

Earth Day Aftermath: Keeping Ecology Alive

By STEVE EARLY

In the wake of last week's national teach-in, many environmental activists and other interested observers are wondering about the future of the ecology movement.

Will the movement, for example, prove to more than a passing campus craze? If it does persist, how can groups like Environmental Action (which planned Earth Day) avoid the fate of the Moratorium?



Nixon's War on Pollution:
"Rhetoric and Fragmentary Reformism"

— becoming a part of "the institutionalized protest scene," losing effectiveness, and fading away?

Can ecology survive identification as merely another "issue," a popular and safe theme for a variety of establishment politicians?

It has become a cliché to observe that everyone is opposed to pollution. That the Environment is now right up there with Apple Pie, Motherhood, and The American Way.

Yet how many of the political figures in either major party who have co-opted the ecological crisis are willing to challenge the powerful corporate interests which helped to create it? It is, after all, the "American Way" itself — our whole pattern of production and consumption — which is largely responsible for the destruction of our native environment.

Little Actual Progress

The foremost fear among ecologists is that all the current publicity will only lull people into thinking that something is being done about ecological problems. Actually very little has been done and there is little prospect that the situation will improve.

In the words of social critic Nat Hentoff, the Nixon Administration to date has offered only "rhetoric and fragmentary reformism." Writing in the April issue of *Evergreen* (in an article entitled "Keeping Ecology Alive") Hentoff notes that in the President's widely praised State of the Union speech, there were not even "specific budgetary figures for cleaning the air and disposing of solid wastes."

\$10 BILLION?

"He (Nixon) did announce a \$10 billion, five-year program to clean up America's waters, but this turns out to involve the expenditure of only \$4 billion by the federal government with the cities and states expected to raise the rest.

"Looked at even more closely, that \$4 billion dollars will be stretched over the fiscal years 1971-79, thereby averaging about \$445 million a year, little more than half the amount Congress appropriated for the same purpose in the current fiscal year. (Before the speech, the Department of the Interior had estimated it would cost between \$43 billion and \$66 billion to curb water pollution over a five-year period.)"

Pathetic Figures

I. F. Stone reported in the February 23 issue of his Washington "Bi-Weekly," that "The total appropriations asked to fight pollution of the air (105 million) and water (\$465 million) next year total \$571 million."

Given the magnitude of the existing pollution problem and the necessity of forestalling further environmental deterioration, these figures are so astonishingly small as to be pathetic.

Evaluating Nixon's spending plans for the coming fiscal year, Stone observed:

"In a budget in which 53 cents of every general revenue dollar goes to the military, only four

bandwagon have any conception of the radical changes that must be introduced if man and the earth are to survive the 20th century.

Writing from Washington last week on the eve of Earth Day, Village Voice columnist Judith Coburn noted, "Unless the system is willing to pay for its own overthrow, the polluters and their friends must think the ecology movement is no threat."

As Miss Coburn went on to suggest in the course of analyzing the ecology movement, the threat to the system exists but is not yet a very potent one.

The old myth that continued growth increases our control over the environment is now simply false. We are losing control. We are destroying the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we walk upon. And this is not an accident. It is rooted in the fundamental attitudes and practices of advanced industrial society. It is in part the logic of capitalism, but it is more than that; it is the very relationship we assume toward the natural world.

The talk about shifting from an economy of affluence, obsolescence, redundancy and waste to an economy that recognizes scarcity must yield practical proposals for a new economics. And these proposals might include the mandatory re-cycling of all natural resources; the mandatory production of only re-cyclable containers; the rationing of all natural resources — rationing to provide for sane limits on the amount of consumption as well as to equalize mechanisms for distribution.

Industrial processes must be rationed as to the amount of oxygen, water or minerals they can consume in production. These are no small matters, but they are only the basic parameters for what would be the beginning of a truly democratic policy for our life support systems. The "economy of death" must be replaced by an economy of life.

— Eco-activist Barry Weisberg writing on "The Ecology of Oil: Raping Alaska," in the March issue of *Ramparts*

tenths of a cent will go to save the air we breathe and the water we drink though it may soon be too late to save them. Nixon's anti-pollution rhetoric is miles from his budget realities."

Re-ordering Priorities

Ecology groups realize that a substantial re-ordering of national priorities is essential to environmental preservation. And for this reason most would agree with Hentoff that any "political action that does not connect ecology with the end of the military-industrial-labor complex is frivolous."

Yet even if the Nixon Administration was attempting to establish new priorities — which it is not — the ecology movement would still be confronted with the basic problem posed by our entire economic system. As Barry Weisberg, a San Francisco Ecologist, puts it:

"The deterioration of the natural environment is clearly a product of the nature of production and consumption, of the cultural values and social relationships that are dominant in our industrial-technological society."

It is doubtful whether many politicians and businessmen currently on the environmental

Reform Politics With No Program

With an anti-corporate theme that is still only "implicit," the movement "has done little more than spawn the further growth of a particularly American kind of reform politics, building on the foundation of the McCarthy campaign, 'new politics,' and the Moratorium."

"It is fiercely anti-establishment politics... and it is ferociously moral. But it is a politics without a program to deal with economic reality."

"It spawns student politicians who urge students to deal with ecological disaster by giving up their cars and Saran Wrap; who sit on panels with the businessmen they accuse of destroying Vietnam and the earth's life-support system; and who recommend consumer boycotts to break the back of an economic system which depends on profits to survive."

Pressing Needs

The importance of public education, consumer protests, and

other forms of political activity cannot be under-valued. But their present scale and impact on public policy seems almost insignificant when one considers how much more has to be done to develop support for environmental controls and achieve the power to implement them.

Reviewing Paul Ehrlich's latest book, *Population: Resources, Environment*, in a recent issue of the *New York Review*, Economist Robert Heilbroner briefly outlined the steps America must take to bring its "economic activities into a sustainable relationship" with the earth's "resource capabilities and waste absorption properties."

Disposing Disposability

"On the simplest level, a whole series of technological problems must be met. Fume-free transportation must be developed on land and air. The cult of disposability must be replaced by that of reusability. Population stability must be attained through tax and other inducements, both to conserve resources and to preserve reasonable population densities." The rate and kind of technological change and industrial development will have "to be supervised and probably greatly reduced."

Heilbroner wonders whether any of this is "imaginable within a capitalist setting — that is, in a nation in which the business ideology permeates the views of nearly all groups and classes and establishes the bounds of what is possible and natural, and what is not?"

Future Of The Movement

Much, it would seem, depends on the future direction and strength of the student-based ecology movement. If the progress of the student-based anti-war movement is any guide, there is little cause for optimism. Vietnam continues and like the destruction of the environment, it is neither an accident nor an aberration. Both are the product of the same political and economic system, the same reckless domestic and foreign policies that America has pursued for many years.

The difference is that while the agony of Vietnam can apparently be prolonged almost indefinitely, the crisis of the environment must be met if any of us are to survive. As Heilbroner concludes in his review, ecological problems "will tax our technical and socio-political ingenuity, but the main problem they pose is not whether, but how soon they can be solved."

Earth-Day Box Score

Most of the nation's waterways are polluted. Almost any sizable city discharges enough combustion products into the air to render the community liable, under certain atmospheric vagaries to the sort of miasma that killed 20 persons in Donora, Pa. in 1948.

The handling of solid waste in most places has been described by conservative Federal experts as "scandalous." By and large it's just dumped nearby, to fester and stink. Although America — the "Once Beautiful" spreads over 2 billion acres, we have no rational policy of land use, so that most people are neurotically crowded into cities while most of the land lies sparsely populated.

Our national sentiments on population limitation are demonstrably schizophrenic. President Nixon and other officials have deplored unbridled population growth; yet tax and welfare laws and many other social fixtures tacitly put a premium on progeny.

Our resource policies, insofar as they are definable, are uncoordinated. Scattering strip mining is not related to the overall need for coal; cries of "lumber shortage" rise while huge amounts are being exported; the Santa Barbara Channel is drenched with tar without reference to the availability of oil elsewhere.

Government agencies have been building highways, damming rivers, digging canals, and licensing the distribution of lethal chemicals with bland disregard for side-effects.

Environmental reporter Gladwin Hill, in the April 24 *New York Times*

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President Nixon and the Court

"Behind Nixon's talk of the philosophy of strict construction (of the Constitution), as behind his talk of the 'legal philosophy' of the South, is plain and simple white middle class prejudice. Preventive detention means putting blacks in jail more easily. His strict constructionism is only a legislative device for restricting the rights of the blacks and the poor generally, as when Chief Justice Burger dissented from a recent decision holding that welfare payments could not be cut off without first granting the recipients a formal hearing. The Nixon-Mitchell-Burger philosophy is to give fewer rights to the disadvantaged. It is the philosophy of the smug, the unsympathetic rich and the Southern white supremacist. That is the kind of majority outlook he hopes to create on the Supreme Court, whether by appointing mediocrities from South or North."

— I. F. Stone in the April 20 issue of his Washington "Bi-Weekly."

Student Defeat On the E.P.C.

To the Editor:

At the meeting of the Educational Policy Committee last Monday, a student proposal to increase the number of voting student members of that committee from two to four was defeated.

As author of that proposal, and one of the two voting student members, I would like to give an account of both the pro and con arguments, and offer some implications. The atmosphere in which the discussion

and vote occurred is irretrievable, but fortunately the mood in which the proposal was defeated echoes in the arguments themselves.

Rationale

I proposed the increase in student voting membership for several reasons, some of which may not be in-an-of-themselves convincing, but all of which are honest, and important components of the rationale.

1. With two student members, it is virtually impossible to miss an EPC meeting even for good representation as students. If one member of the faculty cannot attend, there is still more

sensation. With only two students voting, we cannot afford the luxury of missing a meeting even for important academic or cultural events.

2. The decision to have two voting student members was arbitrary, not based on any rationally derived figure for a balance of student-faculty power. The College governance committee includes in its report a recommendation for a larger proportion of student voting members: a proportion my proposal does not violate. One of the faculty members who spoke in favor of increasing student voting membership suggested

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