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## **The talk about climate change at Bermagui Institute**

The lecture in Bermagui was very clear and convincing, telling the truth without restraint. One could probably not do better, yet I would like to express here my strong expectation that a description of the present state of the threat is far from being enough and that one should go indeed much further. The public, some 80 people among the most conscious people in the Valley in what concerns climate change, gathered together probably the most convinced people who would believe that one should act because of the urgency of the situation. I could evidently feel our common agreement and nevertheless I could also see our common despair asking: what to do now? It means that a talk that states only the present facts, threats and urgency, does not seem to bring what is needed. Instead of presenting the science of facts (what the IPCC does in a very potent way) it should venture further into the rather unknown territory of the science of action. True pedagogy relies also on the potential of showing the exit in positive terms. The two following proposals aim at that: they intend not only to be solutions to climate change but they propose also a form of experience that will reveal other ways of thinking. It is why they are pedagogically powerful: they not only propose new forms of behaviour but they are also opportunities to discover new dimensions of the problem and of our attitude about life in general. In doing so they propose a new path for learning a new form of imagination. As our governments seem to be paralysed, we should not expect anything from them because we could (and already did) wait for long decades. I believe that this should be indeed the role of the Climate Council (a new role that would probably reorient its activities) to develop this kind of initiatives which would illustrate what an action against climate change could imply. In this way the following two proposals form also a kind of third proposal for the Council to take charge of such initiatives and experiences. In regard to the dreadful threats exposed by the IPCC it would propose a positive and creative attitude that should bring us back home: to a life in harmony with nature and with one another. This is also science: not only science of the facts but also science of behaviour and action.

## **Two steps in our struggle against climate change and inequity**

I will present here two proposals for two radical and immediate ways of implementing a real practical solution to the challenge of climate change. The great advantage of these two proposals is that we can start tomorrow, at our personal level, and the change can be radical; in only a few years (maybe 10 or even less) we can convert our whole way of life. If many people do so, it will have a strong impact (reduction of our footprint) and it will generate a larger strong initiative for change that will involve powerfully our governments and most corporations. This is at least the hope! But first a few principles:

- 1) **Participation:** We are all participants; as citizens, workers and consumers we are the ones who make our society what it is. Governments and corporations are indeed only an expression of what we are as persons. Without us as citizens, workers and consumers they would not exist. Despite the enormous power they seem to have they all rely indeed on us, i.e. on our participation. Therefore we are the main actors.
- 2) **Urgency:** The threat of climate change is real; if we do not change our ways of life immediately, we will be soon dead, or at least our children and grandchildren will have to pay for us and have very difficult life conditions if they survive.
- 3) **Sign for harmony:** Despite the urgency and the severe threat for our lives climate change is also a precious opportunity to come to a more harmonious way of life. It tells us that we live now in extreme conflict with the universe instead of being in harmony. It shows the madness of a way of life that destroys the social network and the Earth that both support and nourish us. The teaching of climate change is: “Stop being consumers of overproduction and learn to live in harmony (simplicity) with one another; there is enough for all to be happy. The well-being of each one depends indeed on the well-being of the community and our ability and will to care for one another. Learn then to care and to share, living in harmony with nature, not consuming more than it produces. Life is not about consumption but about quality of relationships”. Climate change is our last chance to get this message and to adapt. This is the positive message: if we listen we can find true harmony. Hence climate change is not only a threat; it is also a precious opportunity to find a true way of life.
- 4) **Threat and hope:** The meeting of these two previous points combines threat (urgency) and hope (promise of harmony). Climate change, despite its urgency, becomes a positive message. Our action could be called: escaping from a mad world and going back home.
- 5) **Democracy:** We live in a democracy, or at least in a system that allows us to elect the people who lead us. The sad thing is that these people in charge are more concerned by means how to stay in power than how to do the right thing for the general good. This is the dark side of democracy that generates inertia. If our governments would take climate change seriously they would act in consequence and organise conditions of life that we would probably not accept: severe restrictions, quota on consumption and on mobility, etc. that would be very unpopular; we would then not elect them again. It means they are indeed “justified” not to do anything because they need to please us. We certainly would like to hear the right talk but we would also refuse the right action if it touches our own interests (except for a few very conscious and motivated people). We are then trapped by our democratic system that is condemned in this way to preserve the way we do things. We should not expect therefore anything from our governments until they can see clearly that we truly want change.
- 6) **The law of accumulation:** Our way of living is the true vote. Each time we make a choice we plebiscite the object of this choice, it means we declare it good for economic, social, ecological, ethical, philosophical, artistic, spiritual reasons. We declare that we approve the way it is designed and produced (social and ecological conditions) and we declare it is useful and necessary. As citizens, workers and consumers we are the true actors. Instead of expecting anything from our governments condemned to be immobilised, we need to implement the solutions and to put pressure on them through the way we live: our choice (our life) is our vote. This is indeed the basic principle that fosters climate change: by accumulation of all our respective small impacts the cataclysm happens. Yet each act seems to have only an insignificant impact onto the whole, and, still more discouraging, each renunciation in self-restriction appears as a very high personal price to pay in regard of the small positive impact it has. Nevertheless this law of positive accumulation of acts of change remains the only law that will allow us to implement a vigorous answer to climate change.

- 7) **Inequity:** The terrible thing is that 20% of the world population consume 80% of its wealth. Roughly North Americans, Europeans, Japanese, Australians, less the very poor of these countries, plus the elites of other countries (i.e. about 1 bn people = 20% of world population) create the problem through their own way of life. Without this rich minority sustainability would be real. Today the rich countries spend the capital and the poor countries pay the bill (draught, flood, fire, sea level rise). As rich countries we not only create the problem but we have also the means to find temporary protections or remedies although they do not solve anything. The rough calculation above shows that it is not overpopulation that is problem; but it is wealth, i.e. our own over-consumption. Our rich countries consume much more than it is necessary for having a good life quality. The choice is ours: do we want to continue depleting the planet and the majority of people (the 60% of world population that live on 6% of its wealth) from what they have a right to? It is evident that there will be no solution to climate change if not in equity.
- 8) **Difficulty for a start:** We cannot expect anybody else (governments, corporations, scientists, professionals, wise people, etc) to bring the solution; the solution is in us; the main solution consists in our own motivation to engage into change. The difficulty is not to know what to do (we know more or less which are the adequate solutions) but we have to decide to start the move towards change. This is the difficult step! And it is only in ourselves that we can find the clear-sightedness, the decisiveness, the will, the freedom and the courage to start the move towards change. Of course the support of others is also important and we need to support each other (care and sharing), but nobody will take for us the decision to change. We are the only ones in charge. Each one of us has to become the instigator of change (going back home).
- 9) **Commitment:** As we are the main actors we have to be and to practice the change we want to see. We can change radically tomorrow to live a new life. In theory, if everybody starts to change tomorrow, we can implement a radical change in a few years. We can in this way at the same time answer the necessity for urgency and find a more harmonious way of life. The creativity of designing new ways of life that have to be in harmony with the universe, and with our fellow human or sentient beings, and the choice of respecting human values will transform our world and bring a new hope. Why would we not do that? It is not an utopia; it is a true form of realism that would include also the main parameters of life, i.e. that life is not just a thing about stuff but also about truth and love.
- 10) **One solution only:** There are not many solutions to climate change. Either we change our ways of life and adapt or we die. Technology will indeed not solve our problem which is philosophical; it can only be a tool if it is used wisely. Changing the way we live is then the only solution and it is in our hands; we can do it tomorrow; we are fully in control; it is very effective; it will generate the right pressure on governments and corporations to do more, because they will have to follow us. We will discover new ways of life that will be richer and more focused on care and sharing, on true human relationships, on harmony with nature. The question is: why do we not wish to be in harmony? Probably because we are attached to what we believe is comfort; but this comfort is only a very poor illusion; it is indeed the only expression of our laziness and our lack of courage. We prefer to conform to what is without thinking. This is purely criminal. It deprives our children from a future; it kills people in poorer countries, and even here at home. If this is not what we wish to generate, when do we start to move towards change?

## **First proposal: reduction of our personal ecological footprint**

### **The proposal**

We (i.e. the people who want to) choose to commit to reduce radically our respective personal impact on the planet. Each one who wants to be part of this new way of living declares him/herself ready to change fundamentally their own habits in order on one hand to reduce drastically their ecological footprint and on the other hand to try to bring it to what can be considered as the equitable world average that is sustainable. According to Footprint Network, the present average world consumption has a footprint of 2.8 ha/pers, but the real biocapacity of our planet is only 1.7 ha/pers. The footprint of Australians is in average of 11.7 ha/pers. To be able to reduce our footprint in such a radical way we need to help one another to find the most effective and quickest ways by sharing our experience and our imagination. The aim is not to organise a new competition but on the contrary to experiment together what are the best means to reduce effectively our impact on the planet while improving the way we live. We are probably doomed in a first stage not to succeed brilliantly – reducing our impact by half would be already a success - but the real effort will yet show where the most consistent obstacles are and we will find together the practical solutions and the necessary motivation. Slowly we will succeed to reach this average that seems now so difficult to implement.

### **The means**

We will have to apply radically the means we already know so well – many people do that already - or if necessary to invent new ways how to live in harmony with the universe, i.e. not to consume more than our average share of what the planet can produce as resources and not to generate more wastes than it can absorb. This is a question of quantity (how much is available) but also of quality (what is available and when). The reference for what reveals itself to be equitable is not the measure of what we wish to do or what we are accustomed to do, given the society to which we belong. The real reference is given (imposed) by our environment: it is the average of what is available for all of us on this planet, whether we are rich or poor. We have only one possibility: adapt! Recognising this fact is the condition for change.

If the measure is imposed by our environment, our choices are yet not imposed by others but remain our own. We remain free to choose what we want to commit to. We do not need to compete to be the best. We have to do what seems right and true to ourselves. In order to achieve this we can decide for instance to install a solar system and rely only on solar stand alone, to never fly, to not use air conditioning, to buy only very few quality goods that last (simplicity), to not buy goods made in China but local goods even if they are dearer, to grow our own food, to not order stuff through internet, to buy recycled goods, etc... The list of possibilities is infinite. We know it already by heart.

It is evident that many people try already to do that. Yet the proposal consists in structuring this common effort to make it a powerful tool to change the way we live and to make it more visible, i.e. to shape it a a means of pressure on corporations and governments. An important aspect of this kind of covenant is that it will soon generate a network of people who will relate to one another in their effort to share their experience and bring support to one another. It is not a new association or party; it is just a link of reciprocal help and inspiration. Here also it is the opportunity to develop a new range of relationships, not based on market or technology, not on leisure time but on what matters

most in our lives. And more important: it will convince other people that there is a solution and even that this solution offers a better life quality. By the way we intend to practice what is true and equitable we may propose an example of what can be done. And still more important we will respond to the call of youth (school strikes) to act urgently and try to restore their hope and trust in us.

## **The calculator**

We can only manage quantitatively what we can measure. We need therefore to be able to calculate our respective ecological footprints with precision. There exist many (?) systems like for instance the calculator of the Footprint Network (<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/resources/footprint-calculator/>). It would be probably better to improve it into a more elaborate and precise tool that would also allow us to calculate smaller changes in our way of life, like using a solar car or burning one's own wood or being vegetarian or producing our own food or energy, etc... The tool can certainly be adapted, and this necessity for improvement is then not the main problem for now.

The most important result of measuring our real footprint is to allow us to grasp reality as it is. We have nowadays the tendency to over-evaluate our rights to consume more than others because we are rich and we are accustomed to do so. We can pay for it! The rigorous measure of our ecological impact will open our eyes and reveal to us what we are truly doing. This is maybe not very nice for our egos but it is nevertheless the necessary condition to adapt to an adequate ecological and social behaviour based on equity.

The challenge remains: who is ready to jump in? A true commitment to these new radical choices as a daily personal practice would not only generate an important reduction of our collective footprint but it would also generate a radical pressure on our governments which would be forced to act in a true way, yet without paying the price of being disowned.

It is a dream that can become reality tomorrow. If not it is death.

**Please consider this proposal seriously. It seems insignificant but it is indeed extremely powerful: going back home!**

**The change of our ways of life is the only solution; everybody can do it; it is immediate; it will have a very quick and powerful effect; it does not cost anything.**

**This is certainly the core of the solution. All other aspects (technology, legislation, management, etc) will be only ways to make this new option more effective.**

## **Second proposal: produce simple light solar cars (like rickshaws)**

### **The proposal**

The car has become the symbol of our ego-centrism and individualism. It is the cause of a lot of destruction: not only ecologically but also socially. In Australia it is one of the main sources of CO<sub>2</sub>. Yet it would be easy to produce very simple and light solar cars that would be able to reach the next country town (reach of some 50-80km) without relying on electric home power. It would look more like a rickshaw (or 2 bikes assembled together) than like a usual car but it would be able to move

some 2-4 people with simple luggage at a slower speed (40-60km/h). The cost would be probably between \$6'000 and \$10'000.- and it would use no fuel, not even need to be recharged at home by the electric network. Its own solar panels and batteries will produce what it uses and will define its range of autonomy and its frequency of usability.

## **The learning process**

It would help us to discover new ways of thinking and behaving:

- 1) The way this light solar car would be used would change radically our perception of what mobility is: not a necessity, not a right, but a possibility to be used with measure and awareness.
- 2) It would be used only when power is available. This is indeed a basic principle and constraining condition of sustainability: consumption must adapt to the availability of resources. We would then learn how to use our car when energy is available. This is of course a big restriction but it is also the necessary change. It is what I'm used to do with my stand alone solar system when I look how much is available and whether I can allow myself to consume more power (pumping, ironing, watching a movie). We learn then to listen to nature and find a new way of relating with our environment.
- 3) A gentle use of car at a low speed will regenerate our towns and cities after they have been invaded by violent and harmful machines that destroy our social construct and quality of life.
- 4) It would lead to the creation of local small workshops (5-10 workers) that would offer qualified jobs and excellent working conditions at human size. The service for the clients would be adapted and flexible because any small change to the basic model could be implemented.
- 5) It would propose an alternative to mass production and overproduction which are the causes of all our problems (globalisation, competition, pollution, low wages, export of our tradition activities, bad quality, workforce as a market good, etc).
- 6) It would be a first step for offering the local community social and economic means to provide good life conditions for the local youth.
- 7) It would also, by extension of the same model to other activities, offer the community means of deciding about its own future and finding consensus at the local level for what is necessary: anything we cannot agree about will be managed by external forces in their own interest, i.e. at our own expenses.
- 8) It will therefore foster a spirit of democratic empowerment at local level which will reinforce our power to live the alternative form of life we wish to.
- 9) This is of course only one of the first steps... In the same spirit and in the same practical way many other alternative forms of production could be developed – and are already developed - for food production, building, communication, local decision making, etc. that would reinforce the alternative will of the local community.

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