

Earth Day: A Fresh Way of Perceiving the Environment

The observance of Earth Day on 22 April may or may not have marked the launching of a mass movement on behalf of environmental protection and a better quality of life. The Earth Day rites can be taken as symbolic evidence, however, of a major change that has occurred over the past year in public perception of environmental problems. There is evidence, too, that many students have found the environmental issue to be one related to nearly all of their other concerns, such as the Vietnam War, racial injustice, dehumanizing aspects of urban life, and the frequent failure of both government and corporate enterprise to behave in a manner broadly representative of the public interest.

Moreover, Environmental Teach-In, Inc., the national ad hoc student organization that promoted the observance of Earth Day, is being reincarnated in a more militant form. To be known as Environmental Action, this will be a non-tax-exempt group encouraging and using such tactics as lawsuits, stock proxy fights, demonstrations, and campaigns for or against political candidates. According to Steve Cotton, spokesman for Environmental Action, Earth Day observances were

conducted by some 4000 local groups, half of them campus groups and half organizations such as labor union locals, League of Women Voters chapters, conservation groups, and other community groups. Nearly all of the campus and local community groups intend to remain active and will be the national organization's principal source of strength, Cotton says.

The very term "Earth Day" points up the distance conservation has come from the time, only a few years ago, when most who considered themselves conservationists were still concerned principally with problems such as the protection of the Grand Canyon from dam builders and the protection of the Cascade Range from miners and lumbermen. The term was coined in January by students at the national teach-in organization in connection with the preparation of a newspaper advertisement appealing for funds (some \$125,000 was raised by the national organization, most of this money coming in \$5 and \$10 contributions).

To trace precisely the genesis of the Earth Day idea would not be easy, but, clearly, it was something that was in the air. René Dubos, microbiologist at The Rockefeller University and a prominent "environmentalist," has suggested that it was worth all the billions spent on Apollo just to make people perceive the uniqueness of the earth in a solar system which otherwise appears barren of life. Through their writings and appearances on the campus lecture circuit, Dubos and other biologists, such as Barry Commoner of Washington University, LaMont Cole of Cornell, and Paul Ehrlich of Stanford, have been energetically sounding the warning that the earth itself may become uninhabitable. Now, finally, the concept of "spaceship earth" is, without doubt, another idea whose time has come.

A year ago, there was little evidence of public concern about domestic population growth as a major factor in environmental degradation, although for years there had been an awareness of

a "population crisis" in the less developed countries. A major theme of Earth Day was the warning that, unless the U.S. population is stabilized and a "zero growth rate" achieved, nearly all environmental problems will be exacerbated and eventually made insoluble.

"Stop at 2" buttons and a poster depicting an earth crowded to overflowing were distributed by the thousands. And, to judge from the increasing willingness of many public officials to speak out in favor of the two-child family as the norm, this emphasis on population control was not contrary to popular currents. In the Nixon Administration, two high-ranking officials, Lee DuBridge, the President's science advisor, and Robert H. Finch, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, already have spoken out in favor of moving toward a zero growth rate, although the President himself has not yet gone this far in his public statements.

Another significant change in the perception of environmental issues by the public—or at least a significant and growing part of the public—is that, now, there is increasing awareness that effective environmental action is impossible without a reordering of national priorities. A cliché always handy to the tongue of Earth Day speakers was that the United States cannot fight in Vietnam, build the supersonic transport (SST), explore the moon, lace its cities with freeways, and overcome air and water pollution too.

Late last week, Arthur Godfrey, television personality and crusader for conservation causes, announced the formation of a "Coalition Against the SST." This group, made up of 14 con-



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servation organizations such as the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, the Wilderness Society, and the Citizens League against the Sonic Boom, has written President Nixon to urge that the Administration's request for a \$290-million appropriation for the SST in 1971 be withdrawn. If the President refuses to do this, as he undoubtedly will, the coalition will try to have the appropriation blocked in Congress.

It has been a matter of regret to organizers of the Earth Day observances that relatively few Negroes participated, either in groups or as individuals (there were exceptions, as in the case of the Black Survival organization in St. Louis). However, while many blacks apparently viewed Earth

Day as a white middle-class exercise unrelated to their own problems, this scarcely seems a fair appraisal. In an Earth Day speech in Denver, Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.), with whom the idea for an environmental teach-in on 22 April originated, put it this way: "Earth Day can—and it must—lend a new urgency and a new support to solving the problems that still threaten to tear the fabric of this society—the problems of race, of war, of poverty, of modern-day institutions. Ecology is a big science, a big concept—not a copout."

The people most likely to be blamed for a copout are the leaders of the Nixon Administration and the leaders of both parties in Congress if the fed-

eral government does not soon take action stronger than anything now under way to stop environmental degradation. Yet when one thinks of how cautiously this Administration and this Congress (and their predecessors) have dealt with environmental problems, it would take a bold prophet to say that the government will now act to reverse existing trends. To some, it seemed symbolic that Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel chose Earth Day to announce that a right-of-way permit will be granted for the controversial trans-Alaska pipeline, a project which many conservationists fear will result in disastrous oil spills or otherwise disrupt the ecology of the Alaskan tundra.

—LUTHER J. CARTER

Discrimination: Women Charge Universities, Colleges with Bias

Forty-three colleges and universities have been charged with discriminatory employment practices against women under laws that provide, as a final sanction, the cancellation of all federal contracts held by the institutions and the barring of new contracts.

Two women's rights groups, the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) and the National Organization for Women (NOW), have filed the complaints, citing laws that forbid federal contractors to discriminate in employment against women. All the institutions named by WEAL and NOW have federal contracts.

One university, Harvard, initially cooperated with investigators from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) but refused early in April to open "confidential files." Harvard is playing for big stakes—until the matter is settled, negotiations on new federal contracts may be delayed. The Civil Rights Office, which must approve the contracts, may simply hold them up. Harvard was negotiating for \$3 million worth of new contracts. Payments on existing contracts, which at Harvard total \$60 million, have not been suspended, but they could be suspended

later in the proceedings if Harvard fails to adopt an acceptable plan. Personnel director John Butler, who closed the files, said he thinks HEW and Harvard will be able to negotiate a settlement.

Executive Orders 11246 and 11375 forbid discrimination by federal contractors on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. Discrimination is forbidden in employment, promotion, pay rates, and admission to apprenticeship.

Enforcement works like this: a complaint is filed with the Civil Rights Office of HEW. HEW investigates the complaint and notifies the contractor of discriminatory practices that it has found. The contractor must draw up a written plan of "affirmative action" to correct the discrimination and to remedy the effects of past discrimination; this plan must be implemented by a specific deadline. (WEAL and NOW are drawing up a model plan of affirmative action.) If the contractor refuses to submit an acceptable plan (none has yet refused), the contractor is barred from acquiring new contracts and existing contracts are canceled. Cancellation of contracts requires a formal, public hearing, and during this process payment

on the existing contracts is suspended.

The Executive Orders have been used to counter racial discrimination in the construction industry, but they have not previously been enforced with regard to sex.

The colleges named by WEAL and NOW include public and private institutions, rich and poor, Northern and Southern: Harvard, City University of New York, the universities of North Carolina, Tennessee, Pittsburgh, Boston, and Maryland; Rutgers, Southern Illinois, Brandeis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Smith, Amherst, Radcliffe, and a group of small colleges—DePauw, Marymount College in New York, Clarion State College in Pennsylvania, and others. WEAL is readying more complaints against colleges and universities, and these should be filed in May.

In addition, two professional associations have been accused of discrimination against women. The American Psychological Association's journal and the American Personnel and Guidance Association placement bulletin have each published help-wanted advertisements which specify sex. WEAL is contending that such publication violates the law.

The HEW Office of Contract Compliance, Civil Rights Division, has been asked to begin an immediate "class" action and compliance review of the colleges and associations. The complaints against the colleges name these areas of discrimination: admission quotas to undergraduate and graduate schools; discrimination in financial help for graduate study; hiring practices;