ECO-PHILOSOPHY OR BUST

Why Current Environmental Trajectories are Not Enough

HE way in which our society is going about destroying nature is not so much a matter of intention, not even of a lack of consideration of important issues concerning how we need to care for nature if we are ourselves to survive. It is certainly correct that we need to be less anthropocentric in outlook and action and that we need to be aware of what we are doing to nature, how we should establish new ways of understanding the biosphere and how we should change the ways we relate to it for our own good. This, of course, we continue to fail to do as we remain profoundly ignorant of biotic systems just as we continue to maintain

faith in the flagging science and technology-led ra-

tionalistic culture. Most people, most of the time are concerned with, and deeply embedded in, ideas and activities that are a very long way removed from 'our destruction of nature' in any general sense. This probably includes the reader and writer of this article, if we are to be honest with ourselves. So even when 'ordinary citizens' come across an idea of ecophilosophy, it is in no way obvious how they might weave these insights into their own actions in their own daily lives. Furthermore, the idea that leaders in positions of power and politics and business will be willing to, make — or are even capable of making - an effective translation between a desperately needed eco-philosophy

activity is equally unrealistic. This is not to say that there is no concern to make necessary changes or that changes that are being made are not genuine attempts to address the fundamental issues (though there is certainly a degree of dysfunctional selfrighteousness and cynical opportunism at work here). It is indeed remarkable how rapidly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, activity con sciously informed by an awareness of ecological crisis has proliferated, ranging from 'green consumerism' in the North to the creation of technocrat-led international policy standards for the environment to grassroot move-

and the fine grain of everyday

ments in the South. But these remain steadfastly positivistic environmentalist initiatives addressing the immediate environmental impacts in a fragmented manner but lacking any framework - ideological or practical - through which the totality of the problem might be addressed. As such, they fail to meet the criteria of a value-oriented eco-philosophy we so desperately need but lack. Eco-philosophy - and in-

deed its 'practical' support in the actions of NGOs like Greenpeace at the international level and Proshika MUK at the national level are concerned with problems that lie a very long way from the every day lives of most people who control resources, both material and intellectual, and who therefore control economic and political resources too: that is, you and I the urban and literate. And with virtually no exceptions, they are hardly providing any clues as to how to negotiate the distance between every

by Abdul Hannan

day life and some other ways of doing things that are benign to nature. This largely results from the fact that we are ignorant of the processes of fragmentation of knowledge and skill which is one of the salient characteristics of the corporate global village we live in. Beyond this - and somewhat more problematic - is the continued influence of the proscription upon ideas explicitly aimed at fomenting radical social change. It is more acceptable in intellectual circles to exhort people to take an ethical stance towards nature than it is to call for wholesale change in social and political structures.

But that is precisely what is required if the destruction of nature is to be forestalled I herefore in the current context the intellectual and ethical exhortations for a new eco-philosophy are not the symptoms of faddism in intellectual circles, but a conse-

quence of the radical and deleterious havoc we are wreaking upon our life support systems. If we are in practice to have adequate regard for nature then we will need to change quite fundamentally our social and economic praxis. Thus we should be concerned in the first instance to effect change in the social and political machinery that structures our every day lives, bearing in mind that the ultimate reconfiguration of the way in which these work will have to square with the sustainable self-reproduction of nature. It is necessary to accept culture and society as the central terms of our approach to forestalling ecological destruction; the every day concerns and actions of 'ordinary citizens' and 'community leaders' will only make informed tracks via an adequate conscious restructuring of this as a whole to produce a social and political machinery that is inherently benign in its intercourse with

We need to start from the assumption that it is necessary to make choices about how we live our lives in relation to the use of nature; human civilizations could therefore be guaged as resource use systems, sustainable or unsustainable. We need to become aware that individual choices are also social ones and so become con-"Will the choices currently being made by our society sat-isfy our material and spiritual needs and avoid ecological, destruction?" Ten years ago the answer to this was clearly "No". Today we can see a significant adoption of environmentalist measures osten-

talist perspective to realize in their results to no signifioverstretched ecosystems. It and upon that effective acquestion in the affirmative.

Before we even venture to ask that question, however, we need to ask ourselves: "Do we possess a social decisionmaking structure that is capable of making effective choices to satisfy our material and spiritual needs and avoid ecological destruction?" Only when we can authentically provide the answer "Yes" can we say that we have achieved an adequate understanding of the way in which our predicament is determined by the totality of our social and ideological structures at all levels. Then, reflexively, we might escape from these to build a sustainable, ecological society and culture.

The writer is an environmentalist with a special interest environment-culture



sibly designed to address the issue of ecological destruction.
But it takes little by way of hard analysis within the

framework of an environmenthat these measures amount cant impact at all upon the general destructive trajectory. 'Sustainable growth' as the currently acceptable concept within which changes are politically tolerated, still calls for economic growth which adds to the burden on already is quite clear to ecologists that substantially more thought and understanding, tion, is required before we have reached a point where we can answer the foregoing

interface. American taxpayers"); John Tanton of the Federation of American Immigration Reform (Brimelow's assessment: "Truly a citizen who has taken up arms for his country"); fellow Briton and exporter of the sceptred isles' poisonous brand of xenophobia, National Review editor John O'Sullivan; and

1996 and the coming wave of

With media anti-immigrant hackles raised, the Omnibus Act wending its way towards passage and the onslaught of pseudo-research about the negative impact of immigration — the battle lines are being drawn just in time for the 1996 elections. The Godfather of Proposition 187, Pete Wilson, is already in the presidential fray. His probable defeat in the primaries only ensures that the anti-immigrant plank will be adopted by other presidential candidates eager to pick up the scapegoat vote. The immigrant will emerge as a successor to Ellison's "Invisible Man" - replacing Willie Horton as the universal bogeyman. But, as Brimelow and others are already discovering, this is not a fight that will be easily won. Attacks on immigrants have galvanized into action not only immigrant groups, but a host of other progressive coalitions, civil liberties groups and ethnic communities which are now solidly embedded in mainstream American.

day, but an idea that still serves as a saving grace and something approaching a core value for US - the conception that all peoples of the world have the right to be part of this nation, and that this diversity strengthens and enriches American society. Europe's doors are now firmly shut against immigrants, and ugly anti-foreigner attacks are spreading like wildfire across that continent; the Asian tigers are practising their own home-grown brand of xenophobia, particularly directed against darker skinned "guest workers" from neighbouring Asian hations. The last remaining bulwark of the immigrant ethos, the United States, is now undergoing a struggle pitting multiculturalists against xenophobes. 1996 may prove to be the watershed year for this struggle which extends beyond traditional left-right divides, with both allies and enemies in unlikely places. The Village Voice's Lawrence Chua echoes the fervent hopes of the activists now organizing to push back the nativist onslaught: We take our acts across oceans in order to survive. Our survival depends

suffered from minor health rious. After the death of her changed drastically for the to the bed, unable to do the most simple things by herself. crisis. Before every one especially daughters, daughter-inlaws looked upon her to lis-

Actively Contributing to Society by Sabrina Shahab

Elderly People of Bangladesh

W ITH the advance of science and technology a man's life ten to give them advice, supervise their children. She acted more or less as a centre of stability for the whole family. Now she herself had be-come a family burden, some one who needed to be looked after. This was created not because of financial hardship, health problems, or fear of abandonment. The reason was simply inability to cope with the sudden change from a happily married prosperous wife to a lonely widow who

how does one define old age? Many define, old age as being had to depend on others.

Members of the Bangladesh Association for the Aged holding a press conference discussing the problems of the elderly and the objectives of the Association

over 65. But we know that many people become old (that is they show the systems of old age) long before 65 especially women and poor people in a country like Bangladesh. On the other hand in advanced countries like Europe, America increasing number of elderly remain mentally and physically active long after this age.

has increased. Instead of this

increased life span being a

source of hope for the

individual making him more

productive, this has bought

sorrow making him a burden

on the society. But why?

Especially in our country old

age is associated with

decreased mental, physical

ability, unemployment,

loneliness, inability to take

But is this picture true and

care of oneself.

And we all know how active people like Bhutros Bhutros-Ghali, Goerge Bush, Ronold Reagan and Margaret Thatcher are. Surely these people are not going to be placed in the elderly category. Therefore it is clear that there are many who despite not being in prime health are capable of growing and conlive in if their financial and special health care needs are provided. This definitely gives a more bright and hopeful picture of the elderly.

An ideal picture of the elderly, the picture we like to see is the one which has been depicted in Ai Sab Din Ratri: Elderly people surrounded by their sons and daughters,

It is even worse for the elderly who come from the lower middle classes. These people don't own a home, their savings are negligible. After retirement they are forced to live with their children as they do not have any alternative. On the other hand, the children who themselves belong to the lower middle' class are hard pressed to look after their parents. Though their health care needs are not met very adequately the real damage is done to their minds. They feel depressed and guilty about being a burden on their children, thus further deteriorating their health. This naturally increases their dependence, making them feel more

As for the poor elderly people of the cities the situation is really tragic. These people belong to the labour class but their food consumption is below the standard level, so they become old faster and earlier. It is not surprising that abandonment of the elderly is quite common among the poor given

guilty creating a vicious cycle.

with their children, a opportunity elderly of western countries don't get. But they ignore the fact that the joint family structure is fast breaking down due to socio-economic changes. The majority of neither the elderly rich nor the poor elderly enjoy the benefits of joint family system. It is only the middle class who can be genuinely associated with the joint family system. Elderly in the western

countries benefit from finan

cial and health care system specially designed for them by the government. Therefore they enjoy a special sense of independence which can only, be imagined by the elderly of Bangladesh. With the increase of elderly population in the western countries, they have begun to be aware of their political and economic might. This might has also been recognised by the Government and the business sector. That's why we see the interests of elderly becoming more prominent in the political agenda and market places being filled with products services especially designed for the elderly. In Bangladesh the elderly are the silent minority. Neither the government nor the private sector pay them any special attention or recognize their rights. In European countries where

birth rate has become zero of even negative governments are thinking of extending the retirement age. This gives the elderly a unique opportunity to prove themselves. But this is impossible in Bangladesh where the elderly are forced to retire early because of the population boom.

The Bangladesh Association for the aged and the Institute of Geriatric Medicine is a voluntary, social welfare organization devoted to the welfare of all categories of aged persons throughout Bangladesh. In Bangladesh there are other organisations made of elderly people (such as retired army officers, police officers etc.) but they are not made for the elderly people: In that sense this organisation is unique because this is the only organization which represents the elderly in Bangladesh. It is good to see that this organization has recognized that only the elderly can understand and help the elderly, these special groups of former government officials and professionals are willing to do something for their less



Age is no bar to creativity

tamily matters

being respected and loved They also have a say in the

Reality is far from this rosy picture. Most elderly people have two major fears One is the increasing alien ation from the society they live in, in other words the fear of being left out. Their second fear is financial and becoming mentally and physically handicapped thus reducing their independence, ability to take care of themselves, and forcing them to depend on their unwilling children

According to psychologist Nazimudullah problems of old age spring from widow hood, retirement, financial problems, physical, mental impairment.

Let's cite the case of one woman who comes from the upper middle class. She lived quite happily with her husband and son in a joint family structure (she was the recognized head of the family along with her husband.) She problems but nothing that sehusband the situation worse. Her health deteriorated so much that she took This created a minor family

Courtesy Nouzesh Ahmed, Naib Uddin Ahmed their socio economic condi-

tion. Therefore today's rickshaw, cart pullers or day labourers may be seen tomorrow as beggars in the streets. Their destiny seems to be dying in the streets Dhaka city dwellers are so used to seeing old men and women lying on the streets in a semi dead condition that their hearts are hardly touched.

From a psychological point of view elderly people living in the village are better off than their counter parts in the cities. Though they do not have the same access to health care facilities as do city dwellers at least they do. not suffer from isolation as they live in a closely knit community. But the situation is changing fast. Due to increase in economic hardships more and more villagers are coming to the cities. The trend is also similar for the land owners and other rich people of the villages. More and more young people of these families are settling in the cities in order to increase their economic and social status. Therefore in the future the elderly of the villages could be worse off than their counterparts in the cities.

Some people argue that the elderly people of Bangladesh are better off than that of western countries. They say that here elderly people get a chance to stay, fortunate brothers and sisters. They can extend their services by urging the Government and NGOs to create a health care services specialised for the elderly.

Creating an organization like Sena Kallyan Sangstha with the help of Government and other funding agencies will give the elderly the opportunity to be productive and financially independent. This organisation will also be able to provide funds for those elderly who are financially handicapped and unable to work. Other ways to help the elderly include:

Urging Government, NGOs and other private financial institutions to help the elderly create provided

Carrying out promotional activities which will make, Government, business and the elderly themselves aware of their political and economic power.

Strengthening the research, training capacities of the organization.

If other organizations become as interested as Bangladesh Association for the Aged in the welfare of the elderly, surely the situation of the elderly will change for the better. They will take their rightful place as productive and creative members. of the society and not as a burdens any more

OLLOWING on the heels of the race-based invective of The Bell Curve, a new group of conser vatives are now entering the mainstream media forum. This time, the targets are the ultimate scapegoats immigrants, a group which neither possesses media presence, nor dares to fight back for fear of losing their prized immigrant status (any arrest record can serve as grounds for denial of future entry to the US). Leading the nativist charge is Peter Brimelow, a British-born naturalized citizen and editor of Forbes magazine. Expanding on the demagoguery of his 1992 National Review article, Brimelow has penned Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster (Random House). The central thesis of Brimelow's magnum opus: immigration policy is shifting the "natural" racial order in the US, transforming the white population into a minority by the year 2060 — a change which will destroy the core character and values of the nation.

"As late as 1950," begins Brimelow, "somewhere up to nine out of ten Americans looked like me. That is they were of European stock. And in those days, they had another name for this thing dismissed so contemptuously as 'the racial hegemony of white Americans'. They called it 'America.'" At issue in the book is the epochmaking 1965 amendment to immigfation, which eliminated racial selection favouring whites and allowed family reunion to be a basis for whole famihes to migrate to join their relatives. In an article in the Atlanta Journal

and Constitution (April 30, 1995) Brimelow argued that the 1965 amendment had produced a new immigrant pool that was, I) "less skilled and more divergent

from the American majority than anything that was anticipated or desired." 2) "Is probably not beneficial economically — and is certainly not nec-3 Attended by a wide and increas-

ing range of negative consequences. 4) Is initiating "an ethnic and racial transformation in America without precedent in the history of the world." "America will become a freak among the world's nations because of unprecedented demographic mutation. "

Brimelow's experience of living in New York makes him shiver for the future: "Just as when you leave Park Avenue and descend into the subway, when you enter the INS waiting rooms you find yourself in an underworld that is not just teeming but is also al. most entirely coloured ... You have to be totally incurious not to wonder: where do all these people get off and come to the surface?" As Lawrence Chua retorts in the Village Voice: "Brimelow's fear is that they will get

US Omnibus Terrorism Act — II

Enter the Nativists

by Naeem Mohaimen

off at Park Avenue and rob him." If readers are not convinced that a non-white majority by its mere existence is a bad thing, Brimelow trots out the beloved family in support of his arguments: "My son, Alexander is a white male with blue eyes and blond hair...the sheer size of the so-called protected classes' that are now politically favoured, such as Hispanics, will be a matter of vital importance as long as he lives." Alien Nation then reminds us that, the newly arriving darkies don't share the values of the majority. Shame on the media for not pointing out that the Long Island Railroad mass murderer Colin Ferguson was an immigrant! And does the nation really want to open the gates to the Koran-toting erazies of the World Trade Centre bomb vintage? Peter Brimelow disingenuously links immigration with law and order: "(If) Ferguson and the others had not immigrated, those fourteen Americans

would not have been killed." Replying to an earlier critic who said it did not matter if immigrants were "Englishmen or Zulus", Peter Brimelow offers an account of a 19th century Zulu leader's barbarism — as if Jalianwallahbagh and numerous other incidents of colonial cruelty had never occurred. Playing fast and loose with statistics, Alien Nation asserts that Dominican immigrants are five times more likely to be on welfare than British immigrants, since the UK's per capita GNP is five times higher than that of the Dominican Republic conveniently ignoring the easily gleaned statistic from the back of his book that, Nigeria and India, both with far lower per-capita GNP than the UK, still have lower welfare participation rates than British immigrants. Alien Nation is a treasuretrove of many such pieces of pseudoscientific pablum According to Brimelow, 75% of Nigerian immigrants are criminals, and "lewish organisations have lobbied the Justice Department" to downplay the activities of the Russian Jewish mob. Briemlow is a particularly strident critic of the New York Times' perennial bleeding heart defender of immigrants. A M Rosenthal his own father is an illegal immigrant). Responding to Rosenthal's appeal for embracing the Haitian refugees learlier he had pleaded for the Chinese immigrants smuggled over in

ships), Brimelow reminds him, "Be

careful about those embraces, Mr

Rosenthal, Sir. Some 3% of Haitian refugees at Guantanamo tested HIVpositive

Peter Brimelow's solution is simple: stop the immigration menace and thus guarantee the management of affairs by the "Real Americans." Intermarriage cannot guarantee social harmony. That can be done only by an American majority that is confident and strong." How to staunch the tide of immigrants waging "war on the nation-state"? Brimelow proposes firstly to repeal the 1965 Immigration Act Then, "(i)t may be time to consider reviving a version of the bracero program, the agricultural guest-workers program that operated from the 1940s to the 1960s, allowing foreign workers to move in and out of the country in a controlled way, without permanently altering its demography and politics." Guard dogs on the borders, aggressive deportation, closure of bilingual schools and bachelor immigration paralleling the Chinese Exclusion Act by "skilled" labourers are the other components of this "Return to Greatness" programme.

In the debate following publication of the book, liberal critics have done an excellent job of combating Brimelow's theories. Interestingly, even neocons have skewered Brimelow's thesis that a white immigrant somehow has a greater affinity for "American culture and values" and that, turn of the century immigrants were "closely related" by a "common ethnic heritage". Many have quickly pointed out that the "Boston brahmins" hardly considered Irish immigrants to be part of their "race" Newsday April 27 points out an other flaw in Alien Nation's paranoid exhortation to "save" majority culture." 'Non-white' is a synthetic, historical construction already fraying at the edges Is it really likely that the great grandchildren of Ecuadorian, Korean and Indian immigrants will come together with African-Americans during the next century to form a new majority culture based solely on their common lack of European-ness?"

At the same time, Brimelow's supporters are also numerous, including Harold Evans, his publisher at Random House: Daniel James, author of Illegal Immigration An Unfolding Crisis; Thomas Sowell | ... the choice facing the country is to be racist or to be suckers who pay for anyone who wants to come here and live off the

economist George Borjas whose research is cited in Alien Nation:

Proposition 187 politics.

At stake in the upcoming battle is not only the status of immigrants toon the destruction of the privilege that

His fear is justified. We will bury him." (Concluded)

Brimelow is so desperate to defend.