

## Environmental Teach-In: A New Round of Student Activism?

Growing student concern about pollution and other forms of environmental degradation shows signs of becoming institutionalized, though just what forms of expression this concern ultimately may take is not clear. Last September, Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.), who successfully campaigned for re-election in 1968 primarily on the environmental protection issue, called for an environmental "teach-in" to be held this spring on every university campus in the United States. The teach-in, he said, could take the form of symposiums, convocations, panel discussions, or whatever the students decided upon. "The same concern [that students] took in changing this nation's priorities on the war in Vietnam and on civil rights can be shown for the problems of the environment," Senator Nelson said.

An environmental teach-in movement has in fact developed, with Nelson helping to organize it. That the teach-in idea has caught on seems due in part to the circumstance that, even before Nelson made his proposal, significant numbers of students felt strongly about environmental problems, as evident from the student conservation and environmental study groups springing up at various universities. And the idea of students turning next to the environmental problem as a major area of their concern has gained currency partly from the publicity accorded it by the news media, which are themselves taking up the environmental issue with fervor.

One of the first of the larger environmental teach-ins this year will be held at Northwestern University on 23 January. This is billed as an all-night affair (actually called a "teach-out" because it is meant to be directed outward to the community) that is to begin with speeches by environmental evangelists such as biologists Paul Ehrlich of Stanford and Barry Commoner of Washington University and by politicians such as Adlai Stevenson III, state treasurer of Illinois and candidate for the U.S. Senate. Then there is to be a songfest, followed by a smorgasbord of group discussions (among which students will circulate) on topics such as environmental law, the politics of conservation, and pollution control technology. The discussions are expected to continue until dawn. The teach-out is being organized by Northwestern Students for a Better Environment, a nonradical group set up last October to investigate and take positions on environmental questions and to stimulate wider public interest in these issues.

From 8 to 11 February, Dickinson College, a liberal arts institution at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, will hold a 4-day symposium on environmental pollution, with classes to be suspended the last day. Senator Nelson, Commoner, and Stewart L. Udall (former Secretary of the Interior) will be among the speakers, who will also include specialists from science, industry, and volunteer groups on problems such as overpopulation and air pollution. Participants in the symposium, which was conceived last spring by a student-faculty committee, will prepare workshop reports to be sent to major polluting industries and governmental bodies.

A nationwide teach-in is set for 22 April. According to Senator Nelson's office and the national teach-in

headquarters in Washington, efforts to organize teach-ins are under way at at least a dozen major universities, and inquiries have been received from individuals or groups at well over 200 institutions. It is now believed virtually certain that teach-ins will be held by students at institutions in the Boston, St. Louis, and San Francisco Bay areas (with students from two or more universities making joint plans in some cases) and at a number of other schools (such as Indiana University, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Yale, Columbia, Southern California, and the University of Florida).

The movement is being promoted nationally by a newly chartered tax-exempt organization called Environmental Teach-In, Inc., of which Senator Nelson and Representative Paul N. McCloskey (R-Calif.) are the co-chairmen. Others on the governing board include Sydney Howe (president of the Conservation Foundation), Ehrlich, and five other members, including three students. The student coordinator of the movement is Denis Hayes, a former president of the Stanford student body and now a law student at Harvard. Hayes and a half dozen other students are taking off a half year from their studies to work for the teach-in movement. Environmental Teach-In, Inc., will appeal to the public for funds to cover its expenses, which are not expected to be large.

Because of a problem of academic scheduling, the teach-in at the University of Michigan will be held from 11 to 14 March, more than a month earlier than the national teach-in. Michigan students have prepared an ambitious set of plans and goals for their event, and this prospectus is being sent by Environmental Teach-In, Inc., to students at other institutions to help them plan their own activities. Organizing the Michigan teach-in is a group called Environmental Action for Survival (ENACT), which includes some faculty members and people from Ann Arbor as well as students.

ENACT is to be a continuing organization that will carry on educational and action-oriented activities long after the teach-in itself has been held. The teach-in, which is reported to have strong support from Michigan's President Robben Fleming, will be an effort to promote programs of interdisciplinary study of environmental problems, draw public attention to those problems, encourage environmental education activities in the public schools of Ann Arbor, and discuss and carry out action projects.

According to the teach-in prospectus, action projects which might be undertaken before, during, or after the teach-in include the drafting and promoting of legislation, the reporting of pollution-law violators, the filing of environmental lawsuits, and active campaigning for elective officials who have sound positions on environmental issues.

If one may judge from the prospectus for the Michigan events, the teach-in movement will have a distinctly activist ring. And past experience with student activist movements has made it clear that these are dynamic and unpredictable and tend to acquire a will of their own.—LUTHER J. CARTER