

Earth faces climate cataclysm: WWF

by Rogelio A. Maduro

That the "greenhouse effect" will have cataclysmic effects on the Earth's climate, and man can now do little to prevent this, was the grim and depressing conclusion of a World Wildlife Fund conference held in Washington Oct. 4-6. Although one of the most prominent panelists stressed that there is only one established fact in the entire greenhouse effect controversy—that the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere has increased over the past century, and everything else is speculation—that was largely irrelevant to the purposes of the conference.

The conference, sponsored by Prince Philip's WWF, was intended to capitalize on the potentially cataclysmic effects of a radical change in the climate, while totally ignoring man's ability to deal with the problem through technological innovation. The shifts in the global climate will allegedly occur as a result of a buildup of CO₂, if steps are not taken to reduce industrial pollutants. The clear remedy of a crash program to build nuclear plants to replace fossil fuels, wood fuel, and biomass as energy sources, together with the rapid development of fusion power, was not even mentioned.

Instead, anti-technology ideologues argued for continuing the same anti-technology policies which have already decimated the Brazilian rain forest—drastic cuts in fossil fuel consumption, to be replaced by biomass, shutting down industries, and severe "conservation" and austerity measures. While millions of people in Bangladesh, Sudan, and northeastern Brazil are still homeless as a result of floods, and hunger is rampant worldwide, these phony ecologists are far more concerned with the presumed problems of animals in wildlife sanctuaries.

Most of the presentations were based on the assumption that there will be a several-degree warming of the planet and a rise in the level of the oceans. An extrapolation was then made as to how this climate change would affect birds, butterflies, and plant species. The result, summarized by Robert Peters of the World Wildlife Fund: In a matter of decades, national parks and wildlife refuges will be in the wrong climate for the animals and plants they were set aside to protect.

Thomas Lovejoy of the Smithsonian Institute said that most wild species survive only in refuges that are "man-locked" so they will "not be able to escape." He added that "whatever the uncertainties, it is abundantly clear that we are facing the prospect of major biological dislocations which

are both horrifying and great."

The greatest threat to humans may not come from a shifting climate, but an explosion of pests and parasites. According to Andrew Robson (University of Rochester), as the climate warms and plant life comes under severe stress, many pests and parasites would spread their range out of the tropics. This would endanger humans, crops and animals, since most of these pests have developed resistance to current chemical pesticides, he said.

Rep. Claudine Schneider (R-R.I.) urged participants to get active in forcing changes that will allegedly cut the release of greenhouse gases. She has introduced a bill in Congress to restrict industrial pollution and cut down on fossil fuels.

The anti-human perspective that pervaded the conference is illustrated by the remarks of Deborah Jensen (University of California at Berkeley) during the last panel. She "raised" what she called an important question which had not been raised at the conference so far, and that was how humans will be affected by the greenhouse effect. Jensen observed that as the levels of the oceans rise, "humans will have to move somewhere, and ecologists have to think in terms of how they will manage human settlement patterns so they don't overrun the conservation preserves."

How about capturing the CO₂?

A welcome contrast to the anti-technology lobbyists was Norman Myers, an ecologist who admitted that the amount of carbon dioxide and other effluents released into the atmosphere by combustion would be greatly reduced by stopping the wanton burning of rain forests, and by reforesting land which has already been laid bare.

The excess carbon dioxide being pumped into the atmosphere can be captured and stored away, according to Myers, a senior fellow of the WWF. Myers stated that about 7 gigatons of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere every year. Half of that is captured through several mechanisms, especially the oceans and vegetation. If a crash program were carried out to reforest 3 million square kilometers of land, then the rest of the carbon dioxide could be captured every year. The CO₂ would be locked in the wood, which should be used for furniture, construction, and other uses, preventing its return to the atmosphere.

Using satellite pictures, Myers described the vast deforestation occurring around the world, including over 8 million hectares of virgin rain forest burned down in Brazil last year, as a major contributing factor to the greenhouse effect. He ridiculed the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) figures which insist that deforestation has not increased one bit in the 1980s.

A Brazilian student got up to the microphone and stated that Brazil had to cut down its forests to pay its foreign debt. He then raised the issue that if the WWF were serious about stopping deforestation, then it would organize to have \$40-60 billion of debt eliminated.