

Earth Day— The Beginning

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A Guide for Survival
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environmental action

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DENIS HAYES

THE BEGINNING

Sylvan Theater, Washington, D.C., April 22

I suspect that the politicians and businessmen who are jumping on the environmental bandwagon don't have the slightest idea what they are getting into. They are talking about filters on smokestacks while we are challenging corporate irresponsibility. They are bursting with pride about plans for totally inadequate municipal sewage treatment plants; we are challenging the ethics of a society that, with only 6 percent of the world's population, accounts for more than half of the world's annual consumption of raw materials.

Our country is stealing from poorer nations and from generations yet unborn. We seem to have a reverse King Midas touch. Everything we touch turns to garbage—142 million tons of smoke, 7 million junked cars, 30 million tons of paper, 28 billion bottles, 48 billion cans each year. We waste riches in planned obsolescence and invest the overwhelming bulk of our national budget in ABMs and MIRVs and other means of death. Russia can destroy every American twelve times; America can destroy every Russian forty times. I guess that is supposed to mean that we are ahead.

We're spending insanely large sums on military hardware instead of eliminating hunger and poverty. We squander our resources on moon dust while people live in wretched housing. We still waste lives and money on a war that we should never have entered and should get out of immediately.

We have made Vietnam an ecological catastrophe. Vietnam was once capable of producing a marketable surplus of grain. Now America must feed her. American bombs

have pockmarked Vietnam with more than 2.6 million craters a year, some of them thirty feet deep. We spent \$73 million on defoliation in Vietnam last year alone, much of it on 2,4,5-T, a herbicide we've now found causes birth defects. We dumped defoliants on Vietnam at the rate of 10,000 pounds a month, and in the last fiscal year alone we blackened 6,600 square miles. We cannot pretend to be concerned with the environment of this or any other country as long as we continue the war in Vietnam or wage war in Cambodia, Laos, or anywhere else.

But even if that war were over tomorrow, we would still be killing this planet. We are systematically destroying our land, our streams, and our seas. We foul our air, deaden our senses, and pollute our bodies. And it's getting worse.

America's political and business institutions don't seem yet to have realized that some of us want to live in this country thirty years from now. They had better come to recognize it soon. We don't have very much time. We cannot afford to give them very much time.

When it comes to salvaging the environment, the individual is almost powerless. You can pick up litter, and if you're diligent, you may be able to find some returnable bottles. But you are forced to breathe the lung-corroding poison which companies spew into the air. You cannot buy electricity from a power company which does not pollute. You cannot find products in biodegradable packages. You cannot even look to the manufacturer for reliable information on the ecological effects of a product.

You simply can't live an ecologically sound life in America. That is not one of the options open to you. Go shopping and you find dozens of laundry products; it seems like a tremendous array unless you know that most are made by three companies, and the differences in cleaning power are almost negligible. If you really want to be ecologically sound, you won't buy any detergents—just some old-fashioned laundry soap and a bit of soda. But there's nothing on those packages to tell you the phosphate content, and there's nothing in the supermarket to tell you, only meaningless advertising that keeps dunning you.

We are learning. In response, industry has turned the environmental problem over to its public relations men. We've been deluged with full-page ads about pollution problems and what's being done about them. It would appear from most of them that things are fine and will soon

be perfect. But the people of America are still coughing. And our eyes are running, and our lungs are blackening, and our property is corroding, and we're getting angry. We're getting angry at half-truths, angry at semitruths, and angry at outright lies.

We are tired of being told that we are to blame for corporate depredations. Political and business leaders once hoped that they could turn the environmental movement into a massive antilitter campaign. They have failed. We have learned not to place our faith in regulatory agencies that are supposed to act in the public interest. We have learned not to believe the advertising that sells us presidents the way it sells us useless products.

We will not appeal any more to the conscience of institutions because institutions have no conscience. If we want them to do what is right, we must make them do what is right. We will use proxy fights, lawsuits, demonstrations, research, boycotts, ballots—whatever it takes. This may be our last chance. If environment is a fad, it's going to be our last fad.

Things as we know them are falling apart. There is an unease across this country today. People know that something is wrong. The war is part of it, but most critics of the war have, from the beginning, known that the war is only a symptom of something much deeper. Poor people have long known what is wrong. Now the alley garbage, the crowding and the unhappiness and the crime have spread beyond the ghetto and a whole society is coming to realize that it must drastically change course.

We are building a movement, a movement with a broad base, a movement which transcends traditional political boundaries. It is a movement that values people more than technology, people more than political boundaries and political ideologies, people more than profit. It will be a difficult fight. Earth Day is the beginning.

DENIS HAYES is national coordinator of Environmental Action.

RENNIE DAVIS
UP AGNEW COUNTRY

Sylvan Theater, Washington, D. C., April 22

The jury in Chicago said we were not guilty of conspiracy. But if there was no conspiracy in Chicago, there sure as hell is now.

Yes, it's official—the conspiracy against pollution. And we have a simple program—arrest Agnew and smash capitalism. We make only one exception to our pollution stand—everyone should light up a joint and get stoned.

We gather tonight in the headquarters for Agnew country. Tonight Agnew is thinking he's got us running around the country, picking up garbage, getting ourselves into peaceful rallies to demonstrate our impressive numbers, to prove our nonviolence. It took us five years, exactly five years, to learn the lesson in Chicago that whites as well as blacks will find that channels in this country are dead-end streets where people get clubbed, maced or ignored trying to work through the "system" on a single issue.

So we say to Agnew country that we are not going to be tricked into an ecology movement that diverts us from our revolutionary purposes. We say tonight that we are an ecology movement that intends to join forces with the people who have taken to the streets of this country in the demand to end the genocide in Southeast Asia.

We are an ecology movement that is integral with those who say "black liberation now." We tell Richard Nixon that ecology to us means going to New Haven to stop the electrocution of Bobby Seale and to free the New Haven 9. We are an ecology movement that must support and work for the demands of the most oppressed class of people in this country—women. Let Nixon know that this is our

perspective: an end to a system based on the prerogatives of private greed rather than social need.

When I was in Hanoi in 1967 I met a woman—an old woman sixty-five or seventy years old—who was bent over a broom, sweeping a street in the city of Hanoi. I told her that of all the cities that I had been in, that the streets of Hanoi were among the cleanest anywhere in the world. And that woman turned to me, and she said, "Hanoi used to be a city that was filled with garbage and dirt and prostitutes, but now every day, I can show the people of this city what it means to have freedom and independence."

What we are saying is that we are going to pick up the shit in this country, but in the context of a movement to liberate ourselves. We are saying "No" to the leadership that wants to use us as tools for liberal politicians. We are saying that we will not be co-opted for token changes in a system that plunders and rapes and destroys all over the world. We say to Agnew country that Earth Day is for the sons and daughters of the American Revolution who are going to tear this capitalism down and set us free.

RI-NNIE DAVIS is a member of the Chicago Seven.

EDMUND S. MUSKIE

A WHOLE SOCIETY

*Harvard University and University of Pennsylvania
Cambridge, Mass., and Philadelphia, Pa., April 21-22*

... First, I want to define for you what I think the environmental crisis means.

It means that we must outgrow our traditional way of solving problems one at a time—each in its own limited context—and unrelated to side effects.

It means that we must rethink what we mean by “cost,” what is economical or not economical, or what we can afford or cannot afford to do.

It means, at bottom, that our old value systems—whatever may be said for or against them—no longer respond to our needs or fit goals relevant to our future.

Those who believe that the environmental crisis relates to trees and not people are wrong.

Those who believe that we are talking about the Grand Canyon and the Catskills, but not Harlem and Watts are wrong.

And those who believe that we must do something about the SST and the automobile, but not ABMs and the Vietnam War are wrong. . . .

Our goal has never been to create a society where human greatness took a back seat to economic growth and technological change. We have sought a society where men could live in harmony with their environment and in peace with each other. In many respects, our growing economy and our mushrooming technology have moved us toward that goal. But in too many other ways, the costs of unrestrained and uncontrolled growth have caught up with us.

If economic growth means rivers that are fire hazards, we had better redirect economic growth.

If prosperity means children dying from lead poisoning, we had better redistribute prosperity.

And if progress means technology that produces more kinds of things than we really want, more kinds of things than we really need and more kinds of things than we can live with, we had better redefine progress.

We are not powerless to effect these changes.

We must go to the ballot box with an environmental conscience and elect leaders who have made a commitment to a healthy total environment.

We must go to stockholders' meetings with the power of proxies, as Campaign GM seeks to do, and require industries to change their ways of doing business.

And we must go to the cash register with the power of our dollars and buy from industries that do not pollute.

If one phrase can characterize our traditional outlook as Americans, that phrase has been, “There’s more where that came from.”

We have thought that there was always more of everything. But now the time is coming—or it is here—when there is no more:

- no more clean air or clean water;
- no more room for our garbage and trash;
- no more patience for poverty; and,
- no more tolerance for energy-sapping wars, over-

seas or at home. Whether or not we can find ways to achieve fundamental change in a free society is the acid test of a democratic experiment.

The environmental conscience may be the way to turn the nation around. All we need is hardheaded decisions to save our own skins. . . .

Our technology has reached a point where it is producing more kinds of things than we really want, more kinds of things than we really need, and more kinds of things than we can really live with.

We have to choose, to say no, and to give up some luxuries. And these kinds of decisions will be the acid test of our commitment to a healthy environment.

It means choosing cleaner cars rather than faster cars, more parks instead of more highways, and more houses and more schools instead of more weapons and more wars.

The whole society that we seek is one in which all men live in brotherhood with each other and with their environment. It is a society where each member of it knows that he has an opportunity to fulfill his greatest potential.

It is a society that will not tolerate slums for some and decent houses for others, rats for some and playgrounds for others, clean air for some and filth for others.

It is the only kind of society that has a chance. It is the only kind of society that has a future.

To achieve a whole society—a healthy total environment—we need change, planning more effective and just laws and more money better spent.

Achieving that whole society will cost heavily—in foregone luxuries, in restricted choices, in higher prices for certain goods and services, in taxes, and in hard decisions about our national priorities. It will require a new sense of balance in our national commitments. . . .

The only strategy that makes sense is a total strategy to protect the total environment.

The only way to achieve that total strategy is through an Environmental Revolution—a commitment to a whole society.

The Environmental Revolution must be one of laws, not men; one of values, not ideology; and one of achievement, not unfulfilled promises.

We are not powerless to accomplish this change, but we are powerless as a people if we wait for someone else to do it for us.

We can use the power of the people to turn the nation around—to move toward a whole society. . . .

SENATOR MUSKIE is a Democrat from Maine.

MARGARET MEAD

EARTH PEOPLE

Bryant Park, New York City, April 22

. . . The relationship to a primary environment and the view of that environment is something about which we know quite a few things. We know, for instance, that the Swedes were willing to travel all the way to Minnesota to live in the same kind of country rather than move from the country to the city. We know that Sicilians and southern Italians moved to south Jersey to find land for their vineyards like the land they had before. We have a good many studies of refugees who have found themselves extraordinarily disoriented in another country where there was no water, when they were used to water, or where there were no mountains, and they were used to mountains. . . .

It's exceedingly important how people feel about their environment, whether they feel that it's something that's friendly, or something that's hostile. Colin Turnbull, in the delightful book *The Forest People*, has given a vivid description of the way the pygmies feel that they belong to the forest and the forest cares for them. The whole of life is thought of as a relationship to this great forest, whom they mustn't offend and who will look after them. . . .

When we deal with children growing up in America . . . we find some who are trying to escape from everything that the modern environment stands for, who think of our contemporary environment as an amalgam of cities that are falling to pieces, of pollution that is choking us, of living that are dying, of people who are being starved, and of people who are being killed. They go off and try to found communes where they will be closer to the earth. . . .

We have had a tremendous amount of discussion that

echoes and re-echoes in the minds of young people as they're growing up, as to whether technology is a monster and we should get rid of it, and whether man has committed the unforgivable sin—the sin of having separated himself from the environment and from other men, of having separated himself from himself. We hear discussions going on everywhere as to whether there is a possible new religious phrasing of the relationship to the environment. . . .

Young people have a sense of this planet that older people did not have when they grew up. They have a sense of the unity of the human race that older people had only as a dream. . . .

All of these things are linked together—our feeling about the whole planet, our feeling about war, our feeling about population, our recognition that the population must now be balanced in relation to the earth, our feeling about the environment.

If we put all of these things together into a new ethic, that ethic ought to give us the possibility of inventing the kind of scientific advances and technological advances which will cope successfully with what we're doing.

In the past, the individual pollution, what's happened to this lake, what was done by this factory, what was done in this city, what was done by this country and that country, have all been fragmentary dangers. They've been fragmentary pieces of behavior by people who couldn't see all of it.

We have today the knowledge and the tools to look at the whole earth, to look at everybody on it, to look at its resources, to look at the state of our technology, and to begin to deal with the whole problem. I think that the tenderness that lies in seeing the earth as small and lonely and blue is probably one of the most valuable things that we have now. . . .

MARGARET MEAD is an anthropologist and author.