ATASTROPHE : A SCENARIO

ocean cam rapidly

logist had expected ..



Air pollution continued to be the most obvious manifestation of environmental deterioration. It was, by 1972, quite literally in the eyes of all Americans. The year 1973 saw not only the New York and Los Angeles smog disasters, but also the publication of the Surgeon General's massive report on air pollution and health. The public had been partially prepared for the worst by the publicity given to the U.N. pollution conference held in 1972. Death in the late '60s caused by smog were well known to scientists, but the public had ignored them because they mostly involved the early demise of the old and sick rather than people dropping dead on the freeways. But suddenly our citizens were faced with nearly 200,000 corpses and massive documentation that they could be the next to die from respiratory disease. They were not ready for that scale of disaster. After all, the U.N. conference had not predicted that accumulated air pollution would make the planet uninhabitable until almost 1990. The population was terrorized as T.V. screens became filled with scenes of horror from the disaster areas. Especially vivid was N.B.C.'s coverage of hundreds of unattended people choking out their lives outside of New York's hospitals. Terms like nitrogen oxide, acute bronchitis and cardiac arrest began to have real meaning for most Americans.

The ultimate horror was the announcement that chlorinated hydrocarbons were now a major constituent of air pollution in all American cities. Autopsies of smog disaster victims revealed an average chlorinated hydrocarbon load in fatty tissue equivalent to 26 parts per million of D.D.T.. In October, 1973, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare announced studies which showed unequivocally that increasing death rates from hypertension, cirrhosis of the liver, liver cancer and a series of other diseases had resulted from the chlorinated hydrocarbon load. They announced that Americans born since 1946 (when D.D.T. usage began) now had a life expectancy of 49 years and predicted that if current patterns continued, this expectance would reach 42 years by 1980, when it might level out. Plunging insurance stocks triggered a stock market panic. The president of Velsicol Inc., a major pesticide producer, went on television to "publicly eat a teaspoonful of D.D.T." (it was really powdered milk) and announce that H.E.W. had been infiltrated by Communists. Other giants of the petrochemical industry, attempting to dispute the indisputable evidence, launched a massive pressure campaign on Congress to force H.E.W. to "get out of agriculture's business". They were aided by the agro-chemical journals, which had decades of experience in misleading the public about the dangers and benefits of pesticides. But by now the public realized that it has been duped. The Nobel Prize for medicine and physiology was given to Drs. J.L. Radomski and W.B. Deichmann, who in the late 1960s had pioneered in the documentation of the longterm lethal effects of chlorinated hydrocarbons. A Presidential Commission with unimpeachable credentials directly accused the agro-chemical complex of "condemning many millions of

agro-chemical journals mislead public about dangers of pesticides.

Americans to an early death". The year 1973 was the year in which Americans finally came to understand the direct threat to their existence posed by environmental deterioration.

And 1973 was also the year in which most people finally comprehended the indirect threat. Even the President of Union Oil Company and several other industrialists publicly stated their concern over the reduction of bird populations which had resulted from pollution from D.D. T. and other chlorinated hydrocarbons. Insect populations boomed because they were resistant to most pesticides and had been freed, by the incompetent use of these pesticides, from most of their natural enemies. Rodents swarmed over crops, multiplying rapidly in the absence of predatory birds. The effect of pests on the wheat crop was especially disastrous in the summer of 1973, since that was also the year of the great drought. Most of us can remember the chock which greeted the announcement by atmospheric physicists that the shift of the jet stream which had caused the drought was probably permanent. It signalled the birth of the Midwestern desert. Man's air polluting activities had by then caused gross changes in the climatic patterns. The news, of course, played hell with commodity and stock markets. Food prices skyrocketed as savings were poured into hoarded canned goods. Official assurances that food would remain ample fell on deaf ears, and even the government showed signs of nervousness when California migrant field workers went out on strike again in protest against the continued use of pesticides by growers. The strike burgeoned into farm burning riots. The workers, calling themselves "The Walking Dead", demanded immediate compensation for their shortened lives, and crash research programmes to attempt to lengthen them.

It was in the same speech in which President Edward Kennedy, after much delay, finally declared a national emergency and called out the National Guard to harvest California's crops, that the first mention of population control was made. Kennedy pointed out that the United States would no longer be able to offer any food aid to other nations and was likely to suffer food shortages herself. He suggested that, in view of the manifest failure of the Green Revolution, the only hope of the UDCs lay in population control. His statement, you will recall, created an uproar in the underdeveloped countries. Newspaper editorials accused the United States of wishing to prevent small countries from becoming large nations and thus threatening American hegemony. Politicians asserted that President Kennedy was a "creature of the giant drug combine" that wished to shove its pills down every woman's throat.

Among Americans, religious opposition to population control was very slight. Industry in general also backed the idea. Increasing poverty in the UDCs was both destroying markets and threatening supplies of raw materials. The seriousness of the raw material situation had been brought home during the Congressional Hard Resources hearings in 1971. The exposure of the ignorance of the cornucopian economists had been quite a spectacle – a spectacle brought into virtually every American's home in living colour. Few would forget the distinguished geologist from the University of California who suggested that economists be legally required to learn at least the most elementary facts of geology. Fewer still would forget that a distinguished Harvard economist added that they might be required to learn some economics, too. The overall message was clear: America's resource situation was bad and bound to get worse. The hearings that led to a bill requiring the Departments of State, Interior and Commerce to set up a joint resource procurment council with the express purpose of "insuring that proper consideration of American resource needs be an integral part of American foreign policy."

Suddenly the United States discovered that it had a national consensus: population control was the only possible salvation of the underdeveloped world. But that same concensus led to heated debate. How could the UDCs be persuaded to limit their populations, and should not the United States lead the way by limiting its own? Members of the intellectual community wanted America to set an example. They pointed out that the United States was in the midst of a new baby boom: her birth rate, well over twenty per 1000 per year and her growth rate of over one percent per annum were among the very highest of the developed countries. They detailed the deterioration of the American physical and psychic environments, the growing health threats, the impending food shortages, and the insufficiency of funds for desperately needed public works. They contended that the nation was clearly unable or unwilling to properly care for the people it already had. What possible reason could there be, they querried, for adding any more? Besides, who would listen to the requests of the United States for population control when that nation did not control her own profligate reproduction?

Those who opposed population controls for the U.S. were equally vociferous. The military-industrial complex, with its all-too-human mixture of ignorance and avarice, still saw strength and prosperity in numbers. Baby food magnates, already worried by the growing nitrate pollution of their products, saw their market disappearing. Steel manufacturers saw a decrease in aggregate demand and slippage for that holy of holies, the Gross National Product. And military men saw, in the growing population-food-environment crisis, a serious threat to their carefully nurtured Cold War. In the end, of course, economic arguments held sway, and the "inalienable right of every American couple to determine the size of its family", a freedom invented for the occasion in the early '70s, was not compromised.

The population control bill, which was passed by Congress early in 1974, was quite a document, nevertheless. On the domestic front, it authorized an increase from 100 to 150 million dollars in funds for "family planning" activities. This was made possible by a general feeling in the country that the growing army on welfare needed family planning. But the gist of the bill was a series of measures designed to impress the need for population control on the UDCs. All American aid to countries with overpopulation problems was required by law in part of population control assistance. In order to receive an assistance, each nation was required not

continued on page 10

f caviar by 1970. ientists at that ti tificial caviar whi al thing – except t Union, observ rioration of relati ted States, came developed what de, a highly leth lexed with a spec l skeletal armour ew pesticide, call a Green Revolutio ations with vario massive Thanodr all the costs; all trade and milita the perspective the reason why t plan with such op se countries ignor tists that Thanodr which plagued the t the basic cause ion, and that the d by the dullne endemic to t only populat t aimed primarily em the horrors th y were not about simply to accuse t em proper aid; ho n panacea. eneral worsening ates and the UDC his. The situation 1970s deserves o

crutiny. Being more dependent on imports for aterials than the Soviet Union, the United had, in the early 1970s adopted more and more handed policies in order to insure continuing s. Military adventures in Asia and Latin a had further lessened the international lity of the United States as a great defender of m - an image which had begun to deteriorate during the pointless and fruitless Viet Nam t. At home, acceptance of the carefully actured image lessened dramatically, as even romantic and chauvinistic citizens began to tand the role of the military and the industrial in what John Kenneth Galbraith has aptly "The New Industrial State".

t home in the USA the early '70s were tic times. Racial violence grew and the bility of cities diminished, as nothing ntial was done to ameliorate either racial ies or urban blight. Welfare rolls grew as ation and general technological progress forced and more people into the category of ployable". Simultaneously, a taxpayers' revolt d. Although there was not enough money to the schools, roads, water systems, sewage s, jails, hospitals, urban transit lines and all the amenities needed to support the burgeoning tion, Americans refused to tax themselves eavily. Starting in Youngstown, Ohio in 1969 llowed closely by Richmond California, unity after community was forced to close its or curtail educational operations for lack of Water supplies, already marginal in quality and y in many places by 1970, deteriorated . Water rationing occurred in 1723 palities in the summer of 1974 and hepatitis idemic dysentery rates climbed about 500% n 1970-1974.

en revolut d agricultural practices – ions that l lf-sufficient in food in two tilizer prog far behind projections, of the Gov cision and bureaucratic