

## AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

*Science* serves its readers as a forum for the presentation and discussion of important issues related to the advancement of science, including the presentation of minority or conflicting points of view, rather than by publishing only material on which a consensus has been reached. Accordingly, all articles published in *Science*—including editorials, news and comment, and book reviews—are signed and reflect the individual views of the authors and not official points of view adopted by the AAAS or the institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

### Editorial Board

1970

GUSTAF O. ARRHENIUS	RICHARD C. LEWONTIN
FRED R. EGGAN	ALFRED O. C. NIER
HARRY F. HARLOW	FRANK W. PUTNAM
MILTON HARRIS	

1971

THOMAS EISNER	NEAL MILLER
AMITAI ETZIONI	BRUCE MURRAY
EMIL HAURY	JOHN R. PIERCE
DANIEL KOSHLAND, JR.	

### Editorial Staff

#### Editor

PHILIP H. ABELSON

#### Publisher

DAEL WOLFLE

#### Business Manager

HANS NUSSBAUM

Managing Editor: ROBERT V. ORMES

Assistant Editors: ELLEN E. MURPHY, JOHN E. RINGLE

Assistants to the Editor: NANCY TEIMOURIAN, PAULA LECKY

News Editor: JOHN WALSH

Foreign Editor: DANIEL S. GREENBERG\*

News and Comment: LUTHER J. CARTER, PHILIP M. BOFFEY, NANCY GRUCHOW, SCHERRAINE MACK

Research Topics: ROBERT W. HOLCOMB

Book Reviews: SYLVIA EBERHART, KATHERINE LIVINGSTON, CAROL BROWN

Editorial Assistants: JOANNE BELK, ISABELLA BOULDIN, ELEANORE BUTZ, GRAYCE FINGER, NANCY HAMILTON, CORRINE HARRIS, OLIVER HEATWOLE, ANNE HOLDSWORTH, MARSHALL KATHAN, MARGARET LLOYD, VIRGINIA NUESSEL, PATRICIA ROWE, LEAH RYAN, LOIS SCHMITT, BARBARA SHEFFER, RICHARD SOMMER, YA LI SWIGART, ALICE THEILE, MARIE WEBNER

\* European Office: 22 Mulberry Walk, London, S.W.3, England (Telephone: 352-9749)

### Advertising Staff

#### Director

EARL J. SCHERAGO

#### Production Manager

KAY GOLDSTEIN

Advertising Sales Manager: RICHARD L. CHARLES

Sales: NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036: Robert S. Bugbee, 11 W. 42 St. (212-PE-6-1858); SCOTCH PLAINS, N.J. 07076: C. Richard Callis, 12 Unami Lane (201-889-4873); MEDFIELD, MASS. 02052: Richard M. Ezequille, 4 Rolling Lane (617-444-1439); CHICAGO, ILL. 60611: Herbert L. Burkland, Room 2107, 919 N. Michigan Ave. (312-DE-7-4973); BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF. 90211: Winn Nance, 111 N. La Cienega Blvd. (213-657-2772)

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE: 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: 202-387-7171. Cable: *Advancesci*, Washington. Copies of "Instructions for Contributors" can be obtained from the editorial office. See also page xviA, *Science*, 27 March 1970. ADVERTISING CORRESPONDENCE: Room 1740, 11 W. 42 St., New York, N.Y. 10036. Phone: 212-PE-6-1858.

## The Wrong Top Priority

At the moment, American conservatives and liberals, government and people, all consider the elimination of pollution the domestic problem which deserves first priority. Public opinion polls show that Americans ranked fighting pollution next to fighting crime; fighting pollution ranked higher than any other needs, including those of improving schools and expanding medical services. A very high 56 percent favored allotting more money to the purification of our air and water, while an extremely low 3 percent favored less expenditure in this area. The President clearly indicated his concern in his message to Congress on 10 February: "The time has come when we can no longer wait to repair the damage already done, and to establish new criteria to guide us in the future." Furthermore, he added that pollution "may well become the major concern of the American people in the decade of the '70's."

This new commitment has many features of a fad: a rapid swell of enthusiasm (most of the ecology action groups are less than 6 months old), fanned by the mass media (the number of activists at Columbia University tripled after the *New York Times* reported that pollution was The Cause of the Year). And the commitment is rather shallow. Few citizens seem aware of the costs they will have to bear as taxpayers, consumers, and automobile and home owners. For example, the increase in fuel costs for landlords is estimated to run between 15 and 20 percent. Another typical feature of this past fad is the preponderance of advocates who feel that the advancement of their project would achieve a whole spectrum of good things, ranging from revival of the Judeo-Christian tradition to improvement of the "quality of life."

To arouse the public and Congress, the newly found environmental dangers are being vastly exaggerated; we really are not all about to be asphyxiated by carbon monoxide. Nor is it true that, unless we *act now*, "air pollution will screen out the sun and make big cities uninhabitable; [that] the fragile biosphere we all live in is becoming poisonous and may cease to support life; [that] plagues threaten" [editorial, *Life* (6 March 1970)]. The time frequently set for this "end of the world" is "within 10 to 15 years." Even if a presently threatened species—say, Louisiana's brown pelicans—were to disappear, it is still ridiculous to expect that the whole ecology would be thrown so out of equilibrium that our economy or society would collapse.

The complicated problems that pollution control poses can be handled only in part through a crash program. Public and legislative commitment ought to be built up for a long pull. But even if one day water and air again are as pure as they were before man polluted them, many other environmental problems—from ugly cities to overcrowding—will still be with us.

Now we should continue to give top priority to "unfashionable" human problems. Fighting hunger, malnutrition, and rats should be given priority over saving wildlife, and improving our schools over constructing waste disposal systems. If we must turn to "environment," first attention should be given to the 57,000 Americans who will *lose their lives* on the roads in 1970.

More deeply, we must face the fact that our society and policy are still organized as if our real top priority was the production of consumer goods and their consumption. Unless we learn to turn much more of our resources, manpower, organizational skills, and attention to public issues, none of the annual fads will cause a significant, lasting reduction in any of our domestic problems.—AMITAI ETZIONI, *chairman, Department of Sociology, Columbia University, New York, New York*