

Problems of population

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Pollution is today, probably, the greatest problem that faces mankind. There is a saying in English that it is an ill bird that fouls its own nest. And human beings are, collectively speaking, fouling their nest at the increasing rate. It is an alarming picture. We are polluting the air, which we need to breathe, the earth from which we derive all our food, and the waters from which we, of course, derive the water we need to live, to drink, and for other purposes.

So all the elements that surround us — there are three elements: earth, air and water — are being increasingly polluted by the activities of man, by industrial activities, for the most part. And pollution, of course, knows no frontiers. One country that pollutes will export its pollution to others. The radioactivity, for example, that was generated by the catastrophe at Chernobyl four years ago, four or five years ago, was carried in clouds across Europe, and some of these radioactive clouds, something which have been polluted in this way, actually produced rains which fell on parts of England and Wales.

And we had a problem with the cattle which, of course, are fed on the grass, which had been rained on, by this polluted water, so we had problems in a small way, even in England as a result of the Chernobyl disaster. But Chernobyl is only one instant among many. It's a dramatic and alarming symptom of what is going on in all societies, all advanced industrial societies, not just in one. It's common to all, it's a common problem for all of us and in fact, in a sense, it takes us beyond all our ideologies. We must, in fact, look at this in a totally neutral, totally objective way, not for the blaming of one, one economic system or another.

It's something which is, as I say, frowning both ends. It's really a function of advanced economic systems, of advanced, technologically advanced countries. It's basically the result of the industrialization which began in England, of course, in the 18th century and in above all, it's a result of the increasing use of and dependence upon fossil fuels: primarily, of course, coal and oil for both industry and transport. Modern industry, modern civilizations are run almost entirely on oil, mainly upon oil, to a less extent also, of course, on coke coal.

But oil, it is which quite literally... oil's the wheels of industry throughout the world. And the desire for oil, the need for oil, the craving for oil, the guzzling of oil is one of the great phenomena of the 20th century. We know, of course, that oil is decreasing, the stocks of it are decreasing inevitably and that someday, since they are finite, they will run out altogether, but that day hasn't, of course, arrived yet and new reserves are found from time to time, to enable us to go on in the same old ways.

But the problems are increasing. Some day we shall have to find means of transportation by means of inventing some new kind of transport which isn't dependent on oil, perhaps, upon electricity or something, like that, because electricity itself is oil-dependent to some extent. We shall have to become less and less oil dependent, whereas, in fact, in the last hundred years or so, we've become more and more oil-dependent.

First, dependence on oil is something, this rapidly dwindling resource is one of our major problems, and we hope all of us, I think, that the scientists will be able to find alternative sources of energy, solar energy, water, water power from the seas, so to say, and it is derived from sea power and the

building of dams. This will take the place, we hope, on the oil-fired and coal-fired power stations which we depend on so much today and, of course, nearly all our transport is fuelled by oil or by its derivative — petrol. We shall have to do something about that.

There'll be required a technological revolution. We hope we'll acquire one, at any rate, which will bring about a new way of life which is less pollutant, less polluting, less dangerous to our environment. Let us look a little bit at the picture today. We are all aware of this; in order to satisfy our almost boundless need for oil today we send huge tankers to transport it from one country, where it is to be found, where it is drawn up from the ground, to many countries, of course, that have no oil of their own at all, they have to import it.

And then, of course, the issued tankers sometimes sink and sometimes have collisions, and vast spillages occur, causing oil slicks which are sometimes miles and miles long. As a result of these oil slicks, which gradually come towards the coast, we have a poisoning of fish life and sea birds, and this makes the beaches unfit for either the local residents or for holiday-makers to use. And it's a dirty sight, a tragic sight.

The sea birds, for example, are covered in thick black oil, and they have no chance of survival unless people can get to them early and clean their bodies, clean their wings of this oil. So the great cost to natural life - we've been endangering the other creatures of Earth in our greed for more and more oil. And the cost, the economic cost of cleaning up these oil slicks is enormous and, of course, fines that are imposed upon owners of tankers

from which oil is spilt, but the fines themselves are derisory, they are not nearly heavy enough.

Many tanker captains deliberately flush out the holes of their vessels in foreign ports leaving the foul mess for other people to clean up, and the fines they pay, if they are caught, which is not always the case, are literally peanuts. And then there are carbon emissions from our factories and from the traffic. The emissions from the exhausts of cars and other vehicles on the roads are largely responsible for the atmospheric pollution from which we are suffering these days.

These emissions cause acid rain which, when it falls upon the ground, is harmful to plant life, and to some extent, to animal life too. We are told by those who are supposed to know about these things that the atmospheric temperature throughout the world, the average temperature is rising very slightly, and the result of this is so-called global warming, which is only by 1 or 2 degrees, perhaps not even as much as 2 degrees will be the so-called greenhouse effect.

This can be described in the following way: the ice at the Pole caps, the North Pole and the South Pole, will begin to melt as a result of this global warming and causing the level of the oceans to rise, and this, in turn, will flood low-lying coastal areas in various parts of the world, thereby, of course, not only causing disaster to people who live there, but also depriving man of some of the soil — the earth which he needs to grow his food on.

And as further results will be, this happens, that the climate in many parts of the globe will change, maybe, of course, some parts will become warmer and

may be better from that point of view, but others undoubtedly will suffer. We can't know in total whether this will be a good or a bad thing, but we shouldn't just assume blindly that all will be well. We must try and plan and look on the gloomy side in a sense. We must assume the worst; we must take the worst case analysis, as it's called in England.

It's really quite a moot point today whether mankind will perish by flood or by frying, whether it'll be flooded out of existence or fried out of existence. For many decades after the Second World War, once the atom bomb had been invented, people were afraid above all of a nuclear war. Nuclear war was what it was feared, would wipe out mankind because, if there were a war and nuclear weapons were used, and rockets with the nuclear warheads — " nukes" as the Americans call them - were used, then there's little hope for mankind, there'll be no victor in such a war.

Everybody would be vanquished and, of course, the pollution would occur as a result, as well as the devastation would probably, or could easily wipe out mankind, or if not wipe out mankind, then make lives, all life that was left unbearable, as to be almost not worth thinking about, not worth contemplating. There is, of course, an ever horrifying doomsday scenario, from which it's to be really gloomy about this sort of thing. This is the possibility of the Sun baking us all, frying us all.

I haven't spoken about the possibility of flood from melting of the ice caps at the two Poles, but there's this other possibility which is opening up now as a result of man's activity in space and on earth, of course. Some of the hydrocarbons that we release into the atmosphere, especially those from the aerosol cans together, it is believed, with the rockets that we launch into

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space cause holes to appear, large holes to appear in the ozone layer above the Poles, above the Pole caps.

And it is this layer, and this alone, incidentally, this ozone layer which prevents us all and which protects us, in fact, from the harmful effects of the ultraviolet rays given off by the sun. Were there no ozone layer, of course, life would not be life as we know it. It would not be sustainable, and for our type of life it would be too hopeless, the rays, ultraviolet rays would harm us. We know this is so, when we go sunbathing we give caution not to expose our bodies too much to the effect of the sunrays. As if all this were not enough, we pollute our water in various other ways.

We pollute it not only, that is to say, with oil slicks, spillages of one source or another. In many places, and certainly this is true in England, and probably true in other countries, I'm sure, it's true in many continental countries on the Mediterranean coast, for example, in many places untreated sewage is discharged directly into the sea, instead of being treated and used on the land, as would seem to be possible, of course. Side by side with this, we use huge quantities of chemical fertilizers in our agriculture.

Some of these fertilizers seep down into the underground water shelves and aquifers and finds its way into the river system together with chemicals discharged by factories, which are often sited near rivers and lakes, of course, straight into the river or the sea. We are polluting our waters with chemicals, with oil and with untreated sewage. And, of course, the oceans are huge, of course, they cover more of the earth surface than land, as we all know, but they can't endlessly prove a kind of flushing system, purification system for modern civilizations.

The harmful chemicals which are deposited in one way or another into our rivers, our seas, our lakes and our oceans, get into particularly harmful metals, such as lead and cadmium; get into the food chain and the water supply. And, of course, we are absolutely dependent on food, on safe food and water which is fit to drink. However, we mustn't be too gloomy about this, the mankind is capable not only of dirtying, of messing up the planet, it is also capable of cleaning it up, if he applies himself rationally to this problem.

Many rivers have in recent years been cleaned up, that is to say, made a lot cleaner and the matter is clean as long as they would wish and they certainly have been improved immensely, the Thames in London is an example of this. Fish which have not been seen in the river Thames for decades are now reappearing there now. Of course, many of them are put in deliberately as the river is restocked. But the fish which would not have stood a chance of surviving in the Thames a few years ago are now able to survive in that environment, which is very encouraging, of course.

There is another form of pollution I'd like to speak of briefly. It is not quite so harmful to the human race as a whole, but it is certainly deleterious, has a deleterious effect on the environment. It is one another environmental problem we have to deal with. This is the, what I call, noise pollution. This can come from various sources, for example, aircraft with the loud engines. These engines can be made quieter, and there is much effort going into making them less noisy all the time, but they are still enormously disruptive in their effects.

Anybody who lives near an airport knows what a terrible noise these planes can make after they take off or when they are landing. Some people can adapt to this, but not everybody can. It is not true that if you live near a noisy place, you'll adapt to it. I know from personal experience that a noisy traffic can have a continuously bad effect on one's health, because it disturbs one's sleep, keeps one awake and keeps one in a nervous state. Some people adapt to it, but many people, quite a large minority of people never adapt to noisy conditions.

And the traffic noise and the bubble aircraft noise are the worst offenders in this respect. It's not only, of course, aircraft or road vehicles which cause a noise, but other things, such as the well-known ghetto blasters, as they call these, they are very loud hi-fi systems, or loudspeaker systems that they have in pubs and other places of entertainment. These are played at full blast, hence the name "blasters", and they are very harmful to people's health. In the long run they can affect hearing.

There is no doubt about it, scientists have shown that young people who are habitually exposed to very loud noises, to this deafening loud music, will in a course of years suffer an impairment in their hearing and can, in some cases, become deaf, which is a heavy price to pay for listening to loud rock music or something else of the kind. They can enjoy just as well at a lower volume surely, but the fashion today is to play these things as loud as possible, without regard for those around who, perhaps, don't want to hear these things.

It's not uncommon for people in our country to play their transistors in their cars and then to open the car window and the sound comes out, and

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everybody hears whether they want to or not. I usually don't want to hear it. This is an offensive thing to do to one's fellow creatures to impose a sudden noise on them if, so to say, they don't want to hear. It's antisocial, to say the very least of it. It annoys me intensely.

And some shops where they sell hi-fi equipment will have that equipment, will have some music playing usually, usually junk music, I call it, playing very loud and such you can hear from the street. Why should I be, why should I be punished, as if my ears be afflicted with the sounds of music I don't wish to hear, which I don't regard in any way artistic or aesthetic, just because some other people are thoughtless, too thoughtless to turn the sound down. So we have created a problem, perhaps, of a nuisance. The same thing happens, of course, to transistors.

Young people sometimes take a transistor with them, say, to a beach in the country and even in the town, and play it loud. And so all people are forced to listen to, are forced to hear it. This shouldn't be possible in fact, on our railways, I'm not sure about the buses, and other forms of public transport, certainly on our railways, it's illegal, it's technically illegal to play a transistor. It's perfectly acceptable to play one of these players, one of these personalized hi-fis which you wear, you just have earphones, walkmans, but not to play a transistor.

We've created smokeless zones in our cities to rid ourselves of some of the pollution. Now, of course, we are not allowed to burn coal on our fires in most areas in England. In the country you still can have this kind of smoke, but in the towns one is not allowed to have an open fire which burns coal. One has to have a special smokeless fuel, and this, of course, has reduced

the pollution and the fog and the smoke in the towns enormously. And even in my life-time I've noticed a huge difference in this respect.

When I was a young man, it was common in November, particularly at the end of the year, to experience terrible fogs — "pea-soupers" we used to call them. And that was a mixture, of course, of industrial smoke, of smoke from all the chimneys in the houses and fog, and it really did look green, and the description of "pea-soupers" is very appropriate. It did look greenish, a horrible colour. It choked you, of course, and you got black deposits in your nose and so on. It was foul. People used to walk around with handkerchiefs and scarves wrapped around their noses and their eyes.

They got into your eyes, as well, and it's really quite dreadful. We've managed to overcome that problem by the introduction of smokeless zones, I think some time in the late 1950s or early 60s. We could and should do something about the noise that we're creating, that is creating a nuisance for us. In a similar way, we could, in fact, impose restrictions on people. We have started in a small way but we need to go a lot further in this respect. So all these problems, these problems of pollution are man-made problems.

It is we, the human race who have caused these problems by failure to appreciate the extent of the damage we're doing to our environment by mismanagement, even when we do know the effects, we don't always take measures to secure a clean and safe environment. But we know now more and more of the matter, how very delicately balanced the ecology of our world is and that if we go on as we are doing, we might, well, disrupt it and alter it irreversibly, and to the detriment of all, all the human race. We've got to be extremely careful how we're moving in this respect.

There is, as we say, only one spaceship — earth; we have only one planet, we are all in the same spaceship, all in the same boat, as we say. And we could perish unless we alter our attitudes, alter our industrial methods and ruthlessly punish those who are responsible for polluting parts of our Earth. And if we don't, I can quite truthfully say that the sands of time are running out for mankind. *Sort some of the underlined vocabulary under the following headings (to have at least 5 items for each): a.

words and phrases that show the attitude of people to environmental issues; b. the hottest environmental problems we are facing; c. the dramatic consequences of man's activities; d. reasons for / causes of /sources of pollution and other ecological problems; e. ways of dealing with these problems; words and phrases that show the attitude of people to environmental issues; the hottest environmental problems we are facing; the dramatic consequences of man's activities; reasons for / causes of /sources of pollution and other ecological problems; ways of dealing with these problems;