

Economics, Animals and Pollution

PROFESSOR HARRY JOHNSON, economist, American, holder of chairs at the London School of Economics and the University of Chicago, and a former member of the now defunct Council for Scientific Policy, has come down hard on the so-called environmentalists. In a well written and instructive booklet prepared for the benefit of the British-North American Committee, Professor Johnson brings the power of economic reasoning and, it might be said, common sense to the problems of man and his environment, and his arguments deserve to be read by all who profess to have at least a passing interest in these problems (*Man and His Environment*, British-North American Committee, £0.40).

It seems that there are still people who need convincing, or even teaching, that economic growth produces something other than pollution. Those who advocate bringing the economy to a standstill so that further damage to the environment can be avoided do so, it seems, without fully realizing the implications. Quite often it is these very same people who, quite properly, call for all efforts to be made to improve the lot of people living in the developing countries. But how can this be achieved without economic growth? The advantage of having professional economists turning their attention to these problems is that the most perceptive of their profession soon come up with the answer that growth and preservation of the environment are not necessarily incompatible.

The arguments for this are by now well publicized and Professor Johnson reiterates them to effect: "Economic growth and not the impediment of it is the way to a betterment of the quality of life and the avoidance of ecological disaster." He argues, quite cogently, that what are often considered the chief environmental problems of today—air and water pollution, deforestation, apparent shortage of mineral resources—are not the most important ones. Air pollution can be decreased by attacking its source, either by technical developments which are already available, or by continuing research into, for example, making the internal combustion engine more efficient and therefore less of an environmental hazard. Water pollution can similarly be tackled while forests can be replanted and minerals recycled. This is not to say that these programmes of work will present no problems, but there is no evidence to show that the ingenuity of man will not, as it has so often done in the past, provide a solution.

There are, however, other problems to which the environmentalists have attached their flag. And it is these which are more deserving of attention. Wild animals and fish once they are hunted to extinction are a permanent loss and no amount of technology (or genetic engineering for that matter) will bring back extinct species. It is in this field that there is need for the greatest concern. But in some cases, clearly, a compromise will have to be reached where the animal provides a living for some people or groups of people and where a wholesale ban of hunting would not be totally beneficial.

A case in point is the concern now being expressed once again for the survival of whales worldwide. There are those who would ban whaling for several years to ensure

that some species which are most threatened will increase their stock without danger. But is there a need to jeopardize the livelihood of so many fishermen and others who make their living out of whale products in order to preserve these aquatic mammals?

Would not a more sensible approach be to try and extend the ban already in existence on some whale species to others which are in danger? To ensure the success of such an approach all the whaling nations, the largest of which are Japan and the Soviet Union, must cooperate to the full, and even though such an approach might be difficult to police, it will stand a much better chance of being approved by the International Whaling Commission which meets in London at the end of the month than a blanket ban on whaling.

A far more worthwhile campaign than attempting to have a moratorium on whaling would be to persuade the whaling nations which are not members of the commission to either become members or observe the quotas and bans imposed by the commission.

Professor Johnson, quite properly, is more concerned with the conservation of animals than pollution, at least in so far as he sees solutions to the latter problems, but his faith in science which is evident in most of his booklet deserts him when it comes to problems which cannot transparently be subjected to economic analysis. "It is not established," he says, "that we have the scientific capacity to remedy the damage we may be doing to our oceans and upper atmosphere by treating both as a costless medium for the transport of people and goods and the oceans as an inexhaustible source of fish and crustaceans for human nourishment." Where, Professor Johnson, have you lost your faith in the ingenuity of man?

100 Years Ago



A PROJECT has been set on foot by Colonel Grant, so well known from his African travels, to form a loan exhibition of skulls and horns of hollow-horned animals, in order that by observation and comparison of a large number of characteristic specimens, facts may be obtained regarding the form, sexual characters, and locality of each particular species. It is proposed to have as many as from twenty to fifty specimens of each species, so as to be able to form groups representing every stage in the life of each, as also to show the varieties of species in different localities. When from three to five thousand specimens of the one hundred and fifty existing species has been promised, means will be taken to secure the most suitable place in London for their exhibition.

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