

EDITORIAL

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

With continuing economic difficulties in various sectors and the lingering possibility of renewed recession, many people ask whether environmental concerns have been relegated to a position of secondary importance. In some countries, indeed, organized labor has vigorously demonstrated against further environmental constraints. But environmental affairs remains of utmost importance in the minds of many and can hardly be characterized as a subsidiary issue — economic stresses notwithstanding. By way of example, it is widely believed that an issue figuring significantly in the recent elections in Sweden was the opposition's criticism of atomic power development policy in that country. It will be quite interesting to keep a close watch on the elaboration of that policy by the new government. Another case in point was, of course, the recent elections in the United States. The close results tended to suggest that the American electorate experienced some difficulty in distinguishing between the positions of the two major contestants on many issues. But on the issue of environment, there was little doubt that a choice was perceived. Time, the US news magazine, accorded the environment versus economics debate much coverage, delineating between the two candidate's sometimes very divergent positions. We can't presume to know exactly how significant environment was in either the Swedish or US elections but we do point to them as they tend to indicate that the environment question remains if not uppermost then certainly importantly in many citizens thoughts.

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A paper recently prepared by Leontief for the United Nations had, as its salient feature, the assertion that the differences between the rich and poor countries were, in fact, widening. It emphasized that the gap can only be closed if the developing countries follow the path of intensive development — without a great deal of attention to environmental values. The point is, of course, that the developing nations should not be obliged, at least not to their economic detriment, to pursue a more environmentally responsible course than did the developed nations in the course of their development. If the developed world insists on a standard of environmental care higher than they themselves adopted, more foreign aid should be forthcoming from them. In any event, we feel the time has come to start a new discussion on this matter.

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Alarm is mounting, much of it warranted, about the massive and ongoing pollution of the Mediterranean and, for that matter, the Adriatic. The Mediterranean is sick, biologists say, but the Adriatic is its weakest and most vulnerable component. It is tragic that this should occur on one of Europe's most beautiful holiday coasts. Italy passed laws last June obliging firms to disclose the substances they discharged into sewers and rivers and the sea and to install purification plants where needed. In theory, this should bring land source pollution down to an acceptable level in the next six years. The severe economic crisis in Italy may compromise that objective. But the overall impact on the Mediterranean tourist-based economy could merely reinforce the economic problems. We genuinely hope that this will not be the case.

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At the Crossroads

(Re: A. R. H. Schneider, "The New York Session of the 3rd UN Law of the Sea Conference: Progress or Stagnation?", EPL 2:2 at 60)

The difficulties anticipated with respect to the Fifth Session of the Conference materialized in various forms. In many quarters a feeling of disappointment, frustration and even failure was expressed, with many of the key issues unresolved, despite optimistic speculation at the outset. Many of the delegations were simply unwilling to make the necessary far-reaching political and ideological decisions.

Clearly, participants at the upcoming Sixth Session of the talks will be at the crossroads. Much ground has been covered — the peripheral work toward a new treaty is basically complete. A treaty may be close at hand if all move toward cooperation and compromise. The decisions to be taken at this next juncture will determine not only the fate of the Conference but also the common heritage of mankind and peace.

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Chief Seattle: Timeless & Universal

(Re: Chief Seattle, "We May Be Brothers After All", EPL 2:3 at 148).

Chief Seattle speaks with an eloquence that is both timeless and universal in context.

Historians of science might appreciate knowing the archival source of the Chief's response to the President; and philosophers of science will enjoy comparing his thoughts to those of Maurice Strong who was interviewed in the same issue. We must study our past in order to protect ourselves against our future.

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