recognized macro-effects of man on his environment, which were exactly the two central preoccupations in *The Limits to Growth*. But new factors, such as changes in human behaviour, the emergence of seemingly irrational movements including terrorism, and the growth of individual and collective selfishness, thrown up by our materialistic society, have definitely become elements of today's problematique. Such matters are obviously relevant when considering the present situation.

The human being both creates the problematique and suffers its consequences. The problematique therefore demands a systematic analysis that pays due attention not only to what is regarded as rational behaviour, but also to instinctive and apparently irrational elements inherent in human nature that make for an uncertain world.

If the Club is to live up to its role, it is essential that we re-examine the problematique, attempt to elucidate more clearly some of its interactions, and issue warnings about the consequences and trends determined by the persistence of present economic systems and human behaviour. With the possible exception of the nuclear threat, the present dangers to humanity are probably greater and more imminent than those in 1972. We shall, no doubt, be accused as before of being harbingers of doom. This may well be our role and our glory. However, prophesying doom is by no means our sole or even main intention. It is but a necessary prelude to taking action so as to avoid the doom confronting the earth's inhabitants. *The Limits to Growth* was never