The Eco-Establishment

by Katherine Barkley and Steve Weissman

ASK VIETNAM PROTESTERS about the April 22 National Environmental Teach-In and they'll tell you it's a scheme to contain their spring offensive against the ecological disaster in Southeast Asia. Ask young blacks about this new movement to save the ecosystem and they'll tell you that it is a way of distracting attention from the old movement that was supposed to save their skins.

Then go and talk to an environmental activist, a Survival Walker. Ask him why the ecology movement has turned its back on Vietnam and civil rights and he'll explain, with a convincing freshness the old New Left has lost, that the sky is falling. He'll point out that we all have to breathe and that none of us—white or black, Vietnamese peasant or American marine—has much of a future on CO_2. We all must eat, and a diet of pesticides is deadly. We all need water, and the dwindling supplies are unfit for human (or even industrial) consumption. We all depend on the same limited forests, mines, oceans and soil, and we are all going to choke on the same waste and pollution.

To this new ecology activist, nothing could be more obvious: we've all got to unite behind the overriding goal of unfouling our common nest before it's too late, turning back the pages of the environmental doomsday book. If we succeed, then we can get back to these other questions. There is no stopping, he will add, an idea whose time has come.

He will be right, too—though a bit naive about where ideas come from and where movements go. Environment *will be* the issue of the '70's, but not simply because the air got thicker or the oceans less bubbly, or even because the war in Vietnam got too bloody to have to think about every day. It will be the issue of the '70's because such stewards of the nation's wealth as the Ford Foundation, with its Resources for the Future, Inc. (RFF), and Laurance Rockefeller's Conservation Foundation needed a grass-roots movement to help consolidate their control over national policymaking, bolster their hold over world resources, and escalate further cycles of useless economic growth.

[II]

THE ENVIRONMENT BANDWAGON is not as recent a phenomenon as it seems. It began to gather momentum back in the mid-'60's under the leadership of Resources for the Future. "The relationship of people to resources, which usually has been expressed in terms of quantity, needs to be restated for modern times to emphasize what is happening to the quality of resources," warned RFF President Joseph L. Fisher in his group's 1964 report. "The wide variety of threats to the quality of the environment may well embrace the gravest U.S. resources problem for the next generation." The following year, Resources for the Future established a special research and educational program in environmental quality, funded with a $1.1 million grant from its parent organization, the Ford Foundation.

Created by Ford in the early '50's during the scare over soaring materials costs, RFF had just made its name in conservation by organizing the Mid-Century Conference on Resources for the Future, the first major national conservation conference since Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot staged the National Governors' Conference in 1908. Held in 1953, the Mid-Century Conference mustered broad support from both the country's resource users and conservers for the national conservation policy already spelled out by President Truman's Materials Policy Commission. It was this Commission, headed by William S. Paley (board chairman of CBS and a founding director of RFF), which had openly affirmed the nation's inalienable right to extract cheap supplies of raw materials from the underdeveloped countries, and which set the background for Eisenhower and Dulles' oft-quoted concern over the fate of the tin and tungsten of Southeast Asia. Insuring adequate supplies of resources for the future became a conservationist byword.

By the mid-'60's, Resources for the Future had begun to broaden its concern to include resource quality, thus setting the tone for a decade of conservationist rhetoric and behavior. The trustees of the Ford Foundation, an executive committee of such international resource users and polluters as Esso and Ford Motor, established a separate Resources and Environment Division which, since 1966, has nourished such groups as Open Space Action Committee, Save-the-Redwoods League, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy, and the Environmental Defense Fund. A year later, the Rockefeller Foundation set up an Environmental Studies Division, channeling money to the National Academy of Science and RFF and to Laurance Rockefeller's own pet project, the Conservation Foundation.

The conservationist-planners' new concern over threats to

the quality of resources, and to life itself, was actually an outgrowth of their earlier success in assuring cheap and plentiful raw materials. It had become clear that supplies of resources would be less a problem than the immense amount of waste generated as a by-product of those now being refined. The more industry consumed, the more it produced and sold, the larger and more widespread the garbage dumps. Rivers and lakes required costly treatment to make water suitable for use in homes and industry. Smoggy air corroded machines, ruined timberlands, reduced the productivity of crop lands and livestock—to say nothing of its effect on the work capacity of the average man. Pesticides were killing more than pests, and raising the spectre of cumulative disaster. Cities were getting noisier, dirtier, uglier and more tightly packed, forcing the middle class to the suburbs and the big urban landowners to the wall. "Ugliness," Lyndon Johnson exclaimed sententiously, "is costly."

This had long been obvious to the conservationists. Something had to be done, and the elite resource planners took as their model for action the vintage 1910 American conservation movement, especially its emphasis on big business cooperation with big government.

[III]

WHEN THE 1890 CENSUS officially validated the fact that the frontier was closed, a generation of business and government leaders realized with a start that the American Eden had its bounds. Land, timber and water were all limited, as was the potential for conflicts over their apportionment. What resources should timbermen, grazers or farmers exploit? What should be preserved as a memory of the American past? Who would decide these questions? The conservationists—Teddy Roosevelt, Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot and some of the bigger timber, grazing and agricultural interests—pushed heavily for a new policy to replace the crude and wanton pillage which had been part of the frontier spirit. While preservationists like John Muir were fighting bitterly against any and all use of wild areas by private interests, the conservationists wanted only to make sure that the environment would be exploited with taste and efficiency.

Roosevelt and his backers won out, of course. And the strategy they used is instructive: failing initially to muster congressional support for their plan, they mobilized a broadly based conservation movement, supposedly to regulate the private interests which they in fact represented. Backed by the widespread public support it had whipped up, the conservationist juggernaut then began to move the country toward a more regulated—but still private—exploitation of its riches.

Of course, the private interests which had helped draft this policy also moved—to staff the regulatory agencies, provide jobs for retiring regulators, and generally to put the right man in the right niche most of the time. Within short order, the regulatory agencies were captives of the interests they were supposed to regulate, and they were soon being used as a screen which kept the public from seeing the way that small interests were squeezed out of the competition for resources. Their monopoly position thus strengthened by regulatory agencies, these large interests found it easy to pass the actual costs of regulation on to the citizen consumer.

[IV]

THE OLD AMERICAN CONSERVATION movement had reacted out of fear over resource scarcities; the new movement of the mid-'60's feared, as well, the destruction of resource quality. And the corporation conservationists and their professional planners in organizations like Resources for the Future once again looked to government regulations as an answer to the difficulties they foresaw. Only this time the stakes were much higher than they had been at the early part of the century. Many of the resource planners want an all-encompassing environmental agency or Cabinet level Department of Resources, Environment and Population. Holding enormous power over a wide range of decisions, this coordinating apparatus would be far more convenient for the elite than the present array of agencies, each influenced by its own interest groups.

Who will benefit from this increased environmental consciousness and who will pay is already quite clear to business, if not to most young ecology activists. "The elite of business leadership," reports Fortune, "strongly desire the federal government to step in, set the standards, regulate all activities pertaining to the environment, and help finance the job with tax incentives." The congressional background paper for the 1968 hearings on National Policy on Environmental Quality, prepared with the help of Rockefeller's Conservation Foundation, spells out the logic in greater detail: "Lack of national policy for the environment has now become as expensive to the business community as to the Nation at large. In most enterprises, a social cost can be carried without undue burden if all competitors carry it alike. For example, industrial waste disposal costs can, like other costs of production, be reflected in prices to consumers. But this becomes feasible only when public law and administration put all comparable forms of waste-producing enterprises under the same requirements." Only the truly powerful could be so candid about their intention to pick the pocket of the consumer to pay for the additional costs they will be faced with.

The resource planners are also quite frank about the wave of subsidies they expect out of the big clean-up campaign. "There will have to be a will to provide funds," explains Joseph Fisher, "to train the specialists, do the research and experimentation, build the laws and institutions through which more rapid progress [in pollution control] can be made, and of course, build the facilities and equipment." The coming boondoggles—replete with tax incentives, direct government grants, and new products—will make the oil depletion allowance seem tame. And what's more, it will be packaged as a critical social service.

The big business conservationists will doubtless be equally vocal about the need for new bond issues for local water and sewage treatment facilities; lead crusades to overcome reluctance of the average citizen to vote "yes" on bond measures; and then, as bondholders themselves, skim a nice tax-free six or seven per cent off the top.

It isn't just the citizen and taxpayer who will bear the burden, however. Bedraggled Mother Nature, too, will pay. Like the original conservation movement it is emulating, today's big business conservation is not interested in preserving the earth; it is rationally reorganizing for a more efficient rape of resources (e.g., the export of chemical-intensive agribusiness) and the production of an ever grosser national product.

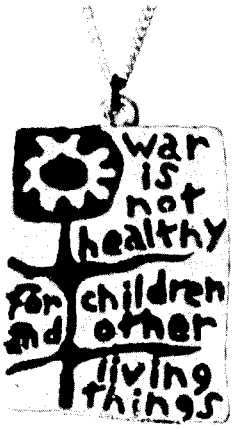
(Continued on page 54)

Blessed are the Peacemakers...
for they shall give great Mother's Day Gifts!

Created just for Mother's Day...
(and one whole year's delight)
Another Mother's Datebook for Peace

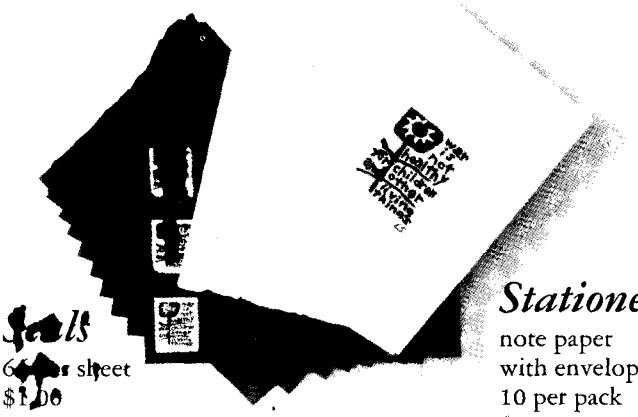
Hurry, hurry, hurry...we haven't got a lot!
The *only* datebook of its kind ever published—
a whole year's peace assignments
in a charming sunny yellow appointment book
with our famous logo on the cover.
Over 120 pages of how-to-be-effective-for-peace info,
plus daily reminders, *plus* inspiring quotes,
plus beautiful photographs, *plus* wonderful letters
and poems from real live people...and
all with a Mother's Day theme!
Another Mother's datebook for peace
is THE secret weapon in the war against war.

Introductory Offer $1



(actual size)

Medallion
on necklace chain (as shown)
or same on key ring
$3.00



Seals
60 per sheet
$1.00

Stationery
note paper
with envelopes
10 per pack
$1.00

All proceeds go to further the work of Another Mother for Peace, which is a non-profit, non-partisan association whose goal is to eliminate war as a means of settling disputes between nations, peoples, and ideologies.

Another Mother for Peace
407 North Maple Drive, Beverly Hills, California 90210.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Quantity		*Quantity*	
_____	Peace datebook	_____	Seals
_____	Medallion on necklace	_____	Stationery
_____	Medallion on key ring	TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED $_____	

Enclose check or money order. (Add 5% sales tax if in California.) To assure delivery by May 10, your order must be in our office no later than April 30.

... and we'd sure appreciate help with the postage!

Science and the Gross National Pollution

THE WORLD'S FISHERIES ARE in danger. This year we lost the California mackerel catch. Last year it was the magnificently productive Coho salmon of Lake Michigan. Both fish were banned from interstate commerce because of DDT residues. If experience with the Coho salmon and other fish applies, we can expect the mackerel gradually to disappear, its young poisoned. Other fish will follow. This loss is especially significant because it indicates that the ocean is contaminated to the point that human food supplies are being reduced. But even more disturbing is the continued failure of American science to address itself to such problems clearly and effectively.

For a culture that is brutalized daily by casual brushes with war, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect a general outpouring of grief over one more crisis in the existence of a species of fish. But how can it be that the American scientific establishment, whose ingenuity and technology appear often to be almost infinitely versatile, is fumbling with the crisis of the environment? Science should have been intensely concerned with the devastation of the earth long before conspicuous disasters and grass-roots protests made ecology fashionable. But scientists have not been leaders in the protest, and now they are conspicuously unprepared for the environmental crisis and often even antagonistic. To understand this failure is to probe the way that science has grown in the United States over the past two decades; it is also, as with other aspects of ecology, to wonder about the wisdom of the present course of this country's political and economic systems.

[II]

A TESTAMENT TO THE seriousness of the environmental problems and the inability of science to provide ready solutions comes from a look at a recent Health, Education and Welfare report by a special commission —the so-called "Mrak Commission"—on the relationship between pesticides and human health. One of its most striking conclusions points to "the absurdity of the situation in which 200 million Americans are undergoing lifelong exposure [to pesticides], yet our knowledge of what is happening to them is at best fragmentary and for the most part indirect and inferential." Despite this admission, however, the report observes that "production and use of pesticides in the United States is expected to grow at an annual rate of approximately 15 per cent." This rate of growth means that pesticide production will double every five years or so and that the hazards that science is now recognizing (not to mention those that haven't yet been uncovered because researchers have been busy elsewhere) can be expected to be at least twice as serious by 1974. To be sure, the Mrak Commission calls for an end to the use of DDT and DDD within two years, and it makes appropriate gestures to the possibilities for control of pests without using persistent pesticides. But nowhere does it challenge the wisdom of allowing production of these poisons to double every five years over the foreseeable future. Nor does it provide any appraisal of the future impact of this massive chemical assault on the living systems of the earth, or even recommend an expansion of research and regulatory activities appropriate to such a deadly growth rate. While a growth of 15 per cent is attractive in a portfolio of stocks, it is very difficult to maintain a highly integrated, complex social system that dumps poison at that rate into its own environment.

PESTICIDES ARE obviously no longer simply a national problem involving 200 million Americans. They are now a world problem. Recent studies with my colleagues at Brookhaven National Laboratory, and studies by others elsewhere, suggest that most of the DDT produced in the world has been held at one time or another as vapor in the atmosphere, is accumulating in the oceans and is having a catastrophic effect on the earth's biota. It has, in fact, become almost commonplace to point out that lakes and streams are being seriously degraded, bird populations reduced and in some cases eliminated, and oceanic fisheries jeopardized. The broad pattern is very clear. DDT and similar poisons are worldwide pollutants, products of Western technology that are rapidly transforming the ecosystems of the planet—from the complex communities that have built the biosphere and have supported oceanic fisheries and man, to the simplified biota of cesspools such as Lake Erie. How far can we go in reducing the earth's biota this way and still support large human populations?

The pesticides problem is of course not the only worldwide pollution scientists have handled poorly. It happens to be one of the most important and best known. Others are now appearing with terrifying regularity. Take for example the so-called "PCB," toxic polychlorinated phenyl compounds that appear to have a distribution similar to that of DDT. They are used in large quantities in various industries, later to vaporize and circulate freely throughout the biosphere. How much of these compounds there is now circulating is not known, nor are their effects on the biota known, although PCB's are certainly accumulated in living systems and are toxic to many kinds of organisms. And how many other toxic organic compounds are circulating in biologically significant quantities worldwide?

To these questions we must add the questions raised by combustion of gasoline containing 2.4 grams of lead per gallon; fossil fuels containing sulphur; the widespread use of mercuric compounds as fungicides and as anti-fouling compounds; wastes from chemical milling; and a host of other toxic inorganic substances. We must also add the broader scale of "toxic" effects due to changes in temperature of the earth caused by particulate matter in the atmosphere.

The broad pattern of changes caused by the accumulation of these toxic effects is simple enough, although not widely recognized. For an indication,

by George M. Woodwell