

12 MAY 1976

Environmental education for 'eco-smart' children

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ous effort to reduce personal consumption would require giving up various human activities, from transportation of people and resources, to heating, lighting, and cooking. Driving to and from school or the office may burn fuel, but it often saves time that can then be devoted to other important activities. Almost all efforts to enhance energy efficiency involve trading capital expenditures in the present for potential energy savings in the future. These trade-offs are inherent in any serious effort to reduce the use of energy, and must always be considered. Nevertheless, they are rarely discussed in the classroom.

7: There Are Too Many People

As population continues to increase, so will the human impact on the natural environment. More people on the planet means that more people are engaged in activities that shape the world around them. As a result, children are taught, the earth faces dire ecological consequences, from resource depletion to famine and extinction. From the EPA's EARTH NOTES—sent to educators for grades K-6 the educational materials such as FOR EARTH'S SAKE and THE POPULATION CHALLENGE of Zero Population Growth, educational materials on population growth are becoming part and parcel of the environmental curriculum.

One educational guide, distributed in conjunction

with Turner Broadcasting's "Save the Earth Season," provides a worksheet in which the students' ultimate goal is protecting the environment through population control. A high school text published by Addison-Wesley even talks of the "innovative" population measures developed in the People's Republic of China, a country known for coercive abortions and draconian laws limiting family size.

PART FOUR

Some educational messages are more explicit in their advocacy of population control. THIS PLANET IS MINE instructs educators to tell children that population growth will cause severe environmental problems "unless the use of birth control methods increases." In suggested activities, educators should "talk about what would happen to the planet if all the people in the world created large families generation after generation after generation." Captain Planet and the Planet Patrolers also tell children, "When it's your turn to have a family, keep it small. The more people there are the more pressure you put on our planet." The population message is summed up well by a "Green Tip" published in the daily

regimes, such as that recently deposited in Ethiopia, there were also shortages of food. But these were more the result of political problems than they were of a deficiency in the world supply of food.

Moreover, children are rarely taught that as societies become more prosperous, population growth eventually slows and resources are used more efficiently with less environmental damage.

8: The Air Is Getting Worse

A common refrain on air pollution in school materials is that "the problems are here and they are growing at an alarming rate" (THIS PLANET IS MINE). 50 SIMPLE THINGS claims, "Today, the air is so polluted in some places it's not always safe to breathe!" whereas "until about 150 years ago, the air was pure and clean." This sentiment is echoed in a Charlie Brown film produced for the American Lung Association with a grant from the EPA. In the film, the air is so polluted that Lucy cannot even see a baseball hit into the air due to a great cloud of smog.

There is little recognition in school curricula that, by most measurements, air quality is actually improving. According to the EPA's own data, levels of ground-level ozone, the pollutant known as "smog," are declining significantly in most urban areas. Even where ozone levels are declining, there is little evi-

dence that the moderate levels found in most cities are responsible for any long-term health effects.

The Virginia Department of Air Pollution Control's "Airy Canary" has trouble flying because of "Dastardly Dirt" created by increased industrial and commercial activity. Yet after initial industrialization. Economic growth typically results in decreases of air borne particulates, the form of air pollution with the most significant health effects. Particulate concentrations in such cities as Tehran and Calcutta are almost 10

times greater than those found in New York. As Resources for the Future vice-president Paul Portney has noted, "It is important to remember that cities in the United States that are relatively polluted by our standards might be considered quite clean in other parts of the world." This is particularly true when compared with the cities of the former Soviet Union.

While children are taught to dislike automobiles, they are not told that not all cars pollute equally, or that in most cases the contributions of individual vehicle emissions are negligible. Much air pollution is the result of incomplete fuel combustion. As technology has improved over time, cars have naturally become more efficient and have thus polluted less. While many give full credit to federal laws for these gains, reductions in automobile emissions began well before the first national clean air legislation was enacted.