



Pollution warning by scientist

BY A STAFF REPORTER

A warning that the world before long could become unfit for human habitation was given by a leading authority on pollution problems in London yesterday.

Professor Barry Commoner, Professor of Botany at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, spoke of "a terribly grim challenge" to mankind to solve the environmental crisis.

He was addressing a one-day conference organized by the Soil Association and he forecast a crisis, a point of no return which could reach the fields or waters of American major farming areas in 25 to 50 years' time unless action was taken.

He said: "If we are to survive as inhabitants of a world increasingly transformed by technology we need to reassess our attitudes towards the actual world on which our technology intrudes". We had become enticed into a nearly fatal illusion that we had at last escaped from our dependence on the rest of nature.

There was strong evidence that our pollution problems were due to fundamental faults in our technology. Triumphs in developing the modern car or nuclear reactor had been balanced by failures in their operation.

"Once the automobile is allowed out of the factory and into the environment it is transformed. It then reveals itself as an agent which has rendered urban air carcinogenic, burdened human bodies with nearly toxic levels of carbon monoxide and lead, embedded pathogenic particles of asbestos in human lungs, and contributed significantly to the pollution of surface waters".

Once a nuclear reactor began to operate it threatened rivers and lakes with its heated waters

and human bodies with radiation.

Insecticides had helped to breed resistant strains of "big, strong, strapping bugs" and in parts of South America they had even had to import parasitic pests to prey on the smaller pests to redress the balance of nature after use of insecticide.

Professor Commoner said we should start looking at our environment as a whole instead of breaking it down into a number of special disciplines when considering pollution. There was now little leeway left in the system. "Time is short", he said.

Dr. Kenneth Mellanby, chairman of the Soil Association's research advisor committee and director of Monks Wood experimental station, said that all was by no means lost. He said: "The air of London today is cleaner than for a century. The Thames, until recently a stinking sewer, is much less offensive, even if additional impurities are taking their toll.

"A concentration of some persistent pesticides in our bodies and in our food is declining. . . . I hope we will disown those Jeremiahs who say the countryside is totally ruined and there is nothing left worth saving."

Professor Commoner answering questions said there was evidence to suggest that DDT from moth proofed clothing could percolate through the skin into the body-fat. It was known that D.D.T. in the body could stimulate the activity of enzymes in the liver which were responsible for regulating certain hormones.

A new generation was being raised—with D.D.T. in their fat, carbon monoxide in their systems and lead in their bones. "That is technological man" he said.

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