

Discussant Paper on Warren Brockelman's Paper

**COMMENTS REGARDING "FOREST CONSERVATION IN TROPICAL ASIA:
THE INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION" BY WARREN Y. BROCKELMAN**

by

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Professor Brockelman has really given us two papers.

In the first half of his paper, he speaks as a tropical forest biologist making the conventional statements of his profession. His viewpoint in this role is well captured in his opening sentence: "Tropical forest destruction is one of the most pressing problems facing the world today." To those of us not members of this fraternity, the large stocks of atom bombs, the proliferation of countries possessing atomic bombs, the effect of increasing burning of fossil fuels upon the world's temperature, the ugly potentials of the human reproductive apparatus, the numerous large and small repressive dictatorships with their destruction of human values, and other problems rate far higher in the scale of world problems than does tropical deforestation.

Biologists and other specialists concentrating on tropical forests repeatedly quote one another. I credit them with a sincere and deeply emotional belief in what they say, as they act like converts at a religious meeting whooping up one another's devotions to higher and higher pitches of conviction. These writers ignore or are unaware of criticisms by economists (Simon and Kahn, 1984; Simon, 1986) exposing gross inconsistencies in the biologists' own statements and they seem equally unaware of analyses by biologists (Ladrach and Mazuera, 1985; Mazuera, 1985) who have shown that by use of properly designed harvest techniques at least some tropical forests can regenerate fully and quickly, permitting controlled timber harvest on a sustained yield basis with relatively short (30 year) rotations. The "conventional wisdom" is not challenged by most of these writers.

Mankind has increased its numbers 8 fold in 400 years, or about 16 generations. A baby born today has a life expectancy more than 3 times that of a baby born 400 years ago. The average person in the world today is better fed, better housed and clothed, has far better health, and far more intellectual fare than his ancestor of only those relatively few (by biological standards) earlier generations. This is a remarkable biological achievement of species growth. It has been achieved with remarkably little aid from tropical forests. The larger numbers today are sustained with remarkably little aid from tropical forests. Man's welfare has lain and does now lie elsewhere.

The tropical forest biologists hold out threats of future catastrophes if we do not repent. "The end of the world is coming tomorrow." Maybe so, maybe not. Doomsayers have made

predictions of disaster from time immemorial. Possibilities for disaster to the human race surely do exist. But thus far the record is more notable for the predicted dooms that did not occur than it is for actual disaster. Maybe the people of the world will fail to secure all those wonderful undiscovered and unknown values and products of the tropical forests. But statements about these values rest on faith--in belief in things not seen.

In the latter part of his paper Prof. Brockelman becomes the sociologist or the humanist as he examines the problems of the actual user of the tropical forests in one country. He discovers that these are really pretty nice people, struggling to make a living for themselves and their families. As he says: "People usually know what benefits them the most, and they understand what is happening to the environment."

Given their situation, these users of the forest cannot be expected to give much real concern to global, or regional, or even community problems and effects of their actions, nor to give much concern to tomorrow. Food and shelter for their families today is and must be the dominant concern.

What can science and technology practically offer these people, at their level and within their capacities, to meet their needs? Here lies the real problem of the tropical forests. As Prof. Brockelman says: "We have largely failed to come to grips with this (problems of individuals) in our efforts to reverse the trend of forest destruction." As one not emotionally involved in tropical forests, I wish those who are most directly concerned would shift their emphasis from speculations about uncounted millions of species and unrealized great values to a more mundane but more practical level of the individual forest user. We are grateful to Prof. Brockelman for bringing the problems of the individual forest user to the fore. Accurate definition of a problem is basic to its solution.

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