Voices of Mexico /October • December, 1992

The first global revolution: report from the Board of the Club of Rome

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Mankind may have to choose between the two extreme alternatives of committing genocide or learning to live henceforth as a single family. Arnold Toynbee.

What is the Club of Rome?

The Club of Rome was founded in 1968. Currently, it is made up of some one hundred independent individuals from fifty-three countries. Members represent a wide variety of cultures, ideologies, professions and disciplines, united in a common concern for the future of humanity. Their objectives are to:

The Club of Rome with its one hundred members from fiftythree countries concerns itself with the complex long-term problems of an increasingly interdependent world.

- 1. Adopt a global approach to the vast and complex problems of a world in which the interdependence of nations in a single planetary system is constantly growing.
- 2. Focus attention 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.
- 3. Seek a deeper understanding of the interactions within the tangle of contemporary political, economic and environmental problems for which the Club of Rome has adopted the term "the world problematique." Since 1972, the Club has published eighteen reports on a variety of issues. The most recent, *The first* global revolution, was written by Alexander King and Bartrand

Schneider in 1991.

Mexican section of the Club of Rome The Mexican section was founded on April 22 of last year. It consists of thirty-one members, among them two former presidents of Mexico, political figures, government officials, professors and researchers from institutions of higher learning, as well as representatives of the mass media and business community.

Among its objectives is to contribute to the examination of humanity's problems and provide ideas and recommendations for finding viable solutions to these great global challenges.

Report on The first global revolution 1

The main theme of recent meetings of the Club of Rome has been "The great transition," since we are in the initial phases of shaping a new type of global society. It will be as different from today's as was the society announced by the Industrial Revolution from the society of the long agrarian period preceding it.



¹ Summary of the introduction to the book published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991.

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The initial motive force behind this change has been the emergence of a cluster of advanced technologies, especially those derived from microelectronics and the new discoveries of molecular biology.

These technologies are creating what is variously called the information society, post-industrial especially and increasingly unbearable for Arab-Muslim countries.

The war is also a demonstration of another attempt by the US to reassert its hegemonic presence in several regions of the world, while putting its force at the service of law and legalism. The ambiguity of US policies, in spite of frequent displays of goodwill, is not

66 Members represent a wide diversity of cultures, ideologies, professions and disciplines **99**

society or the service society. In it, jobs, lifestyles and prospects, both material and otherwise, will be quite different from today's for everyone.

Suffice it to mention the Southern countries' population explosion, the probability of profound changes and disturbances in global climate, the precarious nature of global food security, doubts on the availability of fuel and the great changes in the geopolitical situation.

In 1989 and 1990, history accelerated its pace: communist regimes crumbled in Eastern Europe, East and West Germany once again became a single nation, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq led to a grave crisis in the Persian Gulf.

The Gulf War was a warning and should lead to a new view of international relations. The end of the Cold War has led to an awakening of several expressions of nationalism that had remained hidden under cover of East-West tensions and will inevitably produce conflicts of varying intensity.

This confirms the tension that will continue to grow between rich countries and poor, between North and South, while the injustice and humiliation it breeds will become going to facilitate the US' international relations in the future.

Finally, we should emphasize that the disarmament process undertaken by the US and the USSR is positive, but insufficient. Priority has to be given to disarmament in high-risk zones and to exercising tight UN controls on hightech arms sales if we want to impede other confrontations, as bloody and paradoxical as those brought about by the Gulf War. differences, flagrant inequalities, the vast and extreme poverty facing an excess wealth produce all sorts of tensions and conflicts that crop up here and there in the most diverse geographical areas. They are the signs characteristic of this first global revolution, illustrative of the uncertainty hanging over the planet's future.

But why do we consider contemporary threats and changes as the first global revolution? The change from the hunter-gatherer phase to sedentary agriculture probably originated with some intelligent women discovering the possibility of domesticating food plants, and took tens of thousands of years to spread throughout the world.

The Industrial Revolution, which began in the United Kingdom two centuries ago, is still geographically incomplete. Currently, brutal changes are occurring everywhere at the same time, the effect of equally ubiquitous causes, thereby giving rise to the *Sturm* und Drang of a universal revolution.

This revolution is all the more meaningful if we consider that an inadequate focus on it could endanger

66 An awakening of several expressions of nationalism that had remained hidden will inevitably produce conflicts of differing intensities ??

Will budding democracy grow stronger and spread, or will we return to authoritarian governments? Can seemingly well-rooted regimes resist the pressure of populations composed mostly of youths under 20 who cry for a roof over their heads, a job and the means to survive and live? No one knows.

There is, however, one incontrovertible fact: world economic

the entire human species. This makes it harder than ever for decision makers, both in the public as well as the private sectors, and induces a permanent questioning by all thinking individuals. Elements or transitional facets of the new society are appearing here and there without any apparent ties between them.

The global revolution lacks an ideological basis. It is being molded

by an unprecedented mixture of geostrategic upheavals, as well as social, economic, technological, cultural and ethical factors. Combinations of these factors lead to unpredictable situations.

Therefore during this transition period, humanity faces a double challenge: it has to grope its way toward an understanding of the new world, many of whose facets are still hidden, and, in the mist of uncertainty, learn how to manage the new world and not be managed by it.

Our objective should be essentially normative: to visualize the type of world in which we would like to live; to evaluate the material, human and ethical resources; to make our vision realistic and sustainable and then to mobilize human energy and political will to forge a new global society.

One aspect of the contemporary situation is the growing perception that the human species, in its search for material benefits by exploiting nature, is heading speedily toward the destruction of the planet itself.

The threat of nuclear destruction, though less imminent, remains with us. The possibility of irreversible will to initiate common actions toward the survival of humanity. Therefore, we call for the creation of global solidarity.

We make no attempt to lay out a detailed plan of concrete actions for saving the world. However, our analysis of the situation encourages us to formulate some practical change. Time is running out. Some problems are already of such a magnitude that dealing with them successfully will be hard. But the cost of delay will be monstrously high. If we do not wake up and act quickly, it may be too late.

The report on *The first global* revolution is organized in two parts,

66 Center attention on issues, policies and options with a longer-term outlook than governments can have **99**

proposals, suggest possible lines of action, and indicate the changes in attitude needed.

Never has humanity had, as it has today, the knowledge and the methods, the resources and the cohesion, to permit it to shape a better world. This should generate great hope for everyone.

However, there is a general sensation of uneasiness and fear in the face of imminent change. Added

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climatic change, with consequences only vaguely foreseeable, constitute an imminent threat.

These ingredients of the problems of today are global in nature and not even the biggest world powers can tackle them successfully alone. Only when all inhabitants of the planet understand they are facing immediate and common dangers can they generate a universal political to changes not yet assimilated in the last few decades, they will increase uncertainty. The tragedy of the human condition lies in the fact that we have not yet managed to grasp all our potential.

We see that the world and its resources are used poorly, but we let ourselves be lulled into a stupor by the self-complacency of our leaders and by our own inertia and resistance to The first deals with the issues and presents the main changes over the last two decades, describing the malaise they have caused and showing some of the most important issues and dangers humanity must face together. The second part deals with solutions and presents diverse actions that must be initiated in this phase.

The report is addressed to all those concerned about the future of the planet and humankind, and hopes to sharpen their concern. But it may also awaken concern in others. It is, above all, directed to young people, so they can assess more coherently the state of the world they have inherited from previous generations and to inspire them to work to build a new and defensible society.

Comments of the Mexican section on the report²

The Mexican section of the Club of Rome is fully cognizant that partial solutions to global problems are not enough. As the report says, main issues of the problem should be attacked simultaneously, studying the reciprocal effects some would have on others and insisting on seeking results.

² Summary.

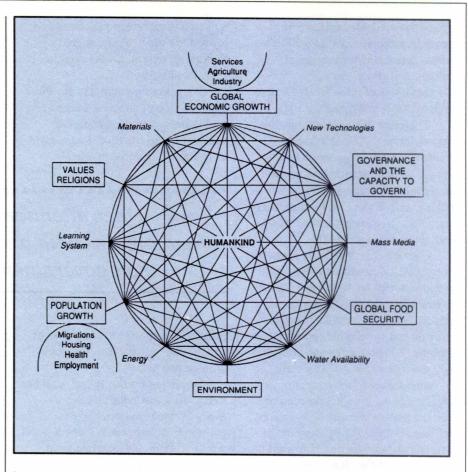
Moreover, the section shares in the focus of the report, in the sense that collective and individual levels should be compatible, that what is local and regional is just as important as what is global, that ethical values should be defined in relation to current conditions, and that it is possible to create consciousness of an international ethic that will positively affect national ethics.

Without neglecting the wide range of proposals and recommendations the report posits at almost every level, the Mexican section prefers to underscore two far-reaching issues: the environment and development versus underdevelopment.

• The environment

We must recognize that the destruction of the environment knows no boundaries. Although the greatest incidence has historically been in highly industrialized countries and has spread throughout them (acid rain, fresh and salt water pollution, atmospheric pollution, deforestation, toxic industrial and nuclear wastes), its reach has been worldwide.

International industrial and transportation activity, the use of fossil fuels as the main energy source, the rapid pace of extraction of renewable and non-renewable resources, desertification and, finally,



begun to appear throughout the biosphere in both southern and northern hemispheres.

There are abundant examples of environmental deterioration in developing countries that have not begun major programs to correct them.

66 Worldwide economic differences, scandalous inequalities, the vast and extreme poverty contrasted with excess wealth produce all sorts of tensions and conflicts 99

the developing countries' adoption of technological standards and consumption patterns of goods and services similar to those of industrialized countries have meant that the main factors and symptoms of environmental deterioration have Modern means of telecommunication make them visible to everyone on the globe: desertification of the Sahel; deforestation in the Amazon and Borneo; air pollution in Mexico City, São Paulo and Santiago de Chile; deterioration in the quality of urban life in the major cities of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and even in those in the northern hemisphere; toxic waste in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, on the US-Mexican border, in the Colombian and Peruvian jungles, in the main watersheds and in the largest metropolitan areas of the globe; disappearance of species; soil erosion and permanent loss of productivity; pollution in coastal areas and marine fauna and so on.

To the preceding may be added damage of a global nature, mainly the greenhouse effect and its future consequence for ocean levels and unpredictably sharp changes and climatic irregularities, the destruction of the atmosphere's protective ozone layer, and the effects of acid rain.

Foreseeable solutions involve profound changes in the use of available fuels and the administration and use of forests at all latitudes. They

will also require important technological advances and generalized application.

They will also call for greater political will, especially in industrialized countries, the main causes of these phenomena. And, finally, they will require international cooperation and an as yet unknown level of global commitment.

development strategies will have to be reformulated, with greater attention to marginal populations both rural and urban, and greater emphasis on local traditions and abilities. Nor is there any doubt that domestic markets must be strengthened and not only external markets taken advantage of, since agriculture is a priority for many countries.

66 The Mexican section underscores two far-reaching issues: the environment and development versus underdevelopment **99**

It is possible that not all the recommendations of the Club of Rome's report may be viable in the short term. However, taken as a whole, they deserve greater support by the international community and by national societies.

• Development versus underdevelopment

On this issue, the Club's report is less explicit, although it diagnoses a fairly wide range of topics, including excessively intensive capital investment; wasteful administration of real and financial resources; extreme industrial concentration; unprofitably grandiose projects; a lack of congruent demographic and migratory policies; failure of social, educational and training policies; neglect of agriculture and small industry, etc.

The report places special emphasis on the economic inequality afflicting almost all developing countries, even those experiencing long-term growth in their per capita gross domestic products, such as several in Latin America; on the emergence of marginally subsistent urban areas, and on the increase in indexes of extreme poverty and indigence in all developing continents.

The Mexican section has no major quarrel with the report's opinion that In major Latin American countries, growing industrialization, formerly based on import substitution, along with high protectionism and little international competitiveness, is being transformed into a process incorporating more leading-edge technology and modern business practices, giving their manufactured goods access to international markets.

On the other hand, excessive indebtedness incurred in the early 80s has curtailed growth, since countries have had to earmark an unprecedented share of their domestic savings to cover interest payments on their foreign debt, while budgetary countries, and others that have not yet reached this stage of transition, will require cooperation from outside, in the form of access to international markets and to different sources of capital, among them private investment, multilateral loans and international bank lending under normal conditions. This is the reason for such open-trade such as those espoused by Mexico and several South American countries integrating them into the North American market.

Although birth rates have dropped in many countries, the rate of increase of their labor force continues to climb. There is a trend toward oversupply of unskilled workers in the face of slow increases in job opportunities. The industrial and agricultural protectionism of most Northern industrialized countries, particularly the limited outcome of the GATT Uruguay Round, do not favor necessary structural changes.

Nor does it seem probable that inflation in Latin America can be cut to less than two or three times those prevailing in North America, Western Europe and Japan.

On the other hand, Latin American countries face the grave dilemma of organizing themselves to carry out costly environmental policies, or concentrating on favoring industrial and agricultural growth as

66 The Club of Rome's report still reflects the points of view of the North on what is best for the South **99**

deficits have contributed to keeping inflation high.

Some nations have quite successfully applied adjustment and stabilization policies, though at high social cost, and have restructured their foreign-debt payments. These well as lagging social development, even at the expense of optimal environmental policy.

Extreme cases will doubtless be those linked to the irrational use of natural resources because of massive population pressure toward new frontiers of agriculture, and those related to the impossibility of substituting fossil-fuel energy with cleaner energy sources in the near future.

Therefore, goals for the consumption of goods and services must be set anew. Consumption patterns imitative of industrialized nations prevalent in many developing nations, and their environmental implications, may not be generally sustainable in view of available resources.

The conclusion is that much more international cooperation and corresponsibility will be required in order for Latin America to press toward economic patterns and development strategies fulfilling the double objective of achieving sustained and equitable development, with a substantial improvement in the living standards of the great majority, and of contributing to reducing environmental damage and creating permanent conditions for environmental protection.

In the opinion of many members of the Mexican section, the Club of Rome's report still excessively reflects the Club was founded, there were already warnings of the apparent incapacity of governments and international organizations to foresee the consequences of major material growth, which did not take sufficiently into account the qualitative aspects of living standards made possible by the material progress itself.

Therefore, a reexamination of global problems and their implications

and technical infrastructure and to improve the quality of educational systems and adapt them to changing conditions of demand.

An in-depth examination of the effectiveness of multilateral international organizations is necessary, especially of those in the UN system, but also of regional organizations and a new international code of ethics and moral values is

66 The indifference still existing in northern countries on the conditions and viewpoint of the South should be cause for far greater concern **99**

brooks no delay. It is important to underscore the cultural diversity that must prevail and the ethical values that must be maintained and affirmed, as well as the need to value all that is diverse, local and small, as well as local actions. Global action, in and of itself, is no guarantee of beneficial results.

66 The main factors and symptoms of environmental deterioration have begun to appear everywhere in the biosphere **99**

the points of view of the North on what is best for the South and does not sufficiently take into account the diversity of conditions in developing countries, nor the serious shortcomings of international cooperation programs carried out by highly industrialized countries.

• Other considerations

The Mexican section shares the view of the current president of the Club of Rome, in the sense that, in 1968, when In the area of science and technology, an issue requiring more depth than appears in the report, attention should be called to the lag prevalent in most developing countries.

It would be a good idea to recover and compile recent conclusions from many international conferences on science and technology of the last two decades. In particular, resources must be mobilized to reinforce scientific needed on which to base efforts in favor of sustainable development.

Mexico is on its way to playing a growing part in international economy and, through commercial instruments and others, to negotiating greater access for its exports in the great marketplaces of the industrialized nations, particularly in North America.

However, the indifference still existing in northern countries to the conditions and viewpoint of the South should be cause for far greater concern. This indifference is reflected in the protectionism of industrialized economies through non-tariff barriers, in their fear of international migration, and in their lack of confidence in the "diversity" claimed by developing countries as their right, compared to the homogeneity the North tries to promote as the only way to go.

Once again, there is clearly an evident need to improve communications, information and education in all nations, as a condition to achieving greater harmony and interpenetration of efforts in the 21st century M