

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Dec. 26—Other ages have had comets and new religions and revolutions. The change of the year is always likely to remind us that change is the law of life. But the sense of change, and the apprehension of it, cannot often have run so deep as they do this year. Many of us feel what an Englishman said in a letter to the editor the other day: "Our world is not ever going to be the same again."

One fundamental that is shifting is the relationship between the industrialized nations of the world and the others. We have been told again and again that the gap between rich and poor countries is dangerous. Now something is actually happening to redress the balance: the growing shortages and rising prices of basic resources.

Oil is the headline example, but it is not the only one. Underdeveloped countries that sell bauxite and copper and other basics are moving toward controlled sales and higher prices, following the Arab example. And the industrialized world is quite simply dependent on those resources.

Even with its advantageous mineral deposits, the United States must increasingly look to foreign suppliers. An official study forecasts that by 1985 we shall depend on imports for more than half our iron, lead, tungsten, aluminum, chromium, manganese, nickel, tin and zinc. We spent only \$5 billion on metal imports in 1970; the bill is projected at \$18 billion in 1985, \$44 billion by 2000.

The average citizen does not need to know such figures to sense the looming reality of profound change—economic, political, social. That prospect, unsettling at best, is the harder for us to bear because we do not get honest or even competent answers from our political leaders.

The politicians in almost every de-

ABROAD AT HOME

veloped country are relying on hope, public relations and luck to get them through the next weeks and months—anything except dealing with the long-term reality. In a time demanding extraordinary vision and patience, they seem more frivolous and short-sighted than ever.

Consider the Nixon Administration's tactics on oil. The message it keeps sending us is that the Arab embargo is easing, things are looking up, we'll get by this winter without real pain and then everything will be all right.

There is no serious student of the problem who believes that, and indeed the Administration knows better. On Dec. 13 William E. Simon, the energy administrator, told a group of Governors: "When the embargo ends, the crisis is not over. We will have a shortfall of five million barrels a day by 1978."

Experts in the oil industry and outside think world oil production will hit its peak within the next 25 years, then start to decline. In the last generation oil consumption has been doubling every decade. Put those two facts together, and you have a recipe for disaster. Prof. Arthur M. Squires of the City University of New York puts it:

"The dislocations of the world's economy and politics that will follow the collision between rising demand and a topping-out of oil production capability are mind-boggling. There is simply no chance at all for us if we do not learn quickly how to make do with less. The technological fixes can only ease the pain somewhat."

The politicians have been grossly deceptive in suggesting that there can be quick technological fixes. To go on with our pattern of expanding energy use would require some new source that could be developed even more rapidly than oil has been—and that is just not on.

There is a lot of talk, for example, about getting oil from shale. A suggested American target is one million tons of such oil a day by 1985, or 10 per cent of our projected oil demand. That would require mining two million tons of rock a day, which is about the total U.S. mining capability today.

Where shall we get the water for mining or other imagined ventures on such a scale? What would we do with the waste? What about the effect on our desperately needed crop land?

The point is not that we should give up research on new sources of energy or other resources—only that we be realistic about the costs, the likely time-spans involved and the connection with everything else on one earth. The day of what has been called the cowboy economy is over—the easy exploitation of physical frontiers and backward peoples. Now, everything connects; everything has a price.

When the Arab embargo produced its short-run oil crisis, those who had been thinking about the problems of energy were actually encouraged. They hoped that the shock, the sudden confrontation with geophysical and economic reality, would make the political leaders of the great industrial societies begin to reckon with the future.

That is why the reaction of the politicians is so depressing. No one expects them to embrace bad news. But there is ample room for challenge and optimism in the world of the future, a world perforce living within its limits, if we begin to adjust to it. Instead, they still talk as if we could go on endlessly with the exploding material world of highways and suburbs and things. That way lies trauma.

An economist, E. F. Schumacher, said something recently about economists that applies even more acutely to politicians. Mostly, he said, they spend their time "optimizing the arrangement of the deck-chairs on the Titanic."