

PROFESSORS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS

W.C. Wentworth

INTRODUCTION

I shall try to discuss three related issues :

- The general relationship between scientists and the Government.
- The particular case of that relationship in regard to the Greenhouse issue.
- The actions which scientists should presently advise with regard to Greenhouse.

Parliamentarians cannot generally be expected to understand all the scientific details which should determine policy – they must rely upon the advices given them by scientists. On the other hand scientists cannot generally be expected to understand the political questions involved, and may lose perspective. It is clearly the role of scientists to advise, and the role of parliamentarians to act on advice, and every effort should be made to avoid mistakes occurring through the knowledge gap. One way of closing this gap would be to encourage scientists to make factual statements in simple non-scientific terms, directing such statements particularly to those aspects which should determine practical policies.

But the closing of the gap is not so simple as might at first appear. In a democracy, major policy changes cannot be implemented without public consent, and this means that the public, as well as parliamentarians, must be made aware of the factors involved. Both scientists and politicians have a responsibility to see that the public is kept informed.

It is just here that a problem arises. Organised factions (themselves sometimes primarily interested in getting political clout for its own sake rather than in the cause they publicly espouse) can get in on the act, and parliamentarians (to whom votes are the stuff of life) will go to great lengths to buy the support of these factions. From