



## **“CLIMATE CHANGE, GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS”**

Submission to the International Development Committee of the House of Commons

12<sup>th</sup> December 2001

The European Centre for Public Affairs was established in 1987 to “record, analyse and improve the conduct of public affairs”. Public affairs is defined by the ECPA as “the study of organised attempts to influence decision making in a political system”. Viewed from the perspective of public affairs, the political struggles over climate disruption from 1990 onwards are a classic case study of the interaction of lobbying with an institutional framework that was itself morphing into new and interesting forms in the global political space. As European Parliamentary Rapporteur on the CO<sub>2</sub>/Energy Tax, and as a parliamentary observer at the Conferences of the Parties on Climate Change at Berlin, Geneva, Kyoto and Buenos Aires, I was in a position to observe at first hand the interplay of political and public affairs forces and the developments of the institutions. As Visiting Professor of Global Governance at the University of Surrey, I have devoted attention to the evolution of institutional structures in the global political space.

Climate change is of course an issue of overriding importance both for environment and for development policy, but it also offers a valuable insight in the role of parliamentarians in the formation of global policy. This is of particular relevance, given the debate about global environmental governance ahead of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002, not least because the development of institutions is crucial to the next phase of the struggle over climate change.

The politics of climate change only make sense when seen as a product of the clash of interests interacting with the development of global institutions. For the purposes of this submission, I will examine the activities of corporations, civil society and states and their attitudes to parliamentarians in the context of climate change. The corporate sector has generally tended to regard parliamentarians as a low priority for their lobbying activity, believing them to be substantially powerless in this context. It has tended to ignore them, except when seeking to take advantage of their abilities to block new developments, most obviously in the case of the United States Senate. Civil society activists, while careful to court parliamentarians, have seen them as rivals for the ear of the Executive. They have also displayed a tendency to regard parliamentarians as dumb and ill-informed by comparison with those non-governmental organisations intimately involved in the details of climate change negotiations. Similarly, nation states involved in a complex international negotiation have shown a marked preference for excluding parliamentarians from the process, believing that their involvement would complicate the task of reaching acceptable agreements.

The most obvious example of high profile corporate lobbying is that of the Global Climate Coalition of fossil fuel and related industries. In their own words they established an early “choke hold” on the key committees of the US Congress, and then sought to expand this defensive advantage into Europe. Their public affairs strategy of denying the validity of climate change science is well documented. Their campaign was well financed and professionally executed. Its pollution of the public’s understanding of scientific issues is an unfortunate but enduring legacy.

The evolution of climate policy has also suffered from political rivalries between NGOs with their own organisational agendas. The belief expressed in the mid 1990s by one NGO activist “We don’t do CO<sub>2</sub>... it’s not visual enough for us” is indicative of such private agendas. The most obvious example of personal and institutional rivalries is the continued attempt to exclude maverick individuals and organisations such as Aubrey Meyer and the Global Commons Institute with their Contraction and Convergence model. It is perhaps inevitable that large and well funded NGOs, who insert themselves successfully into the political process at global level, will fall victim to the same temptations and distractions as the other players seeking to influence policy outcomes.

Climate change is an example of what has been defined as a ‘demand led’ issue at global level. That is to say that it is not just an issue requiring attention because of the inadequacy of nation state’s

responses, but because it is a genuinely global issue of substantial impact on all countries. Such is its importance that existing institutions have been stretched and new institutions have had to be created. Foremost in this is the role of the scientists in the International Panel on Climate Change, which broke new ground in establishing a global consensus of scientific thought on a issue. As an example of the stretching of an institution, one might look at the Climate Change Secretariat. The original model of secretariats for conferences of the parties to an international convention has been put under impossible strain. There is now an urgent need to consider the nature of this mechanism as it evolves into an institution capable of policing and implementing climate change policy. This would be especially the case were it to acquire substantial financial and budgetary power in its next manifestation.

The political process of climate change is perhaps best characterised as a “mobile standing conference” of certain individuals (civil servants, NGO activists, scientists and lobbyists). This has certain advantages in terms of flexibility, but it has very inadequate parliamentary input and results in a democratic deficit worse than that of the European Union. All successful governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is now expected to meet certain standards of legitimacy, transparency and accountability. The existing practice of climate negotiations is deficient on all three counts. Parliamentarians are part of the answer to strengthening the process. To be successful parliamentarians need to recognise the role that they can play and to physically insert themselves into the process. In the complex and incomplete fluidity of the existing global political space, democratically elected parliamentarians are entitled to adapt their national mandate for global use.

Given the conditions of what I have characterised as a mobile standing conference, parliamentarians can only exercise power if they are physically present at key moments. Individual parliamentarians can exercise considerable power if they are regularly present, especially if they are former ministers who understand the nature and detail of the process.

The application of parliamentary power is traditionally limited by apparently trivial matters such as permission to be absent from their national parliaments and the funding of travel. The example of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament is perhaps indicative of what can be achieved. The Committee, in common with other European Parliament committees, had traditionally travelled en masse within the European Union. Permission to travel outside the Union lay effectively in the hands of Group Whips, who used it as a form of both patronage and discipline. When budgetary constraint and public distaste for parliamentary ‘boondoggles’ forced reform of the behaviour of all European Parliamentary committees, the Environment Committee decided to replace its existing behaviour with a tradition of sending small delegations or individuals to important conferences and negotiations at global level. The effectiveness of this was helped by the European Parliamentary tradition of rapporteurs and specialists who followed particular subjects over a number of years. Its long-term effectiveness depends on a degree of inter-party co-operation and trust in reporting back to the full committee factually and without ideological bias. The International Development Committee might like to examine ways in which its political effectiveness could be further expanded by adopting such tactics, albeit within the different traditions of the House of Commons.

It is the view of the ECPA that the next few years are crucial to the shaping of the institutions of global governance, both formal and informal. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg will clearly be an important moment in such development. Bodies such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation are now equipping themselves with a variety of parliamentary networks. Parliamentarian organised non-governmental organisation, known rather charmingly as PONGOs, are growing in scope and number, following the example of Parliamentarians for Global Action and the Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE). Theorists of globalisation point to the influence that so called “super-empowered individuals” can exercise in the political processes of the knowledge society. There is every reason why parliamentarians, with the advantage of their mandate, should figure prominently in such a role. Lobbying from other sources has shaped both the institutions and the outcomes of climate change negotiations to date. Parliamentarians should now seek to reshape the institutions by which the species is seeking to govern itself in the face of environmental and development challenges of a massive scale.

