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This issue of the Reprint Mailing is entirely devoted to the following transcript of the presentation made by former Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. at the symposium ECOLOGY: IN SEARCH OF A NEW ETHOS, sponsored by Laucks Foundation on October 30, 1989, at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

THE CROSS PRESSURES OF ECOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY: THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

by

Edmund G. Brown, Jr.

I am glad to be here and to have the opportunity to share some of my thoughts. I'd like to make them primarily a reflection on the experience that I've had in confronting ecology, confronting the attempt to construct in government a new ethos, turning around the concept of ecology. Now, as we know, ecology comes from a Greek word meaning house, and I suppose what is significant about this new term is that it forces us to look at the fact that we are all in the same house together. And that's already a big breakthrough, since for most of human history we all think we're in different houses, in different skins, in different cells, in different tribes, and our main task is to survive as against those people in different houses and different tribes. In fact, we're still doing that. We just do it with more technology and more sophistication. So I take it that searching for a new ethos based on ecology is searching for an ethos based on a sense of shared humanity, oneness, drinking out of the same well, one in the human spirit, the Divine spirit, however you want to describe it. Well, that's the search, but we're a long, long way from that. I guess we're further along the way because, in fact, we're talking about it. And it has been almost 20 years since Earth Day when someone started pounding a car into pieces to signify that there was something more than producing material growth. But we're not that much further, and that's what I want to talk about.

I became Governor at the period when there was a sense of limits, limits because of our failures in Vietnam, limits because of what happened in Watergate, limits because of the oil embargo,

a sense of limits because there was a book written about the limits to growth. There were many books written about the steady state. There was a whole flourishing of a new perspective on things. And so, when I came into office, I decided, well, I would try to apply some of these ideas. In fact, I tried to avoid the use of the word growth. We didn't talk about economic growth, we talked about economic strength. I don't know whether that got us anywhere or not, but it was just one of the characteristics of this period. Now, eight years later, if you were to ask how would you characterize this period, I can think of four adjectives: moonbeam, medflies, windmills and woodchips. Now, those are negative images in some people's minds, although I've always rather liked the image of moonbeam, and that resulted not just because I believe that we have to inhabit space as we inhabit the earth as part of our unfolding destiny, but also resulted from the idea of what I like to call " planetary realism." We need to try to think in more global terms-- which Herman Kahn once described as "globaloney", and that has been picked up by others since that time.

In fact, if you look at the success of President Reagan, our most popular president, maybe ever, his success is based on the idea that there aren't any limits. I remember being at a host breakfast in Sacramento, which is put on by the Chamber of Commerce and other groups each year. Caspar Weinberger was the main speaker, and during part of his speech he turned and looked at me and made some reference to small is beautiful and E.E. Schumacher, and just said, "Nonsense! Utter nonsense!" and went on with his speech. And in fact, this was before he was Secretary of Defense, so he proved that he had more staying power than I did, at least in that sense. And the whole Reagan notion was to deregulate the regulations of the environment, deregulate the financial industries, reduce taxes, unleash the creative potential for growth. That's what it was all about: the individual and growth. And it's very, very popular.

Now, going against that, I feel that the notions that I went into office with were very much counter to the whole Reagan revolution, and that's probably one of the reasons, although not the only reason, why they went aground in 1982. And I want to talk about some of the things we did, because I think out of that we learned things. We can learn about what it is to try and take the ethos of ecology, of learning to live within limits or learning to act out of ignorance as Wes [Wes Jackson, President of The Land Institute, Salina, Kansas] just spoke about. What it means when you're in the real world world, where the opposite is what everyone is talking about.

Let's take some of the examples. We had the program of the Energy Commission. The Energy Commission came up with wanting to put on construction standards, the idea being that if you build in a certain way you can save a tremendous amount of energy. In fact, you can eliminate the need for several power plants just by the way you construct houses, by the way you orient them to the

sun, by the amount of insulation you put in, by the type of windows you use, how big they are, the materials that are used. Well, we had a tremendous struggle in that. We finally got them in after several years. In fact,it took eight years to get in the energy regulations, the construction standards. Then they were watered down, and somewhat of a shadow still is there. But the logical idea that you can reduce the energy consumption of any house by 75 percent--a great idea-- when you try to put it in, every developer and every legislator and everyone else that is involved in this, from the trade unions to the local newspapers to the Chamber of Commerce, all get on the bandwagon and say you are adding costs to housing and we have to create affordable housing. Therefore the whole effort of the enlightened regulator, or the person who figures this out is a very pale political force when arrayed against all the economic forces that are there.

Another example are the appliance standards. Amory Lovins has shown that you can reduce the energy consumption of a refrigerator built ten years ago by 90 percent. In fact, we did put in standards that reduced them significantly, but by no means to the full potential. Again you run into the economic forces of those who make refrigerators, those who sell them, those who represent the people who sell them. Tremendous economic power arrayed against an idea of future energy saving. And that is really the problem. It's a lot easier for the present to colonize the future than for the future to colonize the present. Because we're here and we are quite well organized.

Another thing that we talked about were pesticide regulations. Well, the first full-scale environmental analysis of the use of pesticides in the State of California was started in 1975. The woman who initiated that study was Rose Bird. It took two years and involved dozens of researchers, and it resulted in a two-volume analysis which was really the basic information about the use of chemicals in agriculture in California. Well, that immediately set in motion a major war, and I attribute, not all, but certainly a significant part of the political opposition that she received to the agriculture-chemical industries. There were very, very few legislators that were willing to implement that. Now, as it turned out over the course of eight years, there were pesticide regulations imposed. Weakened considerably, but nevertheless put in, and as a matter of fact, under the present governor they have not really been weakened, they have been slightly strengthened because of the increasing knowledge that we now have. But when you are operating with only tentative knowledge with very weak political support, no matter how great your idea is, it is very hard to introduce it into the power system that we call politics.

Another idea was protecting prime agricultural land. The idea there was: we have a certain amount of top-grade agricultural land, so we will determine what that is and then restrict development. Well, that runs up against the idea that if

you own your land, you ought to be able to sell it to the highest bidder. In fact, that was the idea that prevailed because the proposal to create a statewide prime agricultural land regulation system didn't get out of the Assembly. An Assemblyman by the name of Charlie Warren came within a few votes of getting it passed, and that was about 1977 and the idea has never been heard from since, at least that I've heard. This is another example of an idea not imbedded in the powers that be that doesn't get too far.

Another example is forest practices. When I became governor, the Forest Practices Board--the Board that issues permits for cutting trees on private land--was totally dominated by the industry. We turned that around, put on public members, put on a Sierra Club member, put on an individual who had led the fight against nuclear power in California,and we slowly began to change those regulations and had some impact. Now, right in the middle of that, a number of the loggers brought their logging trucks down to Sacramento and started circling the Capitol and tooting their horns and burning the effigy of Claire Dedrick who was the Secretary of Resources. And that definitely weakened her position within the state administration. So again, here we had an idea that we're going to make forest practices relate to longer term environmental considerations, but when that becomes the denial of a permit to someone who wants to cut the trees, and people have heavy equipment that they've leased and they have to use in order to amortize, and those people have legislators, there's a lot of pressure, a lot of back pressure that comes from both political parties.

Then we get to the famous case of medflies. Medflies and malathion. Now, of course, we don't know that much about malathion. There are a few studies about it. We know that people have died in India from overdoses of malathion. We know that it removes the paint from your car,but it's supposed to be, as one doctor at the health department said, "you can bathe your baby in malathion and it won't hurt him or her." I was somewhat skeptical of that. We tried alternative ways, such as removing the fruit, which takes human beings, as opposed to the executive order where you just sign an executive order and you start spraying it from helicopters. As you know, trying to remove the fruit didn't work, because the little bugs kept on proliferating, and that's another interesting failure of technology. The way that bug story works, you have little traps that are set every mile or so, or every quarter of a mile, and you have to go check them. Well, we were releasing sterile fruit flies that were painted with a certain phosphorous color, and by the time we got into the traps, we couldn't tell if they were sterile fruit flies or fertile fruit flies until the thing was pretty far down the road. To show you the power of economics: the scientific committee recommended that the spraying start on July 13, and this was the end of June. So I said between now and July 13 why don't we try alternative methods and remove some fruit, use some ground application of pesticides so we didn't have to dump tons and tons of the chemical indiscriminately by air.

Well the farmers got very upset at this. They ordered their legislators to move, and within one day the State Senate had not only reconvened (they had been in recess),but they passed a resolution stripping my office of any power to make a decision in the matter of aerial spraying or not. Now, when you think of how hard it is to get the legislature to move--in 24 hours not only did they pass the bill, they were able to reconvene the legislature, which had already scattered to places all over the state, because there was a sense in the agricultural community that this could destroy their industry if it were not stopped immediately. And, so it was, that we sprayed for several weeks and dumped tons of malathion on, and we don't know exactly what that produced because later the governor refused to continue funding the tumor study in the Santa Clara valley to find out if it had any long-term impacts. Maybe we will find out as time goes on.

When we talk about this new ethos, the question I have to raise is: How do we get there? How to we get from where we are to where we have to go? We consume forty times per capita the energy of a citizen in India. Paul Erlich, who wrote The Population Bomb, Extinction, and other books like that, gave us this example of our predicament: In China the per capital energy consumption is seven percent of what it is in the United States. If the Chinese were able to stop their population at 1.1 billion, which they haven't been able to do,(in fact, it's beginning to grow a little faster now) and increase their energy per capita only from seven to fourteen percent of what it is in America, that would offset our total elimination of all coal-burning in the United States. So, if we overcame all the political obstacles that I've been suggesting, and eliminated coal burning in this country, were the Chinese to increase their energy consumption from seven to fourteen percent of what ours is, and have totally stopped their population from growing, it would completely offset what we would have accomplished. And that's the dilemma of where we are at this very energy-intensive, material-intensive society that we're a part of.

I was looking at some growth statistics recently in the Bay area, and I'm sure they're true all over. They were put out by the Chamber of Commerce, and it was showing population growth, job growth, housing growth. And interesting, housing growth increases faster than population growth. How can that be? Well it could be in the bulge in the housing formation numbers in the populations. It's also because we're forming a lot more households. We have a lot more divorce, we have a lot more separation. You go over to a place like India, you might have seven, ten people in the same family living in one room. Here you might have seven people from one family having seven different houses. And at that level, if you can go to an apartment, and you have 25 people in the apartment, there are 25 stoves, 25 air conditioners, 25 refrigerators.In most parts of the world, that's not the case. So a lot of our consumption is socially constructed, socially determined. But if anyone is going to start

running on a platform that says, "Okay now let's everyone start sharing stoves and refrigerators," that person is not long for the political process. I never advocated that. In fact, one of the negative icons in my administration was the woman who was the head of transportation. It's kind of interesting that all of the people who got in trouble in my administration were women. I don't know whether that was a sexist bias or not, but there's some truth to it.

Adriana Gianturco had a very simple set of priorities. She said that our first priority should be to insure the integrity of the existing infrastructure. In other words, put repair and rehabilitation as the top priority. Now, the political top priority is, of course, new roads, not repairing existing roads. In California there was the imposition of a two-cent gas tax. Actually I authorized it before I left office, but I made it take effect after I was out of office so I could maintain my Reaganesque pledge of no new taxes, which I did. Of course, it didn't get me anywhere, because when I ran for office all of the TV commercials of my opponent were declaring, "Brown is a taxer and a spender." So it doesn't matter, if you are a Democrat, you are a taxer and a spender, even if you aren't. So that's why I say you might as well spend to make a few friends who can help you when you need it, because denying these professors a few pay increases has left a permanent scar. Even on this university campus (UCSB), people still remember my concept of psychic income. My idea was that it was so wonderful to be a professor in the University of California system, you shouldn't need the same pay increases that they get in other places that aren't quite so stimulating or academically enriched. Well, that idea went over not at all. In fact, in a poll that was taken, I was one of the most unpopular politicians on college campuses among the professoriate.

However, to get back to the tax. The two-cent gas tax was made available in 1983 at the same time a five-cent gas tax was made available at the federal level, which made a total of seven cents. For the five-year transportation plan (we make these things in five-year increments) that made available $2.5 billion. Now, of the $2.5 billion, 11 percent, or about $260 million went to repair. All the rest went to new roads. And, as people begin to study why some of these roads and overpasses are in bad shape, you're going to find out that the money we had was diverted to new roads, even though the reason for the tax was repairing the potholes. I don't know if you remember that we have to raise the taxes because the roads and bridges are falling apart. But once we get the money, they're devoted to building more. And this was something Adriana Gianturco was always pointing out to me. As you keep expanding the network, you have more to take care of, and if you're financing the expansion at the expense of the repair that you have every year, you dig yourself deeper and deeper into a dangerous situation of having unsafe roads, unsafe overpasses and bridges, and when you finally recognize the cost of rehabilitation, by that time you will have so committed yourself

to an expansionary program that the gas tax increase will be politically so large it'll be very, very difficult to achieve.

Well, now when we get an earthquake in San Francisco, you find that overnight the number of people who want to increase taxes to fix up the overpasses is now like two-thirds, so we do learn, but we don't learn through rhetoric. We don't learn through talk that well. I think the human animal learns through encountering experience, or I guess what you could call negative feedback, and the only real question is how negative is the feedback that we need to receive before we get it, before we really can develop an ethos of ecology. I think that when we look over this whole concept of where we go from where we are to where we have to arrive at, it's unimaginable. A teacher that I very much respected who actually became a member of the Board of Regents, Gregory Bateson, once described the situation as involving three elements: technological change, population growth, and the western idea of man, or of the individual. And he said that we can survive only if we change at least one of those three. Well, we haven't really slowed down population growth, at least not that much. We're slowing it down, but absolutely it still keeps growing. We're not slowing down technological change, although we might at some point. The only other thing we can work on is the western idea of who we are and what we need. And that is very much imbued with the notion of the separation of individuals, the maximization of individual comfort, and all of that pushes the whole system forward. If you take 5 billion people and each one of them has to defend him or herself against everyone else and get as many new tools as possible, and then you give them all of these new tools with technological change, you have the formula for where we are, and that's been described very well by the previous speakers.

A couple of other things I want to mention about research. During the last few years, the research which was 50% military and 50% civilian, is now 80% military, 20% civilian. In California, there isn't much interest (there is in the university), but as a state item, research doesn't count. It's not a big debate issue. The issues are salaries, roads, medical reimbursements--that's the stuff that everybody argues about. But as to whether or not we should be spending $20 million on sustainable agriculture or alternative energy or conservation, that doesn't show up in the dialogue, even though we have a budget of $50 billion. That's one of the other interesting points. The political debate is about controlling government. I was reading an article in the plane down yesterday about Phil Gramm, the author of Gramm-Rudman, the Democrat who became a Republican from Texas, the real prophet of Reaganomics. And he talks about what a wonderful job Reagan did because of the cutting down of government, the freeing up of the individual. Well, as a matter of fact, the government hasn't been cut down. If you look at the number of employees, you look at the budget, and you look at California after all that talk about taxing and spending, the budget went from $25 billion to $50 billion. So

it's almost as if we're in an unreal world where what is debated has no impact on what happens. So, in other words, people say, "Elect me, I'm going to reduce taxes and reduce crime." And then they're elected,and crime goes up and taxes go up and government goes up. So you know as sure as you're sitting here that the budget in another eight years will be up another $25 billion, probably $40 billion. So,within that $40 billion, can we find any funds for researching and examining the kinds of questions we're talking about today and all the very technical points that have to be examined as well as the social ones? I think we can.

I think that's where we come to What do you do about all this? And that's where things have to start-- first of all, with the university. The connection between the state regulators, between the energy regulatory scheme of the state, the Energy Commission, the Forest Practices Commission, the pesticide regulation--there was some connection to the university, but nowhere near what it should be. There isn't that very close collaboration between the state service and the university research and activities that there should be. So that's one thing --we need much closer cooperation.

Secondly, we have an environmental initiative that will be on the 1990 ballot. We do have initiatives. If people care, we can put laws before the people and make them go for it. Proposition 65 two years ago, (I think it was two or three years ago) restricted the carcinogens being placed in the water supply. That was a popular initiative --65 percent of the people-- something the Legislature could never do. Well, we have the initiative, and that really gets down to what I think is significant in the search for an ethos of ecology, and that's our own example--individual responsibility. We have to look within ourselves and how we understand our own lives as to what's important and whether we can we construct in our own immediate environment an ethos of ecology. And if we can begin to do that, can we join with other people who have a similar mind? If you look back at the civil rights movement, it didn't emanate from a group of senators. I didn't come from a president. It came from a preacher. It came from a group of preachers, it actually came before that from Rosa Parks, who wouldn't go to the back of the bus. It came from one woman on a bus and started the whole civil rights movement. Well, the search for an ecological ethos depends on some Rosa Parks in this room today or in some room somewhere, and tens of thousands of those people because these ideas gather strength. They begin to crystallize in the minds of people outside the power structure.

Politics is really the ratification of the obvious, of the conventional wisdom, and the creation of new initiatives or new perspectives will not take place within the political domain, within the government. That was brought home very forcibly when we set up the California Arts Council. The California Arts Council was an attempt to create state support of artistic and creative endeavor and to try to create a diversity. We had on the

arts council Gary Snyder, who was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet the year after we appointed him. We had Luis Valdez from the Teatro Campesino. We had a number of people from the Watts Community Actors Workshop, a number of people that were very different. Well, we started giving out these grants, and one of the grants (we didn't give like the National Endowment did), we gave to someone who constructed a wooden musical instrument that simulated whale sounds, and the idea was then that he would go out into the water and see if he could attract the whales. Well, when this hit the press, it definitely did not bolster my image as a button-down chief executive. And so other people, seeing that, realized you should not experiment too much. In fact, I think I gave experimentation a bad name. Ever since then, boredom has become the measure of political acumen. And there's a logic to that. If you can keep your image so opaque that you can't identify any particular strain, then as the election approaches the technology of focus groups and polling is such that you can figure out what people would like you to be, and then you can reconstruct your public image with no resistance from any past action or commitment, because you've kept this opaque image, or what I would call a low profile. And that's basically the model of successful politics today, and I feel somewhat responsible because we did have musical instruments that might simulate the sounds of whales, and we do have 94 percent of the energy derived from wind machines, and we do have probably 80 percent of the cogeneration of the country, and all these other things. Great experiments. But without a supportive infrastructure behind it, you can't sustain it,and that's where I get back to first, the concept of ecological examples in our own individual lives, joining up with others similarly disposed and then joining together. Organizations like Greenpeace, Sierra Club, the NRDC, but also that terrible thing called a political party. In the absence of other institutions, it's a pretty powerful instrument. And besides churches, which last the longest, I guess the university is the second longest enduring institution, and next we get political parties. But these little movements pop up and disappear within ten, twenty, thirty years, and if we're looking to a sustainable policy, then we have to reinvigorate and tap into those institutions that are long in duration--and that's churches, universities and last but not least political parties, which I now find myself chair of.

So let me just end on the note that we have within our own hands the power to advance an ecological ethos or ethic, but we have to take steps to do that, and we have to identify others who have a similar commitment and join together in some effective way. There is a Rosa Parks or a Martin Luther King of the environment. We need them to inspire us, we need to join with them. Whether it's through the initiative or through the political process, I think we can slowly turn around the present tendency. And whether it's population growth or technological change or merely what our idea of who we are and how we have to live--all those things are human creations. And it's up to us humans to continue to create them in a way that is sustainable.

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