

Bob Brown delivers the 3rd annual Green Oration

23 Mar | General

The full text of Bob's speech is below:

Fellow Earthians,

Never before has the Universe unfolded such a flower as our collective human intelligence, so far as we know.

Nor has such a one-and-only brilliance in the Universe stood at the brink of extinction, so far as we know.

We people of the Earth exist because our potential was there in the Big Bang, 13.7 billion years ago, as the Universe exploded into being.

So far, it seems like we are the lone thinkers in this vast, expanding Universe.

However, recent astronomy tells us that there are trillions of other planets circling Sunlike stars in the immensity of the Universe, millions of them friendly to life. So why has no one from elsewhere in the Cosmos contacted us?

Surely some people-like animals have evolved elsewhere. Surely we are not, in this crowded reality of countless other similar planets, the only thinking beings to have turned up. Most unlikely! So why isn't life out there contacting us? Why aren't the intergalactic phones ringing?

Here is one sobering possibility for our isolation: maybe life has often evolved to intelligence on other planets with biospheres and every time that intelligence, when it became able to alter its environment, did so with catastrophic consequences. Maybe we have had many predecessors in the Cosmos but all have brought about their own downfall.

That's why they are not communicating with Earth. They have extincted themselves. They have come and gone.

And now it's our turn.

Whatever has happened in other worlds, here we are on Earth altering this bountiful biosphere, which has nurtured us from newt to Newton.

Unlike the hapless dinosaurs, which went to utter destruction when a rocky asteroid plunged into Earth sixty-five million years ago, this accelerating catastrophe is of our own making.

So, just as we are causing that destruction, we could be fostering its reversal. Indeed, nothing will save us from ourselves but ourselves.

We need a strategy. We need action based on the reality that this is our own responsibility - everyone's responsibility.

So democracy - ensuring that everyone is involved in deciding Earth's future - is the key to success.

For comprehensive Earth action, an all-of-the-Earth representative democracy is required. That is, a global parliament.

In his Gettysburg address of 1859, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed: 'We here highly resolve... that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the Earth.'

153 years later, let us here in Hobart, and around the world, highly resolve that through global democracy we shall save the Earth from perishing.

For those who oppose global democracy the challenge is clear: how else would you manage human affairs in this new century of global community, global communications and shared global destiny?

Recently, when I got back to bed at Liffey after ruminating under the stars for hours on this question, Paul enquired, 'did you see a comet?' 'Yes', I replied, 'and it is called 'Global Democracy'.

A molten rock from space destroyed most life on the planet those sixty-five million years ago. Let us have the comet of global democracy save life on Earth this time.

Nine years ago, after the invasion of Iraq which President George W. Bush ordered to promote democracy over tyranny, I proposed to the Australian Senate a means of expanding democracy without invasion. Let Australia take the lead in peacefully establishing a global parliament. I explained that this ultimate democracy would

decide international issues. I had in mind nuclear proliferation, international financial transactions and the plight of our one billion fellow people living in abject poverty.

In 2003 our other Greens Senator, Kerry Nettle, seconded the motion but we failed to attract a single other vote in the seventy-six seat chamber. The four other parties - the Liberals, the Nationals, Labor and the Democrats - voted 'no!'. As he crossed the floor to join the 'noes', another senator called to me: 'Bob, don't you know how many Chinese there are?'

Well, yes I did. Surely that is the point. There are just 23 million Australians amongst seven billion equal Earthians. Unless and until we accord every other citizen of the planet, friend or foe, and regardless of race, gender, ideology or other characteristic, equal regard we, like them, can have no assured future.

2500 years ago the Athenians, and 180 years ago the British, gave the vote to all men of means. After Gettysburg, the United States made the vote available to all men, regardless of means. One man, one vote.

But what about women, Louisa Lawson asked in 1889: "Pray, why should one half of the world govern the other half?"

So, in New Zealand, in 1893, followed by South Australia in 1895, and the new Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, universal suffrage - the equal vote for women as well as men - was achieved.

In this second decade of the Twenty First Century, most people on Earth get to vote in their own countries. Corruption and rigging remain common place but the world believes in democracy. As Winston Churchill observed in 1947,

'Many forms of government have been tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.'

Yet, in Australia and other peaceful places which have long enjoyed domestic democracy, establishing a global democracy - the ultimate goal of any real democrat - is not on the public agenda.

Exxon, Coca-Cola, BHP Billiton and News Corporation have much more say in organising the global agenda than the planet's five billion mature-age voters without a ballot box.

Plutocracy, rule by the wealthy, is democracy's most insidious rival. It is served by plutolatriy, the worship of wealth, which has become the world's prevailing religion. But on a finite planet, the rule of the rich must inevitably rely on guns rather than the ballot box, though, I hasten to add, wealth does not deny a good heart. All of us here are amongst the world's wealthiest people, but I think none of us worship wealth to the exclusion of democracy.

We instinctively know that democracy is the only vehicle for creating a fair, global society in which freedom will abound, but the extremes of gluttony and poverty will not. Mahatma Ghandi observed, the world has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed.

So what's it to be: democracy or guns? I plunk for democracy.

The concept of world democracy goes back centuries, but since 2007, there has been a new movement towards an elected, representative assembly at the United Nations, in parallel with the unelected, appointed, General Assembly. This elected assembly would have none of the General Assembly's powers but would be an important step along the way to a future, popularly elected and agreeably empowered global assembly.

Two Greens motions in the Australian Senate to support this campaign for a global people's assembly have been voted down. However similar motions won support in the European Parliament, and in India 40 MPs, including a number of ministers, have backed the proposal. I will move for the world's 100 Greens parties to back it too, at the third Global Greens conference in Senegal next week. It fits perfectly with the Global Greens Charter, adopted in Canberra in 2001.

We Earthians can develop rosier prospects. We have been to the Moon. We have landed eyes and ears on Mars. We are discovering planets hundreds of light years close which are ripe for life. We are on a journey to endless wonder in the Cosmos and to realising our own remarkable potential.

To give this vision security, we must get our own planet in order.

The political debate of the Twentieth century was polarised between capitalism and communism. It was about control of the economy in the narrow sense of material goods and money. A free market versus state control.

Bitter experience tells us that the best outcome is neither, but some of both. The role of democracy in the nation state has been to calibrate that balance.

In this Twenty First Century the political debate is moving to a new arena. It is about whether we expend Earth's natural capital as our population grows to ten billion people in the decades ahead with average consumption also growing.

We have to manage the terrifying facts that Earth's citizenry is already using one hundred and twenty percent of the planet's productivity capacity - its renewable living resources; that the last decade was the hottest in the last 1300 years (if not the last 9000 years); that we are extinguishing our fellow species faster than ever before in human history; and that to accommodate ten billion people at American, European or Australasian rates of consumption we will need two more planets to exploit within a few decades.

It may be that the Earth's biosphere cannot tolerate ten billion of us big consuming mammals later this century. Or it may be that, given adroit and agreeable global management, it can. It's up to us.

Once more the answer lies between the poles: between the narrow interests of the mega-rich and a surrender to the nihilist idea that the planet would be better off without us.

It will be global democracy's challenge to find the equator between those poles, and it is that equator which the Greens are best placed to reach.

One great difference between the old politics and Green politics, is the overarching question which predicates all our political decisions: 'will people one hundred years from now thank us?'

In thinking one hundred years ahead, we set our community's course for one hundred thousand years: that humanity will not perish at its own hand but will look back upon its Twenty First Century ancestry with gratitude.

And when the future smiles, we can smile too.

That query 'will people a hundred years from now thank us?' should be inscribed across the door of Earth's parliament.

So let us resolve

that there should be established

for the prevalence and happiness of humankind

a representative assembly

a global parliament

for the people of the Earth

based on the principle of

one person one vote one value;

and to enable this outcome

that it should be a bicameral parliament

with its house of review

having equal representation

elected from every nation.

An Earth parliament for all. But what would be its commission? Here are four goals:

Economy.

Equality.

Ecology.

Eternity.

To begin with economy, because that word means managing our household. The parliament would employ prudent resource management to put an end to waste and to better share Earth's plenitude. For example, it might cut the trillion dollars annual spending on armaments. A cut of just ten percent, would free up the money to guarantee every child on the planet clean water and enough food, as well as a school to attend to develop her or his best potential. World opinion would back such a move, though, I suppose Boeing, NATO, the People's Liberation Army, and the Saudi Arabian royal family might not.

The second goal is equality. This begins with equality of opportunity - as in every child being assured that school, where lessons are in her or his own first language, and a health clinic to attend. Equality would ensure, through the fair regulation of free enterprise, each citizen's wellbeing, including the right to work, to innovate, to enjoy creativity and to understand and experience and contribute to defending the beauty of Earth's biosphere.

Which brings me to the third goal: ecology. Ecological wellbeing must understrap all outcomes, so as to actively protect the planet's biodiversity and living ecosystems. 'In wildness', wrote Thoreau 'is the preservation of the world.' Wild nature is our cradle and the most vital source for our spiritual and physical wellbeing yet it is the world's most rapidly disappearing resource. And so I pay tribute to Miranda Gibson, 60 metres high on her tall tree platform tonight as the rain and snow falls across central Tasmania. In Miranda's spirit is the saving of the world.

And lastly, eternity. Eternity is for as long as we could be. It means beyond our own experience. It also means 'forever', if there is no inevitable end to life. Let's take the idea of eternity and make it our own business.

I have never met a person in whom I did not see myself reflected. Some grew old and died, and I am now part of their ongoing presence on Earth.

Others have a youthful vitality which I have lost and will soon give up altogether. These youngsters will in turn keep my candle, and yours, if you are aged like me, alight in the Cosmos. In this stream of life, where birth and death are our common lot, the replenishment of humankind lights up our own existences. May it go on and on and on...

The pursuit of eternity is no longer the prerogative of the gods: it is the business of us all, here and now.

Drawing on the best of our character, Earth's community of people is on the threshold of a brilliant new career in togetherness. But we, all together, have to open the door to that future using the powerful key of global democracy.

I think we are intelligent enough to get there. My faith is in the collective nous and caring of humanity, and in our innate optimism. Even in its grimmest history, the optimism of humanity has been its greatest power. We must defy pessimism, as well as the idea that there is any one of us who cannot turn a successful hand to improving Earth's future prospects.

I am an optimist. I'm also an opsimath: I learn as I get older. And, I have never been happier in my life. Hurling to death, I am alive and loving being Green.

I look forward in my remaining years to helping spread a contagion of confidence that, together, we people of Earth will secure a great future. We can and will retrieve Earth's biosphere. We will steady ourselves - this unfolding flower of intelligence in the Universe - for the long, shared, wondrous journey into the enticing centuries ahead.

Let us determine to bring ourselves together, settle our differences, and shape and realise our common dream for this joyride into the future. In that pursuit, let us create a global democracy and parliament under the grand idea of one planet, one person, one vote, one value.

We must, we can, we will.