LET ROGER REVELLE SPEAK FOR HIMSELF

By Walter H. Munk and Edward A. Frieman*

Cassandras, The New Republic, 6 July 1992.) Easterbrook goes on to say, “A lifetime of study persuaded Revelle that carbon emissions should be restricted, but are far less hazardous than initially feared.”

S. Fred Singer wrote the paper and, as a courtesy, added Roger as a co-author based upon his willingness to review the manuscript and advise on aspects relating to sea-level rise. The whole, it seems to us, is rather less than the sum of its parts, relative to Roger’s stance on these issues.

The key is the use of the word drastic. Roger’s last written statement on the subject was “What Can We Do About Climate,” presented at the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) session, Climate Change: Scientific Uncertainties and Policy Responses in New Orleans on 16 February 1990. It outlines a possible set of actions designed to mitigate or delay climatic warming. It includes attempts to modify society’s use and mix of fuels. While these may not be viewed as drastic, there is also no evidence that he believed that “emissions . . . are far less hazardous than initially feared.”

Roger attended a joint meeting of the American Philosophical Society and the Royal Society in London in May 1991, just a few months before he died. One of us was present and noted that in a public discussion of foreign climate research, he criticized the lack of certain types of measurements, which he believed necessary to understand the phenomena. Roger’s strongly held personal conviction called for informed activism, a combination of research and public policy action, a view he held at the time of his death.

* W.H. Munk, E.A. Frieman, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92039, USA.