

THE ROYAL SOCIETY, LONDON 23 MARCH 1990

Prime Minister of Norway, Mr. Jan P. Syse

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Great Britain has a very special standing in Norwegian minds. In war and peace the ties have been strong. If there is one place Norwegians want to visit, if there is one place where we want to do business and - even more important - if there is one country we want to have as our ally, that is Great Britain. It is therefore a privilege to address the Royal Society, or, to use its full name; the Royal Society of London for the promotion of natural knowledge. The two last words are particularly relevant to this meeting: Natural, and knowledge. The whole point of our three-nation enterprise has been to find out exactly what we are doing to nature, and what should be done about it. It is a question of knowledge - and of putting the knowledge to use.

There is a school of thought that tends to see the sifting of evidence as a waste of time. It is perhaps understandable from the point of view that the problems we face require urgent solutions. But it tends to make people react rather than reflect. An American

journalist once said: "In politics, a straight line is the shortest distance to disaster". The reality is complex. It doesn't call for simplistic answers.

On the other hand, the lack of final proof cannot be taken as an excuse for doing nothing. Doubt must be on the side of the environment. And remember; even if you are on the right track you will be run down if you just sit there.

The programme carried out under the auspices of the Royal Society has established a common understanding of the causes and effects of acid rain. We have brought out the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth - as far as we can get it. We have found, beyond reasonable doubt, - and Mrs. Thatcher, as a chemist, can describe these things in their proper scientific terms, whereas I have to use what is left of my legal training - that there is a close link between sulphur emissions in one country and the acidification of lakes and rivers in others. When causes and effects are so clearly demonstrated by the scientists, we - the politicians - are faced with the challenge of transforming knowledge into action. The newly adopted plan to reduce British sulphur dioxide emissions by 20% in 1993, by 40% in 1998 and by 60% in 2003 represents a significant commitment in the right direction.

In the public debate on acid rain all the emission seem to have flown in one direction - from your country to ours - and all the verbal abuse in the other. It is very simple, but fairly unproductive, to claim that one country is being victimized when the other one is ten times larger, draws his energy from coal instead of running water and is located upwind from yourself. England simply had to be the villain.

Nevertheless, as old friends we owe it to each other to be frank about matters of common concern. My British colleague is well known for possessing this admirable quality of openness and frankness.

We should give credit where credit is due. And we should express concern where concern is justified. I welcome recent decisions by the British Government; to stop the dumping of industrial waste at sea; and to phase out the dumping of sewage sludge.

But there are areas of serious concern; first and foremost the plans to build a new recycling plant for nuclear reactor fuel at Dounreay in Scotland. This project has caused strong reactions all along the Norwegian coast. I should like to take this opportunity - in the spirit of a frank and open dialogue - to ask the British Government to reconsider the present plans.

Our acid rain programme has been based on the principle that political discussions must be founded on scientific evidence. Allow me to express the hope that this principle would apply also to other spheres. I have in mind, for instance, the rational management of marine resources, including minke whales. Norway is conducting a unique research programme to provide insight into the interaction between minke whales, seals, fish stocks and the marine ecosystem as such in the North Atlantic. We would welcome the participation of British, Swedish and other scientists in this research.

Speaking of whales, I grew up in a whaling community. I remember that a place like South Georgia simply was referred to as the island - øya - as if it were next door. South Georgia was where your father or your uncle or neighbour spent their winters, in whaling stations with Norwegian names like Grytviken and Husvik Harbour. During the Falklands war, quite a few of my countrymen were highly surprised: It had never crossed their minds that the island did not belong to us! But if someone else should hold it, we certainly felt that it was best kept in British hands.

The opening of Eastern Europe has revealed a dramatic state of environmental degradation. In certain areas there is literally "Darkness at noon" - to quote Arthur Koestler - even after the death of stalinism.

In Northern Norway we are not only neighbours to the world's largest concentration of naval power. We live next door to a Soviet industrial complex that represents a serious ecological threat to the fragile Northern and Arctic environment. Of course, the-pollutor-pays principle is still valid. But at the same time we face a situation where environmental investments in other countries could give significantly higher effects on our own territories than similar investments made within our borders. In other words, a stronger Western engagement in reducing emissions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union could prove to be the most efficient way of improving our own environment.

It is no longer we and they - it is us. As the military threat is reduced - and I hope that the Soviet response to the Baltic challenge will not reverse this trend - we must come to grips with the environmental threat as well. In this we are all partners. We must take advantage of a unique and historic opportunity - not only to replace a dying political system, but to clean up our European environment.

Success will depend on our ability to formulate new strategies: We need an environmental "code of conduct" to supplement and strengthen agreements on emission controls and reductions. We should urgently develop a set of confidence- and security-building measures for

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environment. Measures of this kind have so far been associated with arms control. But they could provide useful instruments to meet common environmental challenges.

- First, we should give a suitable European forum the task of presenting annual reports on the environmental policies of each member state. Such reviews would provide independent assessments of national policies and serve to stimulate further progress.
- Second, we should arrange for annual international examinations of individual member states to ensure that their environmental policies meet our common requirements and correspond to international obligations.
- Third, we should agree on commitments to notify and to keep each other informed about potential environmental risks or plans which may have transboundary environmental effects.
- Fourth, we should agree on forms of monitoring and inspection of projects and facilities which may cause transboundary pollution.
- Fifth, international agreements should in the future be equipped with stringent provision to secure compliance.

Such measures do already exist in other areas, within the OECD, in NATO and in arms control agreements. Of course, objections will be raised. Our Western proposals for inspection of military activities were at first met by opposition and objections. But these objections were overcome. Let us approach the development of an environmental "code of conduct" with the same imagination and political will.

Nature is complex - the whole creation is complex. As Tolstoy writes in War and peace: "The highest wisdom has but one science - the science of the whole - the science explaining the whole creation and man's place in it."

Let man's place in the creation not be destruction. We have but little time to reverse negative trends. You have set an important example; Let us gather our scientific knowledge and share the results. And let us on that basis develop common programmes of action.

There can be no doubt that 1990 is a year of common action. Important events in Washington, Bergen and London will - in the next three months - focus on various aspects of our environmental challenge. Let us all make full use of these opportunities to make 1990 a turning point in the struggle for our common environment.