Beyond Kyoto: Climate Change & Political Change

Planet Earth is experiencing a climate change emergency of extreme urgency. The production of greenhouse gasses continues to contribute to global warming worldwide nearly twenty years after alarms raised by the scientific community prompted the United Nations Environmental Programme and the World Meteorological Organization to create the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. Consisting of hundreds of leading scientists from around the world the IPCC predicted catastrophic environmental impacts including rising sea levels, severe cyclones and storms, drought, extremely hot temperatures, increased bushfires, stratospheric ozone loss, serious water supply and agriculture degradation, heat related deaths, spread of diseases, climate refugees and the inability of certain species to cope with increased temperatures, unless a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% was implemented immediately. Global warming is an issue that transcends the geographical and political boundaries of Nation States and one which requires a cooperative global response if we are to preserve the Earth's atmosphere for future generations. Ten years ago the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) attempted to secure the commitment of all nations to legally binding emissions targets with the 1997 Kyoto Protocol but in late 2007 an agreement has still not been reached. This demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the current international framework to address issues such as climate change based on the dominance of attitudes rooted in Realism political theory among nation states that favour national interest over international cooperation. The refusal of some of the world's major emitters such as the USA and Australia to ratify the Kyoto Protocol exhibits the Realist traits of governments that prioritise immediate economic security of their nation over transnational co-operation promoted by alternative branches of Liberalism political theory such as Neo-Liberal Institutionalism and Neo-Idealism. Scientists agree that humanity's window of opportunity to stop a climate catastrophe is closing, which calls for the abandonment of prevailing Realist perspectives that have continually thwarted a unified global response in favour of neo-liberalist attitudes and the construction of a new world order that can effectively implement environmental stabilisation strategies before irreversible damage is done. The Latest scientific reports warn that if warming reaches 3 - 4ºC then the thresholds for unstoppable and irreversible change will be crossed and new processes will be triggered that further amplify global warming. Climate change is a threat that affects all

nations and at the level of world politics presents a unique opportunity to build a different kind of world, where each of us recognizes our connections, and our responsibility to each other.

The quest to accurately measure the emission responsibility of each nation and equally calculate the accountability of societies with uniquely established energy production methods and requirements is complex and considers a multitude of factors including the various environmental effects of the six major individual greenhouse gases, causes of emissions, and population sizes to inform international negotiations. The particular changes that must be undertaken in order to achieve emission cuts vary between industrialised and developing nations. Despite the absolute seriousness of the issue there has not been an appropriate response to the dilemma. This is due to the fact that the international community has been pursuing individual self interests that do not coincide with global environmental protection from climate change. Most nations depend on fossil fuels to develop economically and Nation States are unwilling to accept adverse effects on their economies. The exemptions made for some developing countries such as India and China in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol that excused them from being bound to specific emissions targets has been cited by the two nations that refused to ratify, USA and Australia, as inequitable. The USA and Australian governments fear economic disadvantage if they agree to execute costly changes, "To say "We won't sign unless you sign" – As Mr Howard and US President George Bush, have said – is a recipe for failure" (Gittins 2007) Australia is a large producer and exporter of fossil fuels and fossil fuel intensive commodities including primary metals which depend on the use of coal and coal fired electricity. The defensive Realist standpoint is susceptible to the illusion that immediate advantages outweigh long term considerations. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard rejects the call for emissions targets based on matters of national interest:

"We would be part of a new Kyoto if the new Kyoto embraced all of the countries of the world, put us all on a proper footing and very particularly included all of the world's great emitters. Now, if that is to happen, then you can seriously talk about an emissions trading system. Until you get that, it is manifestly against the interests of this nation to sign up to the current Kyoto… We do not want a new Kyoto that damages Australia. We need a new Kyoto that includes Australia, but includes Australia on a basis which is appropriate to our interests and our needs." (ABC Television Broadcast November 14th 2006)

Howard's stance exemplifies the three core elements of Realism being self help, statism, and survival and suggests the current structure of the international political playing field aligns with Realism theory, "Self-help is the principle of action in an anarchical system where there is no

global government. According to Realism, each state actor is responsible for assuring their own well-being and survival." (Dunne & Schmidt 2001 pg 144). In the emissions target stakes, Australia and the US policies appear to be driven by the most fundamental of human motivations; ambition, fear, and self interest. The current position of the USA and Australia relating to international climate change policy perpetuates Realist rhetoric which is not conducive to solving the escalating threat to Earth's biosphere. The fact that some nations are able to avoid greenhouse gas reduction commitments at the expense of the entire world highlights the flaws of Realism agenda, "Realists argue that the basic structure of international politics is one of anarchy in that each of the independent sovereign states consider themselves to be their own highest authority" (Dunne & Schmidt 2001 pg 143). In an age where international cooperation could determine the fate of life on Earth many theorists have identified the need to evolve beyond the anarchical power struggle among states and the utilitarian pursuit of self interest, "the whole pattern of thought associated with the Realism of the post-World War II period represents, at best, a dangerous anachronism in the era that has seen aids, global warming, and international drug cartels force their way on to the global agenda, alongside the cultural, ecological, and gendered challenges to a "reality" that for so long has defined order, security, and the common good in International Relations" (George 1994 pg 6)

The United Nations was conceived to promote peace, human rights, international law, encourage social progress, higher living standards and to prevent another world war. Twenty years after the UN's IPCC recommendations the international community is still not on track. The 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change stated that:

"The parties should take precautionary measures to anticipate, prevent or minimise the causes of climate change and mitigate its adverse effects. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing such measures, taking into account that policies and measures to deal with climate change should be cost effective as to ensure global benefits at the lowest possible cost" (Agius, Busuttil, Kim & Yazaki 1998 pg 96)

The clock is still ticking. The fact that the United Nations is unable to enforce such measures despite them obviously being in the best interests of humanity raises the question of whether a new international order is required to save humanity from governments that are blinded by Realism. Journalist, author, academic and environmental and political activist George Monbiot believes that drastic action coupled with strong political will is needed to combat global warming.

Monbiot states that climate change is the moral question of the 21st century and in his book The Age of Consent: A Manifesto for New World Order sets out a positive manifesto for change in the form of a global justice movement. Monbiot critiques the United Nations inability to implement functions of international duties and argues for a democratically elected world parliament to replace the unelected UN Security Council. "The United Nations has awarded itself three responsibilities. Two of these are international duties, namely to mediate between states with opposing interests and to restrain the way in which its members treat their own citizens. The third is a global responsibility: to represent the common interests of all the people of the world. But it is constitutionally established to discharge only the first of these functions" (Monbiot 2003 pg 74). Mobiot's global justice movement echoes the essence of Liberalism theory as discussed by Tim Dunne being self-restraint, moderation, compromise and peace. Dunne acknowledges that historically international politics has not been hospitable to liberal concepts such as Monbiot's but "even if the world hasn't been accommodating to liberalism to date, this does not mean that it cannot be made into a liberal world order" (Dunne & Schmidt 2001 pg 163)

The radical Neo-Liberal views of Monbiot envision a world with a global identity beyond the confines of nation state borders and propose a 'Constitution for the Federation of Earth' to represent the highest good and best interests of humanity as a whole. In The Age of Consent: A Manifesto for New World Order the flaws of the current system of global governance are identified and the author proposes nothing short of a global revolution which would put world parliament in good stead to tack the imminent threat of truly global problems such as climate change. Monbiot heralds a new era of world politics peacefully transformed by globalisation from below where the old world order built on coercion is displaced by one founded on democracy, "The demagogues who have created nations and established empires have sought to justify their governance by suggesting that the people who live beyond their borders are fundamentally different from those within... many humans are coming to see that the other members of the species have broadly the same needs and responses" (Monbiot 2003 pg 112). It is not unreasonable to suppose that a new form of global political organisation that is superior to states and the state system will eventually be adopted but with continual failure of various nation states to formulate greenhouse gas emissions targets there is an ever increasing urgency for global management. Despite widespread concern amongst communities on the verge of a national election neither of the contending Australian political parties have committed to an explicit greenhouse gas reduction strategy and the USA, a founding member of the United Nations, incessantly rebukes advice from its own IPCC. The current structure of international law is obviously a poor instrument for allocating and controlling emission targets.

In an official press release discussing global climate change and the Kyoto Protocol from the White House on June 11, 2001, George Bush stated the following:

"This is an issue that I know is very important to the nations of Europe, which I will be visiting for the first time as President. The earth's well-being is also an issue important to America. And it's an issue that should be important to every nation in every part of our world. The issue of climate change respects no border. Its effects cannot be reined in by an army nor advanced by any ideology. Climate change, with its potential to impact every corner of the world, is an issue that must be addressed by the world."

In the view of the political realist, the pursuit of environmental protection is subsidiary to safeguarding the country's national security and advancing economic interests. The Bush Administration claims to understand the scope of global climate change yet in late 2007 has still not implemented greenhouse gas emission control. Bush went on to state the reasons for not ratifying the protocol:

"This is a challenge that requires a 100 percent effort; ours, and the rest of the world's. The world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases is China. Yet, China was entirely exempted from the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol."

Here is a classic demonstration of how national interest and aggressive offensive/defensive switch footing rooted in the Realism school of political philosophy can obstruct international cooperation. The USA is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gasses accounting for twenty percent of the world's emissions but declines to take action due to fear of economic disadvantage. Temperatures continue to rise as this stalemate festers. International environmental political theorist Lorraine Elliot observes the pursuit of nationalistic self-interest in the international domain often conflicts with environmental protection "the atmosphere needs a supranational authority as a custodia to protect the interests of mankind" (Elliot 1994 pg 306). The power of United Nations founding members the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, and France to veto decisions proves it to be ineffective as a supranational authority and a failure as an international environment court. Monbiot's world parliament theory provides a democratic solution to supersede the United Nations which he dismisses for its half-measures, impediments, intermediaries and arbiters whose installation masquerades as global democratization. "A world parliament endows us, in theory, with three democratic resources the

world does not yet possess. The first is a forum that carries weight and commands recognition… the second is a system which can, in theory, hold the global and international powers to account… the third is an accelerated fusion of human interests" (Monbiot 2003 pg 84 - 85)

Climate change will penetrate all nations unless transboundary disputes are resolved and governments are pressured to comply with their international commitments and obligations. Adequate protection of the global environment depends on effective enforcement at an international level requiring the solidification of international policies which currently "exist mainly as aspirations, instruments of general supervision, and ultimately safety nets" (Boyle & Anderson 1996 pg 18). Perhaps the identity of Nation States needs to evolve beyond the trademark Realist "incessant, anarchical power struggle among states and… simple utilitarian pursuit of self interest" (George 1994 pg 4) to acknowledge and embrace the common interests of humanity. If nation states of the world can unite to effectively address the pressing issue of global warming the soils of international politics could become tilled and fertile for a new fruitful era of Liberalism ideals to flourish. If a worldwide agreement can be reached to confront climate change the entirety of the human population will have the chance to momentarily suspend its competitive nature in favour of harmonious international cooperation and mutual interest. This is how the climate change crisis can be harnessed as the catalyst for positive international change and potentially usher in a new era of revolutionised world politics. As the status quo government flag bearers of Realism continue to butt international heads, radical voices rally support, "radical voices argue that what is needed is nothing less than a transformation in our political imagination, in terms of widening our sense of community beyond the confines of the sovereign state" (Dunne & Schmidt 2001 pg 144). The popular terminology is 'globalisation from below'.

Liberalism is an ideology that primarily concerns the liberty of the individual where the role of the nation state is subservient of the collective people and not the master as is the case with Realism theory. Multiple facets of Liberalism theory are becoming increasingly relevant to the international negotiation of measures to combat climate change. Tim Dunne outlines some of these key concepts including 'Collective Security' which acknowledges that the security of one state is the concern of all, the "Cosmopolitan model of democracy' which insists the United Nations be replaced with a genuinely democratic and accountable parliament, 'Democratic Peace', is feasible once international cooperation on environmental matters is achieved, 'Interdependence' of nations is undeniable amid the threat of climate change, 'Liberal

Institutionalism' is on the rise with growing activity of transnational corporations and nongovernmental organisations. The New World Parliament proposed by Monbiot is an extension of 'Liberal Idealism', which strives for a democratic international organisation for positive progress and change, and 'Liberal Internationalism' which promotes a harmony of interests among citizens of the world. The new class of transnational, regional and global scale environmental problems that are have emerged in the last decade are screaming out for a system of governance that can cope with such dilemmas "For international cooperation to be effective, some formal commitment is necessary. The intent to cooperate needs to be institutionalized" (Caldwell 1996 pg 33).

This century has seen Liberal Idealism rise and fall with international organizations such as the League of Nations founded in 1919–1920. The League's goals included disarmament, preventing war through collective security, settling disputes between countries through negotiation, diplomacy and improving global welfare "The league of nations was a disaster. Whilst the moral rhetoric at the creation of the League was decidedly idealist, in practice states remained imprisoned by self interest" (Dunne & Schmidt 2001 pg 168). Now, with the advantage of hindsight Monbiot advocates the advantage of a parliament whose power relies entirely on moral authority and sustains power through continued support of the people. If it loses touch with the people, it loses much of its force and has the potential to be a self regulating system. Monbiot criticises the current parliamentary wage structure which encourages greed; "the 'best' candidates are the men and women who are prepared to subordinate their own interests to those of the people they are supposed to represent. High wages attract greedy people. If MPs are paid less, then people who are interested only in self advancement are likely to keep away from parliament" (Monbiot 2003 pg 130) Monbiot explores the possibility of involving nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) at the level of international democracy and considers possible selection criteria "The most obvious is to appoint to the forum those NGOs with the biggest global membership. The world's people would then be represented by animal welfare charities and cancer research trusts" (Monbiot 2003 pg 81). A time out must be called to switch the major players who understand socioeconomic wealth with fresh talent equipped for the mission of preserving the ecosystem and safeguarding the environment for future generations.

The importance of NGOs independent of government agendas and unconstrained by diplomatic protocol and bureaucratic procedure in international environmental policymaking has proven to be crucial. "NGOs have been influential, both within and among nations, and they have been instigators of numerous treaties and international cooperative arrangements" (Caldwell 1996 pg 333). NGOs such as Friends of the Earth, World Wide Fund, and Greenpeace have been a driving

force to spread awareness of climate change impact and mobilise community response where governments have failed. Monbiot envisions a World Parliament that incorporates the expertise, passion and tenacity of non-governmental organizations in regards to environmental matters and notes the vital role of the scientific community in future policy formation and execution. On March 31st 2007, more than 2 million Sydney businesses and households turned off their lights for one hour, 'Earth Hour', sending a powerful national and global message that it's possible to take action on global warming. This resulted in a 10.2% drop in energy use just in the CBD which is the equivalent of taking 48,613 cars off the road for the hour. The Earth Hour campaign was designed and executed by the World Wide Fund (WWF), an NGO whose ultimate goal is to build a future where people live in harmony with nature; something the Realist policies of governments like the Howard and Bush Administrations continue to block. In September 2007, leaders of 21 nations including the USA, China and Japan met for the APEC summit in Sydney, Australia to debate whether to set binding global targets to avert catastrophic climate change, or to retreat to voluntary 'aspirational goals'. Neo-Idealists argue that reform needs to take place at an international level and believe that global social movements must be brought into the decision-making structures, "if non state actors, particularly the scientific community and nongovernmental environment and conservation organisations are recognised as important transnational participants in international regimes, then international relations paradigms need to take account of them" (Elliot 1994 pg 213). Many citizen groups are starting carbon abatement projects without waiting for governments to reach international agreement but a global policy must be enforced if Earth's billions of citizens are to change their daily routines in time to reduce greenhouse gasses to ecologically acceptable levels.

The limitations and inadequacies of primitive Realism in International Relations have been made abundantly clear by the ongoing failure of Nation States to effectively address the global threat of climate change. Despite countless international meetings there are no binding global targets or carbon tax or carbon trading scheme in place to this day. While the threat of global climate change has exposed the ineffectiveness of the international community to negotiate, it opens a window of opportunity for governments to evolve beyond the competitive Realism theories of old and build a new framework of international cooperation. The Liberal Idealist castle in the air that is Monbiot's World Parliament can only be reached if citizens of every nation join to build the staircase to reach it step by step. The slow decision making process of international negotiations, the poor compliance record with United Nations recommendations, and the impotence of the United Nations to hold World Powers to account indicate global governance is in desperate need of an overhaul. Dr A. Barrie Pittock of the CSIRO recently stated "The window of opportunity to

keep emissions below levels that would cause dangerous warming is closing quickly...This represents a major challenge for Australia's domestic climate change policy setting and an even greater challenge to Australia's engagement with the international community" (Barrie Pittock 2007 pg 24). Whether the international community shares common culture or common institutions is becoming increasingly irrelevant as rising temperatures heat climate change debates in the global melting pot. In the tradition of optimism, Liberal Idealists identify the climate change crisis as an unprecedented opportunity for international cooperation that could potentially catalyse a historic step toward a new unified world that is dedicated to the collective interests of all human beings. If Nation States continue to act with the competitiveness of Realism on the world stage the final curtain may well be nigh, but if we can instead learn to sing with the harmony of Liberalism our chorus may echo down the passage of time for future generations to enjoy…

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