

REPORT ON APRIL 22 ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

by

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The following report on the "April 22 Environmental Action" is based on newspaper reports and literature received from the "Environmental Action" committee.

The idea for this nation-wide series of campus teach-ins dealing with the issue of pollution and general destruction of the environment was first proposed by Sen. Gaylord Nelson and the committee that is coordinating the actions nationally has ties with him. Although a number of rallies or demonstrations may be held in a few areas, as well as some individual acts of protest over the environment, the main activity will be in the form of teach-ins on the high schools and colleges.

The "Environmental Action" committee claims that it has wide and growing support for the teach-ins, with claims running as high as 900 colleges and 3,000 high schools in all 50 states. Whatever the actual figure may be, it does appear to be a very large action. An environmental teach-in was already held at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It lasted four days and drew attendance of 15,000. It was carried out with a budget of \$50,000, including sizable donations from some corporations.

The national office of "Environmental Action" is based in Washington, D. C. at 2000 P St. N.W. It is run by a competent staff of college students and capable organizers in their late 20's. The committee publishes a printed newsletter, high quality posters and buttons, and mimeographed organizing memos. A specially prepared paperback book, The Environmental Handbook, has been published for use in the teach-ins and it is being sold in the commercial bookstores. The committee has tax-exempt status and was initially funded with \$50,000 raised from several conservation foundations and by Daniel Lufkin, a New York stockbroker who is finance director for the committee's adult 'policy board' (which includes Nelson). The committee also says that it will be placing ads in major newspapers with the assistance of the UAW.

The committee says that it has not formal ties to any federal agencies for tactical reasons, although it has received the support of some representatives of the Nixon administration. Featured speakers at the U. of Michigan teach-in included Robert Cahn of the Presidential Council on Environmental Quality and Dr. C. C. Johnson, who is head of the "consumer

protection" department of the Department of Health Education and Welfare.

One of the themes that the New York Times has put forward is that of a contradiction between protest over environmental destruction and the issues of black liberation and the struggle against the Vietnam war. An article on March 2 states that "The organizers (of Environmental Action) are unhappy but undaunted by disapproving rumbles from anti-Vietnam radicals who see a diversion of student zeal from the war issue and are mounting a counter-protest for mid-April; and from some Negro quarters who say that they have been fighting environmental pollution all along."

The March 16 Times report on the University of Michigan teach-in states that "The loudest notes of dissent to the mass contemplation of a reordered world came, paradoxically, not from the right, but from the left. Discussions were regularly punctuated with Marxian repudiations of environmental reform as an evasion of needed social and political 'revolution.' And Negro leaders repeatedly charged that preoccupation with pollution was a 'white middle class cop-out' from attention to the problems of blacks and the poor."

We should take an interventionist approach toward these environmental teach-ins and cut across any attempts to portray discussion over this issue as a diversion. Despite the intentions of the capitalist politicians, who are trying to utilize this issue for their own purposes, the issue of environmental pollution is one which revolutionary socialists are wholeheartedly in favor of organizing around. The approach of the capitalist politicians on this issue is the counterpart to their position in relation to the Vietnam war. Although the official Environmental Action Committee is tied to the capitalist politicians, there is nothing wrong in principle with our support to the campus teach-ins demanding speakers when they occur, and intervening in them in other ways.

The antiwar movement can point out how in the war in Vietnam the imperialists are systematically, and with premeditation, trying to destroy the basic environment of Vietnam. In addition, massive resources are being allocated for a war of aggression, rather than being utilized for social needs, including the pressing task of cleaning up the environment. The antiwar movement can point this out on April 15, prepare literature along these lines for the April 22 teach-ins and demand antiwar speakers at the teach-ins. The same basic points can be made in relation to the oppressed national minorities in the U.S. who suffer most from the misallocation of resources and from unbearable living conditions related to environmental destruction.

The most effective way in which we can intervene in these teach-ins is through our election campaigns where we are running them, or in the name of the party in general. Due to the anticipated large size and wide interest in these teach-ins we have an opportunity to mount a major intervention. Our proposals for solving the problems of environmental pollution are the only realistic and rational ones, and we should make sure they are heard.

The environment issue is of growing concern to larger and larger numbers of people -- and for good reason. The basic cause for environmental pollution is from a system in which industry is run with a minimization of protection for workers, for humanity at large, for plant and animal life -- all for the purpose of maximizing private profit. What started out under capitalism as simple pillaging of natural resources without concern for long-range planning safety or waste, is now compounded by a crime against humanity as a whole. (Oil spillage from underground drilling is one example.) Pollution, which started out affecting industrial workers on the job and in working class neighborhoods close to industrial locations, is now affecting everyone. The basic problem lies in the irrational and inhumane nature of the capitalist system. The working class has the greatest interest in solving this problem, and the complete reorganization of society through socialist planning for human need is the only solution.

One of the most destructive forms of environmental pollution that we should point out is that which affects workers on the job and in working class neighborhoods. We should demand that workers be invited to speak at these teach-ins to explain the exacerbated conditions which exist.

The April 22 teach-ins offer us a big opportunity to get our ideas on some basic points across to a wide audience. We should demand the right to have SWP speakers at the teach-ins to present the revolutionary socialist point of view on this problem. Our election campaigns can issue statements for distribution. Large literature tables can be set up. We can utilize the interest generated around this issue to obtain radio, TV and newspaper publicity for our campaigns. Through an interventionist approach many other ideas can be thought of for injecting our ideas into the discussions that will take place.