

# The Ravaged Environment

It seems the curse of modern man continually to confront new possibilities of self-destruction. He emerged from World War II armed with nuclear weaponry that soon gave him the power to obliterate all human life. His population has since grown at a rate that could threaten disaster on a global scale. And now he has come face to face with a new man-made peril, the poisoning of his natural environment with noxious doses of chemicals, garbage, fumes, noise, sewage, heat, ugliness and urban overcrowding. Nearly unnoticed, the scourge of pollution has already spread so far that a few scientists say only a drastic cure can prevent devastation as thorough as that of nuclear holocaust. Even to less doleful prophets, the danger seems sufficient to warrant a sudden boom in the science of ecology, which examines the precarious relationships between living things and their surroundings. Most important of all, the general public has been seized with such anger and alarm as to goad political leaders into proclaiming conservation of the environment the chief task of this decade—and perhaps of the rest of the century.

carp that has adjusted to living off poison. Louisiana's state bird, the brown pelican, has vanished from its shores (600 of the birds remain in an island colony off the California coast, but last year they produced only five chicks; the rest of their eggs collapsed with weakened shells that contained high concentrations of DDT). Cleopatra's Needle, the Egyptian obelisk brought to New York in 1881, has been vastly more worn and scarred by its last 90 years of existence than by its first 3,000.

Man has always been a messy animal. Ancient Romans complained of the sooty smoke that suffused their city, and in the first century Pliny described the destruction of crops from climate changes wrought by the draining of lakes or deflection of rivers. But in the past, man could always leave his own depredations behind and move on to some part of the planet still unspoiled. Today, there is no escape. Thor Heyerdahl, navigating the mid-Atlantic in a papyrus boat last year, discovered plastic bottles, oily blobs and other detritus of civilization adrift on huge patches of ocean far from the nearest ship or shore. The tissues of coastal



reduction factory and nuclear power plant, rejected the project last year by a vote of 144 to 77. Just last week the Federal government, under pressure from conservation groups, arranged with Florida authorities to ban construction of a jetport near the Everglades which would have imperiled flora and fauna in the national park.

American college students have seized on the antipollution drive with nearly the same degree of fervor that they brought to the civil-rights campaign and the antiwar movement (they will hold a nationwide teach-in April 22). Research scientists seem anxious to join the fray. Even some leaders of U.S. industry, the most massive befoulers of the nation's air, water and land, have pledged themselves to reform. Last week, General Motors president Edward Cole echoed the heads of Ford and Chrysler in committing his company "to eliminating the automobile as a factor in the nation's air-pollution problem," if necessary by abandoning the gasoline engine itself.

"Ecology," says Jesse Unruh, Democratic leader of California's Assembly, "has become the political substitute for the word 'mother,'" and Unruh himself is locked with Gov. Ronald Reagan in a battle for the governorship that features claims and counterclaims as to who can do most to preserve the state's considerable natural splendor. President Richard Nixon has embraced the environment as a major project for the '70s: much of his State of the Union speech this week will be devoted to a program to enhance "the quality of life," and he has already declared that this must be the decade "when America pays its debt to the past by reclaiming the purity of its air, its waters and our living environment. It is literally now or never."

Even the ponderous mechanisms of international cooperation are beginning to come to bear on the issue. The United Nations has arranged a World Conference on the Human Environment, to be convened in Sweden in June 1972. Every nation, large and small, is confronted with environmental hazards. The Rhine River may be even more polluted than the Ohio. The archipelagoes of the South

Pacific are threatened by a plague of starfish that consume their vital barrier reefs.

Man has already paid a fearsome price for his carelessness: the lung disease emphysema is the fastest-growing cause of death in the United States; unborn babies, some medical researchers suggest, may be damaged by excessive noise from everything from power mowers to rock bands; the sheer aggravation of crowded city life is taking an ever-higher toll in nervous and psychic afflictions. How has it all been allowed to happen? What explains man's extraordinary brutality toward his environment?

## Injunction Sought

WASHINGTON—(CPS)—Dr. Margaret Mead Iocre in conjunction with Ralph Raider has announced her latest battle in the fight to stem the population explosion.

The duo will seek injunctions against the Ultra White and Plus Bright Toothpaste Companies, Hai Karate Cologne Co., Scope and Bianca mouthwash companies, and Charmin Bathroom Tissue Co. for aiding and abetting the population explosion in Amerika by inducing increased sexual relations.

Specific allegations are:

Ultra White toothpaste gives "your mouth sex appeal" encouraging all sorts of sexual perversions, not to mention intercourse. Plus Bright likewise makes "pucker power the power of the hour," encouraging similar promiscuity.

Hai Karate Cologne turns normally self-controlled women into mad father rapers.

Scope and Bianca have, as demonstrated in the 60-second public information television research films released by these companies, cause typical bad-breathed Americans to become sexually irresistible.

And Charmin Bathroom Tissue has made millions of American women to "squeeze crazy" in public places.

Dr. Iocre says more companies will be added to the injunction as she has time to research the effects of the products. "It's great work if you can get it..." she said.

The Daughters of the American Revolution, seven of whom have been the victims of Scope and Charmin, have joined the bandwagon terming the new crusade "the strongest hope yet for saving our ecology."



For every American, environmental decay has become a personal experience—a glass of water bitter with impurities, a mountain view obscured by haze, the acrid smell of industrial smoke or automobile exhaust, the boom of jet or the rumble of truck piercing the 85-decibel level beyond which noise can do damage to the ear. What he cannot see, hear, smell, taste or touch for himself, he discovers in a grim new sort of obituary dotting the daily press. A few years ago-nobody was paying close enough attention to tell exactly when—Lake Erie died: acidic wastes from the surrounding factories have strained its water of virtually every form of life except sludge worms and a mutant of the

wildlife in Antarctica harbor traces of pesticides that have never been used on the continent.

Rachel Carson pointed the way; later the Torrey Canyon and the Santa Barbara Channel thrust environment into the headlines. Now, with a suddenness that prompts some conservationists to fear the whole thing may be one of America's periodic fads, the country is raising a clamor about pollution and its perils. In Houston, a television station that invited residents to send in comments on local pollution was swamped with 80,000 responses in a month. The tiny coastal town of Trenton, Maine, which stood to gain much-needed jobs and huge revenue from a proposed aluminum-