

Conservation and Politics

Dear Sir,

In his Note on Conservation and Politics (page 38 of the first issue) Mr. G. Stutzin of Chile tries to show that his country's political system (euphemistically described as "a military model of government with emphasis on authority and order") provides as satisfactory a basis for working to protect the environment as any other system. As environmentalists, we ought to recognize, however, that among the essential conditions for the preservation and restoration of a humane environment are (a) the mobilization of public opposition to environmentally disruptive projects, be they of private or of governmental origin; (b) public involvement in planning activities; as well as (c) the cooperative effort, with and by the citizenry, to reform or transform the various socio-economic systems, by means of which the causes of irresponsible environmental disturbances may in the short term be resisted and in the long run eliminated. It is more than idealistic to believe that it would do for conservationist groups "to be elastic enough to adapt their language to the ears and minds of their audience [of decision-makers] in order to get their message through".

We ought to realize, moreover, that those democratic procedures which would produce the necessary public opposition and the desired participation in the environmental field cannot be restricted to a single sector of political and economic life. The interdependence of specifically environmental problems with other socio-economic factors has become common knowledge. Moreover, a population which is being denied the possibility of democratic expression — and action — with regard to fundamental issues and which stands ever under threat of dictatorial repression cannot be expected to pursue a role of social activism in a specifically tolerated sphere and manner.

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The United Nations Environment Programme, particularly in the context of the recent third session of its Governing Council, has been the subject of some criticism at national and international levels for the growth of its personnel and the ambitious scope of its planned activities. An important reason for this dissatisfaction is that except for those who directly participate in or cooperate with the Environment Programme's operations, people frequently know little about the concrete work accomplished by UNEP's Governing Council and its secretariat. Like many international organizations, UNEP produces a great volume of documentary information concerning its work and its planning, but these documents generally go unread or even unseen by its critics. UNEP is itself aware of this problem, and at the Governing Council's bidding, the secretariat has launched a public information campaign to publicize its activities. In the hope of furthering these efforts of Executive Director Maurice Strong, Deputy Executive Director Mostafa Tolba and their staff, as well as because of UNEP's new emphasis on the development of environmental law, this second issue of EPL concentrates upon the activities and problems of the UN Environmental Programme, particularly in the context of the recent third session of its Governing Council.

At the same time we have tried not to neglect other matters of interest in both the international and national spheres of environment law and policy. Consequently, we find ourselves having produced a longer issue than our previous one. So, in order to meet our commitments to a standard volume size, our next issue will not be quite so heavy.

The editors have been pleased to receive many encouraging letters approving of the effort begun with EPL's first issue. We have, however, received few responses to particular subjects discussed in the journal. We would like to encourage readers to send us such responses — whether in the form of complimentary or critical remarks or outright attacks directed to the authors or the editors of articles appearing in Environmental Policy and Law. Original contributions of articles or reports are also, of course, most welcome. We hope that EPL will come to fill an important role as a forum for information and discussion concerning environmental laws and policies. We can learn to fill that role only with the help and guidance of our readers and contributors.

The author is to be commended for stressing "the right of conservationists to act [apart from their participation in environmentalist groups] as 'political animals' ". If it should occur to him and the other members of the Chilean National Committee for the Defense of Flora and Fauna to extend to the extremely endangered "political animals" in their country a concern

equivalent to that shown for their land's threatened species of beetles, butterflies, etc., the credibility of Chilean environmental protection certainly would not suffer.

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