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Save the World

The time has arrived for an extensive systems analysis of the problems of saving planet Earth as a pleasant, productive home for mankind, for now, with a rush, there has come widespread recognition of the deadly seriousness of many of the issues involved.

The fundamental problem is people. Whatever we do to increase food supplies, conserve water, improve land management, or curb pollution merely postpones for a few years the day of catastrophe unless we stop increasing the number of hungry mouths. National and international governmental agencies have *population* high on their agendas. Pope Paul has asked his special advisory commission to speed its report to him, and that report may become public in the next few weeks. Much, very much, is to be done, but this problem is recognized as urgent.

Others are gaining in recognition and urgency. Governor Brown of California has engaged four aerospace companies to study the problems of smog, sewage, transportation, and agricultural and industrial wastes in that teeming state. UNESCO's Hydrological Decade started this year. Other signs, all of recent days, concern a variety of elements of the problem. On 11 August the President met with eastern governors, mayors, and congressmen to consider the water emergency in their states. On 5 August the Western Interstate Water Conference was warned that five of the seven great drainage areas of the western states will, within the next 15 years, be developed as far as they can be. On 6 August India extended to all cities of over a million its policy of restricting the allowance of wheat or rice for adults to 12 ounces a day. A group of congressmen spent several hours viewing the horrors of the Hudson River, its oil slicks, dead fish, detergent bubbles, beer cans, and other garbage. Congressional hoppers are full of bills dealing with national parks, wilderness areas, and conservation measures. A Gallup poll showed 77 percent of a national sample as favoring government action on water problems. Morris Neiburger of the University of California, Los Angeles, warned that if the rest of the world gets to using automobiles as freely as the United States does, smog will kill us all within a century. High-rise mausoleums have been proposed. All of these actions, conferences, and alarms are accompanied by a spate of newspaper and magazine articles that warn the public of the consequences of inaction.

If it be assumed—as it must be—that we will succeed in stemming population growth and preventing nuclear catastrophe, our expected success on these problems makes it time for an analysis on a global scale of the whole set of environmental problems, a systems study of mankind in relation to his planet. Finding the right sponsor for such a study will be an initial difficulty, but perhaps one of the United Nations agencies or a foundation with a world view will come forward. Other difficulties will be created by political divisions, apathy, and the claims of other problems. Controversial decisions will be necessary on whether to move water, move people, change their style of life, or change the distribution of agriculture and industry. Many of the remedial actions will be partial and piecemeal. But a systems analysis of man and his environment would bring increased public and governmental understanding of the scope and importance of positive action and would provide guidance on priorities, costs, time scales, interrelationships, and alternatives that will have to be debated before integrated programs of action can be started.

—DAEL WOLFLE