

Save the Earth

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Consider these facts.

- * Lake Erie is dead. Acidic wastes from the surrounding factories have strained its waters of virtually every form of life except sludge worms and a mutant of the carp which has adjusted to living off poison.
- * World population was 500 million in 1650, doubled around 1850, doubled again within about eighty years, and now seems to be doubling at the rate of every 35 years.
- * It was not discovered until 1968 that DDT slows down photosynthesis in marine plant life. All life in the sea depends on photosynthesis, the chemical process by which green plants bind the sun's energy and make it available to living things. DDT has only been banned in one country.
- * In Los Angeles smog levels regularly reach the stage that schools are advised not to allow the children to do any strenuous exercise on particular days, as breathing deeply would be hazardous to the health.
- * Of some 200 million tons of waste poured into the air each year in the U.S.A., automotive vehicles contribute 94.6 million tons. What flows out of an automobile exhaust pipe is a mixture of five principal gases and chemicals, none of them good - carbon monoxide sulphur dioxide, hydrocarbons, various oxides of nitrogen and tiny particles of lead. The President of General Motors has admitted that it is technically possible to prevent petrol fumes escaping into the air, but it would increase prices.
- * In America women's breasts contain up to ten times more DDT than the government allows in dairy milk.
- * Four steel mills alone pollute Lake Michigan each day with one billion gallons of waste water containing 429,000 pounds of suspended solids, 650,000 pounds of oil and 66,000 pounds of suspended iron filings.
- * Pages of facts and statistics can be given - what has to be realised is that they are not isolated and not separated. Since World War II thousands of species of plants, insects and animals have been destroyed. We could follow.

- * We have to realise the magnitude of the pollution problem alone. Carbon dioxide and heat may well rank amongst the most serious sources of future ecological imbalance and pose threats to our continued existence. As a result of industrial and domestic combustion activities, the quantity of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing rapidly. If this continues a "greenhouse" effect develops - the gas inhibits the dissipation of the earth's heat into space, causing a rise in overall temperatures which will melt the polar ice caps and raise the ocean levels up to 400 feet.
- * Thermal pollution, the result mainly of warm water discharged by both nuclear and conventional power plants, has disastrous effects on the ecology of lakes, rivers and estuaries. Increases in water temperature not only damage the physiological and reproductive activities of fish; they also promote the great blooms of algae that have become such formidable problems in waterways.
- * What is at stake in the ecological crisis we face today is the very capacity of the earth to sustain advanced forms of life. The crisis is being drawn together by massive increases in "typical" forms of air and water pollution; by a mounting accumulation of nondegradable wastes, lead residues, pesticide residues and toxic additives in food; by the expansion of cities into vast urban belts; by increasing stresses due to congestion, noise and mass living; by the wanton scarring of the earth as a result of mining operations, lumbering and real estate speculation.
- * The result of all this is that the earth within a few decades has been despoiled on a scale that is unprecedented in the entire history of human habitation on the planet.

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? "More important than pollution of the ?
? air, soil, and water is pollution of ?
? the mind." - Sir Henry Bolte. ?
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The pollution issue is becoming a bandwagon at the moment, but all the shouting will be to no purpose unless people realise exactly what is at stake, and what measures are necessary if we are to survive - that is if we can survive, given the present existing situation.

It is literally now or never. Pollution is only one aspect of the whole question of our environment, and that question is a political and social question. It means a recognition of the fact that we live in a communal society, that our obligations to each other are just as great, if not greater, than our obligations to ourselves, that the one is the other.

The major problems of our times - Poverty, Race, Vietnam - cannot be separated and dealt with in isolation, and nor can the threat to our environment. At the source of each is the same division of society - those with power against those without.

Industry is now beginning to show concern, but we cannot rely on the polluters to solve the problem for us. Very often their solutions will only make it worse. Environmental decay and ecological catastrophe cannot be averted by programmes which deal merely with sources and not with systems. The solution must entail far-reaching changes in society and in man's relation to man. We must create revolutionary new institutions to embody new goals - human and environmental.

Environmental destruction and mankind's destruction are the inevitable outcome of the present society. Only by a total change in the nature of our society can we survive. We need new attitudes, new methods, new institutions. It may already be too late.

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