



THE POLITICS OF ECOLOGY

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The critical importance of ecology as a developing source of political opposition in America stems from the realization that politics in our age has acquired an absolute character. While political decision making and control is steadily concentrated in the hands of a very few—the arena of control is steadily expanding. Fewer and fewer people control more and more—so that the very conditions which support life on this planet: the land we walk upon, the air we breathe, and the water we drink, are now the subjects of political management on a scale beyond normal comprehension. The politics of ecology must start from the premise that present-day reality is increasingly the product of a structure of economic and political power that consolidates

and sustains itself through the systematic destruction of man and his physical world. The exploitation of man by man and nature by man are merely two sides of the same coin.

It is then folly to think that the destruction of our global life support systems under advanced industrial capitalism or communism is merely a by-product of progress, a case of bad management, the result of insufficient esthetic sensibilities on the part of business and engineers, or simply a matter of who owns the means of production. In an historical sense, we have reached the point where we can totally violate the processes and structures of the natural world; hence our relationship to nature is no longer determined by the forces of nature but by the rule of political management. The deterioration of the natural environment all around us is

therefore clearly a product of the nature of production and consumption, of cultural values and social relationships that today hold sway over industrial technological society—American or Soviet.

In short, our present technical manipulation of the life-support capacity of the planet now threatens the totality of physical conditions which nurture life itself. The oxygen content in the atmosphere, the metabolism of our own bodies, food chains and the relationship between populations and the resources needed to support them, conditions upon which the existence of all plant and animal life today depends, are the products of evolutionary processes extending over billions of years. Our industrial civilization is now destroying them in a matter of decades. We are talking about processes which may well have worked their irrevocable consequences within a decade or two—after which there will be nothing within the human potential to restore their life-giving capacity.

The culture itself is aware of the explosive potential of the imbalances between society and nature. Government and industry through the media have begun to manage these issues on a daily basis. Scientists speak out, reports are called for and committees created. In fact the pattern of action and language emerging around pollution parallels exactly the fail-

ures of civil rights and poverty—"a war on pollution," the calling for a "pollution pentagon." Even new bureaucratic offices to replace the Department of Interior are suggested. What such proposals miss is that it is not the control of the land, air and water that is at stake but the control of man.

The obvious question resulting from this brief survey is whether or not these are matters of bad management, disfunction or the like, as mentioned earlier. The origins of our present destruction of the life-support capacity of this planet are rooted in the very fabric of our civilization, reaching their most insane dimensions in the present corporate America. The Greek rationalism of Aristotle, the Roman Engineering mentality, the biblical anthropomorphic injunctions to "have dominion over the land and subdue every creeping thing," the post-Enlightenment notions of growth and progress, the present technical corporate economic systems motivated by competition—all dominate the Western mentality of man against nature. Where nature works toward harmony, cooperation and interdependence, advanced industrial society works toward growth, competition and independence. The advanced nation state works in direct opposition to those basic life giving instincts which have nourished our billion year evolution. To repeat, the domination of man by man and man over nature are two sides of the same coin. The precondition for our survival requires the most basic trans-

POLLUTION

Every year industrial processes resulting from the burning of fossil fuels pours 140 million tons of pollutants into the atmosphere—the approximate equivalent in tonnage of the entire steel production of the US in that year. We produce five pounds of solid waste per person per day—amounting to more than seven million autos, 40 million tons of paper, 48,000 million cans, 26,000 million bottles and countless other "wastes." For a long time these artifacts worked on the earth's life support systems much as garbage works on the plumbing in your own house. They clogged up the plumbing of the earth, presenting problems for which corrective action was possible. This has changed. Today the volume of waste produced in this society threatens our life support systems with destruction—with the basic alteration of the chemistry of the atmosphere, the oceans and the life-supporting capacity of the land. The present crisis of the life support systems is no longer simply one of pollution, for which exist remedial solutions, but of destruction, after which there can be no repair.

CONSUMPTION

Today, in these United States, seven per cent of the world's population consume upwards of seventy per cent of the world resources; one-fourth of all steel, three-fifths of the world's cars, one-third of the world's surfaced roads, one-third of all electric power, etc. Planned waste and obsolescence motivate this pattern. We eat in one day the equivalent nutrition of a month for most of the world.

Consequently, of the world's 3.7 billion persons, two and one-half billion lack the basic necessities of life. Put another way, only 16 per cent of the world monopolize 75 per cent of the world's income. This pattern of consumption works to deplete the limited resources of the globe, to waste resources which might sustain billions of people—waste which works toward pollution—and to promote the global colonization of most human beings throughout the world. This pattern of consumption is the basis for American domination throughout the world. It helps to explain why 650 million of the more than one billion children in our world will never reach adulthood.

POPULATION

On this finite globe there are now more than 3.7 billion people growing at a rate of 4% every year. That means that within 35 years the world's population will double, requiring not twice the world's resources but five-fold—assuming the rising pattern of consumption (the "revolution of rising expectations") continues to hold sway. The reason for this geometric growth is the imbalance between birth rate and death rate, which has drastically shortened the time span within which the world's population doubles. It has been reduced roughly from 10 million years, to 1600, to 200 years to 60 years to the present 35 years. Contrary to the current popular image, overpopulation is first and foremost a social and not a biological issue. That is to say that the pre-condition for a balanced population with the earth's resources is the redistribution of those resources—without which any measure of birth control will fail.

formation of the cultural, social, political and economic mentalities and structures which dominate the developed nations and hang as a carrot over the never-to-be developed nations.

In view of the sudden flurry of government-initiated programs (including the spate of officially endorsed campus "teach-ins" planned for next April), it is especially chilling to contemplate the performance of government, industry and their conservationist junior partners. Here's a rundown:

GOVERNMENT

The proportion of the National Budget spent on all natural resource programs has declined steadily since 1959.

1965	2.3%
1966	2.2%
1967	2.0%
1968	1.9%
1969	1.9% est.
1970	1.8% est.

In other words, for fiscal 1969, we spent only 3.6 billion on all natural resource programs, of some 202 billion dollars, spending more (4 billion) to reach outer space than to make the earth habitable. The gap between authorization and appropriation on programs such as air and water pollution has widened every year. This is merely to demonstrate the inability of the Congress to achieve its own stated objectives—not that those objectives would have successfully dealt with any major issue. In fact, there is every reason to believe that more spending would have produced merely more pollution. Add to this a government which at the same time subsidizes the supersonic transport, maintains the depletion allowance for continued off-shore drilling, undermines efforts at consumer protection—and one begins to understand the meaning of federal efforts. While there are more committees, more reports, more research and more attention, less and less is actually done. The frightening conclusion, however, is not that government should do more, for the more it does the worse our ecological systems get.

INDUSTRY

What are we to make of the flurry of industrial ads depicting everything from Standard Oil to Dow Chemical to the American Rifle Association as conservation-minded people? Of the recent Business of Pollution Control Technology of the investment of industry in conservation organization? The answer I think is to be found, for instance, in the words of Robert O'Anderson, chairman of the board of Atlantic Richfield. In a recent address before a State Department-sponsored conference on Man and His Environment, Anderson argued that the costs of pollution control should be passed on to the consumer and that oil should remain the base of energy supply. In short, industry has made of the environmental crisis a commodity. Recent financial reports indicate that the business of pollution control will in fact make a profit out of pollution while at the same time generating more pollution: more growth will be the remedy applied to the perils of growth. In short, that adver-

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tising will continue to cost more for business than research, that the consumers will be passed on any costs of "pollution control," and that federal agencies, new or old, will continue to operate as captives of the industry they are to regulate.

CONSERVATION

More than any single element of the present collage of conservation activity, the conservation organizations themselves, to varying degrees, lead the public to believe that the Emperor has no clothes when in fact they serve as clothes for the Emperor. Such organizations act in the most fragmentary ways, attacking isolated problems and not complex patterns of social and political behavior. They save a nature area and fail to address the entire land use patterns of that region. They save a seashore from development when that seashore is threatened with the biological destruction of its wildlife. As such, their victories are at best stop gaps, always provisional. They foster the existence of centralized forms of authority through the support they lend to present elective procedures—"get the good guys in office." They have virtually no critical understanding of the governments of oil, agri-business, public utilities or chemicals. The conservationists frequently violence-bait the Left or shun it as revolutionary. "The country is tired of SDS and ready to see someone like us come to the forefront," a young conservationist recently noted. Increasingly motivated and supported by various governmental machinations, these people work in total isolation to the civil rights and peace movements, with no relationship to the varied forces of opposition and liberation in the society today—the revolutionary young, women's liberation, labor, and oppressed minorities. They seek private solutions to what more correctly are public issues—picking up litter rather than attacking the production of junk, refusing to use autos rather than struggling against oil and the auto manufacturers, to be merely suggestive.

But most important, the "new breed of young conservationists" fail to see that the crisis of the environment truly is but a reflective of the crisis of this culture itself, of the values, institutions, and procedures which have for some 200 years systematically guided the slaughter of human and all other forms of life at home and abroad. These tendencies were demonstrated too well by a recent selection of "youth" hand-picked by the Department of State to participate in the US Commission for UNESCO Conference on Man and His Environment in San Francisco last month. Virtually all "program" suggested by these participants lent credence to the status quo by advocating "better" candidates, new ecology colleges, yet additional "research," and more jobs for conser-

vation-minded college kids.

The barrage of petitions and letters to the President was greeted by the conference "adults" with adulation, for the kids turned out to be "reasonable men" just as their parents. The popular press billed their performance as revolutionary—defined as "non-violent," get-your-man-in-office, and increased student participation. But the role of our benign media goes much further.

By and large, the media has purposely obscured the political and social content of the environmental crisis by confining problems as well as solutions solely to the realm of science and technology. The result is that blind faith in the omnipotence of expertise and technocracy wholly dominates current thinking on ecological issues. Technological innovation and more reasonable methods of resource allocation cannot possibly reverse the present logic of the environment unless the overriding political, social and economic framework which has actually generated that trend in radically rebuilt. Such a transformation cannot reside solely in the realm of culture and values—as most often proposed by the youthful elites of conservation. The critical task today is to raise the issue of pollution/destruction, imperialistic styles of consumption, and of over-population to a political status in order to reveal an arena of political opposition in America which the Left has hitherto ignored. That is not to say that the Left can simply absorb the ecological crisis into its own kind of "business as usual" behavior. For the patterns of life in which most of us partake are not much different than those of the ruling class. This is not to say that true solutions reside in private action, but that public transformation without an entirely different style of life is futile. Thus the development of an ecological politics on a practical level may provide the only framework in which the alienated and oppressed can achieve true liberation.

That potential for liberation doesn't lie in the Save the Bay Campaigns, the protection of a redwood grove or planned parenthood. It does not reside alone in the culturally symbolic acts of many ecology action groups around the country. The true origin of what has yet to become an authentic movement is in the People's Park episode, in militant actions against corporate despoilers (including sabotage) and in the private as well as public attempts to create ecologically sound lives.

While the traditional conservationists have made no imaginative attempt to understand what our cities would look like without autos, with decentralized agriculture or power, with neighborhood control and rationed resources, save for few scant efforts, the Left, with few exceptions, has been equally derelict. "Radical" economists still contemplate growth-motivated economies grounded in false notions of affluence and unlimited resources.

The New Left has at this point made little serious effort to understand or relate to the politics of ecology. While the battles in the streets appear more pressing and more direct, it ought to be understood that unless something very basic and very revolutionary is done about the continued destruction of our life support systems, there may well be no wind to weather in the near future.

Dismissing over-population as simply a matter of genocide, efforts to take back the land as bourgeois or the

necessity for clean air and water as a luxury completely fails to grasp what can only properly be understood as a matter of life or death.

The task of ecological radicals is to continually raise those issues which sort those which would seek to patch up the status quo from those who struggle for basic transformation. The polarization of the rulers and the ruled is the authentic growth of any true movement for liberation. When conservationists argue that everyone is in the same boat, (or on the same raft) that everyone must work together, tempering their actions to suit the imperatives of coalition, they are in fact arguing for the further consolidation of power and profit in the hands of those responsible for the present dilemma.

There is no easy way to summarize exactly how the Movement must respond to the growing politics of ecology. Publishing special magazine editions and flimsy attacks on "sewer men" will not do. Few models exist to lend direction to organizing efforts. Already throughout the country people have been organized around industrial accidents and health hazards, consumer boycotts, women's liberation and the nuclear family, the extinction of animal species or the struggle against a new highway. This is just the beginning. This winter and spring we can expect a series of radical ecological actions: the bombing of more corporate headquarters, sabotage to the industrial machinery that pollutes and obstruction at airports and other transportation corridors.

It is safe to suggest that organizing around environment issues that fails immediately to lead to the political causes and implications of that peril is misguided. For too long eco news and reports have begun and ended with nature—without understanding that nature itself is today the product of manipulation by man. We should have learned from the Peoples' Park that the road ahead will be perilous and paved with a life and death struggle. If the State of California would defend a parking lot with the life of one person and the shooting of another 150, imagine the cost of taking back a forest, preventing an off-shore drilling rig from being placed, blocking the construction of a nuclear power plant or tampering with the power/communication/food/transport systems which make America grow. But the sooner this happens the better. The sooner the spirit of the Peoples' Park infuses every ecological action, the brighter will be our chances to insure the conditions for our survival and, beyond that, a decent society.

Educating "the people about the impending ecological disaster" without pointing to possible forms of action available is at this point a disservice to the Movement. As people engage in direct struggle against the Con Edisons, the Standard Oils, the pollution control agencies, and the United Fruit companies of the world, more and more new insights for strategy will develop. What has been happening to poor whites and blacks for several hundred years, what America has done to the Vietnamese, America is now doing to its own population, en masse. The organizing implications of this single fact may be profound. In a world of total biological slavery, liberation is the very condition of Life itself. To fail does not mean growing up absurd, but not growing up at all.

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