

Why Did These Guys Write This Book?

If you are one of those individuals who determines his or her reading materials on the basis of the author's scholastic credentials or social visibility, you are bound to be disappointed with this selection. We are not Ph.D.'s, government officials, experts on world affairs or self-appointed messiahs. We do not fit into any of these categories, although after reading this book we are sure that you will create a category for us. But the fact that we are not running for office allows us to speak freely.

Our qualifications are those of most people. We are observers who decided that merely observing was not very effective. We have become especially alarmed at the extreme anthropocentrism exhibited by the human race as a whole and the consequent callous disregard of much of humanity toward nature. We are two human beings who would like to see true progress and peace on earth. That, of course, is a description that fits a great number of people. It would be hard to find anyone who does not subscribe to the idea of peace, especially during the Christmas season, and everyone has his own idea of progress. By progress, we mean the social and economic improvement of the human condition and the nurturing of understanding and respect for all of nature. We recognize that these goals are mutually dependent.

Historically, social and political change has usually been fostered by the discontent of ordinary citizens. Government officials, whether communist, socialist or democratic, have seldom provided visionary leadership. With a few notable exceptions, politicians provide very little in the way of leadership, even though they have been dignified as "leaders." Increasingly, especially in the United States, our so-called "leaders" are a product of public opinion polls, political action committees and special interest groups. The extent of their vision is often limited to the horizon defined by the next election. They would like the public to believe that the world is far too complex for ordinary individuals to comprehend and that there is never enough information available to proceed with a course of action that involves the slightest element of risk or uncertainty. But most of the information compiled during the course of writing this book is the same information to which all of us have routine access, yet which we routinely ignore. There is very little in this book that has not been a recurring subject of the 6 o'clock news, the Sunday newspaper, National Geographic specials on commercial television or public television documentaries. Anyone with a high school education, a modest interest in reading and a concern for the conditions and circumstances in which their fellow humans exist could have written this book. The book makes the statement that if ordinary people do not take it upon themselves to change the course of history, nothing will change.

The revolutionary changes that have swept Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were not a consequence of visionary leadership on the part of former communist officials (with the possible exception of Mikhail Gorbachev). This rapid and dramatic revolution had as its impetus both a faltering economic and social system and the desire of ordinary people for change. The "leadership" had to be dragged kicking and screaming into a future which continues to be defined by the masses.

In the democratic, industrialized nations of the Western world, a new challenge is upon us. Like the former communist leadership of Eastern Europe, Western leaders are content with maintaining the status quo. They are content with pervasive inequality. They are content with economic and social systems which are ravaging the planet on which we all depend. They are content with, and even encourage, a hedonistic lifestyle for themselves and their "followers" at the expense of the environment and all life on Earth. They are comfortable with their greed and don't even wince at the

thought that their children will inherit the spoils of an overpopulated and plundered planet. But this absence of vision and leadership in our elected officials need not discourage us. "We, the people" can affect the changes necessary to fashion a better future. In fact, we will have to do so.

The ideas in this book are not original. Most of them are shopworn to the point of banality. The great concern about population growth in the late 1960's and early 1970's has assumed the mantle of a passing fad. The battle cries of Zero Population Growth are whispers today, though that organization and others are certainly alive and well. We will not attempt to blind you with all the statistics which form the formidable structure of this argument, though they are available from population organizations and from many other sources.

This book is not meant to be a technically detailed review of all aspects of resource management and human population. Its style is mostly narrative, rather than textbook. To write a comprehensive treatment of the subject would require several volumes, and the only people who would read it would be experts in the field. This book is only an overview of population and ecosystem dynamics. It attempts to explain in a relatively simple manner why population reduction is critical to the future of the human race.

So why write a book? Many have already been written on the subject. We would really rather write a novel in which the heroes and heroines are noble, there is romance and adventure and everything works out fine in the end. You would probably rather read a novel like that. But we feel we must at least attempt to "change the course of history" by any means compatible with our abilities and commensurate with our concern.

Many people are well aware of the ideas elaborated in this book and will find them a tedious repetition of what they already know. But we wished to register our incredulity that so few people seem to understand the consequences of continuous population increase. If we were to watch someone walk in front of a Mack truck and remain silent, we would passively participate in their misfortune. We do not want to passively participate in the continuation of human misery and the natural destruction engendered by population excess. Though the ideas expressed here are not "new" it seems time to take a fresh look at them.

We live in a world that does not make much sense. Many people spend hours in unimaginable traffic snarls trying to get to their jobs or to some weekend hideaway. Life in our cities of millions of people is a constant struggle to avoid crime, deal with mountains of garbage, continue breathing fresh air and follow interminable regulations. We are all aware of the problems that we face, but it seems that most of us are not aware of any of the long-term solutions. Part of the reason few of us are looking at long-term solutions to our crises is that we have been operating under the same misapprehensions for a long time. We still think of the population of the world as being what it was 40 or 50 years ago. We think of the United States as a country which is not overpopulated, unlike India or Singapore or China. We see overpopulation as a problem that is peripheral to our lives, rather than central. When we begin to see that a world which has fewer of us would also have fewer crises, then we can see that our circuitous approach to solving our present problems is absurd. When we look at ourselves and see that most of the responsibility for our dilemma lies in our individual behavior, then it is clear that the world operates on rational principles that we have temporarily thrown out of kilter. The mass population of the planet is not the cause of all our calamities, but it certainly plays an important part. To examine the part that it plays seems only reasonable. We are reproducing far beyond necessity, with detrimental effects, and this indiscriminate reproduction is not at the forefront of any debate of global concerns. It should be a priority.

This book is a distillation of completely organic ideas. Since no preservatives have been added,

we cannot guarantee its longevity. Other treatments of this subject must have been perishable, since their effects were so fleeting. We would not be surprised if this bound collection of tree pulp shares the fate of its predecessors. The constant media bombardment of our senses with stories of malnutrition, starvation, toxic waste dumps, air pollution, mercury-laden shellfish, DDT-laced mother's milk, resource depletion, species extinction, soaring energy costs, land speculation and fecal contamination of drinking water has numbed us to the essence of the problem. Should uncontrolled human reproduction continue? Not if you love your children. The Earth's children will inherit our legacy, which we hope will include a clean and uncrowded environment---factors which are essential to a happy and healthful existence.

Neither of the authors has any children, making us both suspect as to bias against them. We do not feel we are biased, however. We feel that at this point in history the world does not want or need our offspring. We are gravely concerned about the opportunities that should be available to present and future humans and other organisms. We have had the advantages of the planet's resources, and it is only fair that others should have them in the future. We humans are constantly in search of an answer to the question of "the meaning of life". We may never answer this question, but one thing is certain. **If we don't take care of the planet we live on, virtually nothing we do has any value.** Most of us can envision a better world and hope that our individual efforts would contribute to that end. The question now becomes this: Will we act for a better future or continue acting against it?