

# Common inheritance

SIR — A leading article (*Nature* 362, 379; 1993) on the subject of the world's human population growth stated that any concerted effort by the international community to stabilize growth rates in poor, developing countries will not be successful unless accompanied by a programme of mass education and public health, and by the elimination of trade barriers. The concern about the growth of the world's human population follows from the demands that such increases impose on the 'global commons'. Although a necessary part of the solution, such measures are not sufficient. We cannot solve the problems of human population growth and its effects on the environment in isolation; we must simultaneously address the issue of energy consumption. The leading article failed to do so and one is left wondering whether the omission is the result of ignorance or ideology.

An analysis of the patterns of energy use broken down by country/geographical region was published recently in a report produced jointly by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)<sup>1</sup>. Although three-quarters of the world's population live in relatively poor, developing countries, they account for only 20 per cent of the world's commercial energy consumption.

The remaining 80 per cent is consumed by people living in relatively rich, high energy consumption countries, most of which continue to show increases in resource consumption despite having near stable populations<sup>1</sup>. The per capita commercial energy consumption rate in a high consumption country is 18 times higher than in a low consumption country. On average, a North American produces twice as much carbon dioxide emission as a South American and ten times more than someone living in South Asia or East Asia (with the exception of Japan)<sup>1</sup>.

These data clearly show that action by the international community aimed only at curbing fertility rates in developing countries will not solve the problem of excessive demands on the world's natural resources.

There is no doubt that the rapid population growth exhibited by many low energy consumption countries undermines the prospects for sustainable development. However, addressing this problem while neglecting the need to curb habits of energy use in richer countries will not lead to a reduction in the demands on the global commons. In fact, one might argue that these problems would actually increase if poorer countries were to slow their birth rates and adopt the energy use patterns of richer countries.

Both reduction in energy use and the curbing of fertility rates are extremely difficult policies to implement. However, it is in part the unfairness of the demand that only one group of countries address the problem by implementing unpopular policies that raises the hackles of people speaking on behalf of these countries. Co-operation from less developed countries in terms of implementing policies to curb the birth rate might be more likely if a real commitment to reduction in energy consumption and its consequent damage to the environment was evident in the policies of richer countries.

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1. *Caring for the Earth. A Strategy for Sustainable Living.*  
IUCN/UNEP/WWF (Gland, Switzerland, 1991).

## Anglo-Saxon attitudes

SIR — I have been much interested in two book reviews in *Nature*, separated by a year, which reflect what I think is an interpretation bias about what French and other continental Europeans feel about the Anglo-Saxon scientific establishment<sup>1,2</sup>. Coming from a small country, my reaction cannot be ascribed to delusions about past "grandeur". Of course, we all know of papers submitted to journals, retained a long time by referees, then rejected, only for us to see their main contents appearing in the same or another journal with the signature of what we guess was the referee.

But as referees are anonymous, this is difficult to prove. The error in the *La Science au Présent*, which *Nature* recently reviewed<sup>2</sup>, is to suppose that this happens to French authors because they are French. It happens to all of us, including US researchers themselves. This reflects poor ethics and the results of fierce competition and of *Science Citation Index* ideology, but not national discrimination. On the other hand, as *Nature* seems sensitive to such allegations, I wondered if it is immune to national or cultural discrimination. I therefore looked at the origin of the items which result from editors' requests and not from submissions, that is, News and Views, book reviews, commentaries and reviews. The results of a 24-month survey (from 30 May 1991 to 27 May 1993) were:

■ News and Views: UK 299, USA 349, "Commonwealth" (Canada, Australia,

New Zealand, South Africa) 10.5, Continental Europe 25, Japan 2.5.

■ Commentaries: UK 8, USA 7, Commonwealth 3, Continental Europe 1.5, Japan 1.

■ Reviews and Hypothesis: UK 12.5, USA 40.5, Commonwealth 2, Continental Europe 4.5, Japan 0.

■ Book reviews: UK 351, USA 161, Commonwealth 15, Continental Europe 12, Japan 1.

This excludes *Nature* editors. When authors of one item are of 2 nationalities, a fraction is apportioned to this nationality.

A bit biased for an international journal<sup>3</sup>, is it not? and may we congratulate the few "continental" contributors?

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1. Smith, P. J. *Nature* 354, 27 (1991).

2. Cols, P. *Nature* 362, 680 (1993).

3. Maddox, J. *Nature* 359, 475 (1992).

## Forest cover

SIR — Although not diminishing the importance of proposals for forest conservation in Haiti made in Correspondence by Hedges and Woods<sup>1</sup>, there is a serious error in the figure cited for Jamaican forest cover. In 1980, a comprehensive Jamaican land cover/use assessment revealed 46.22 per cent forest cover<sup>2</sup>, and although the decrease in forest cover from 1980 to 1986 was 3.3 per cent per year and has continued at around this level since<sup>3</sup>, the fraction of forested land in Jamaica is about eight times higher than the 5 per cent shown by Hedges and Woods.

Jamaica retains a larger fraction of its forest than other Greater Antillean island despite a population density equal to Haiti because of three unique geographic characteristics: Jamaica is generally higher, wetter and mostly limestone (around 80 per cent). Jamaica (the "Island of Wood and Water" is the literal translation of the Arawak Indian name *Xaymaca*) remains greenest only because lucky geological accidents cause most forest to lie on land too steep, too rainy or on limestone too lacking in soil to be worth clearing. Habitat degradation and erosion are severe on cleared Jamaican soils, but there is still a good chance to preserve what is left before it nearly vanishes like the tropical forest in Haiti.

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1. Hedges, S. B. & Woods, C. A. *Nature* 364, 375 (1993).

2. Rampair, S. in *Forests of Jamaica* (eds Thompson, D. A., Bretting, P. K. & Humphreys, M.) 77–80 (Jamaican Society of Scientists and Technologists, Kingston, 1986).

3. Eyre, L. A. *Jamaica Nat.* 1, 27–44 (1991).