

ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

Number 59

Spring 1990

NEWSLETTER OF THE SECTION ON ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY, AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE SECTION?

William R. Freudenburg

Virtually every issue of a Section newsletter contains some sort of "Words from the Chair" discussion, and the custom seems to be for these discussions to focus on a Section's business management concerns. The first part of my comments will do just that, but the latter portion of my discussion is intended to focus not so much on the *Section on* as the *sociology of* Environment and Technology. My theme will be that I see a greater need for "new directions" in the second of these topics than in the first.

Business Matters. While the Section on Environment and Technology has just experienced a transition in leadership, the practical consequences of that transition should be relatively small. The Section's affairs have been left in quite good shape by the outgoing Chair, Fred Buttel, meaning that most things are in very little need of change.

Throughout most of the year, the most visible activity of the Section is the one you are now holding in your hands--the Section newsletter. Retiring newsletter editor Gil Gillespie has done a superb job in working with Fred to put out the newsletter over the last two years, and he even agreed to provide an additional service to the Section by producing one last "transitional" issue to ease the way for the new editor (and the new Section Chair). While that last issue was delayed by some fairly serious problems with Fred's back, Gil's superb overall performance made it difficult to find someone who could pick up where he left off. Fortunately, Allan Schnaiberg proved willing to tackle the challenges of being the Section's newsletter editor as well as handling the Chair-Elect's other duties, including those of chairing our Annual Meeting Committee and Awards Committee.

A second bright spot for the Section has to do with our overall membership. Roughly a

year ago, many of us were concerned that the Section might suffer a drop in membership because of the increase in dues that was mandated by the ASA. Instead of declining, however, the Section's membership showed the biggest *increase* during 1989 that we've seen in any year since the Section was founded. After many years of experiencing a very steady membership of 290-295, the Section grew by almost 10% during 1989 alone, to a total enrollment of 326 members--which just happens to be the largest membership we've ever had, passing the previous record of 321 members that had stood since the late 1970s.

It is entirely possible that part of the increase in membership can be traced to the fact that sociologists, like other members of society, were reminded again last year about the fact that technological alterations of the environment will have consequences, whether we are thinking of global warming or Boston Harbor warring. It is also important, however, that we not overlook the efforts of Carole Seyfrit and Tom Hood of the Membership Committee (and Section Council), both of whom seem to have been working especially hard at just about the same time when the increase in membership was especially great. Both of them, incidentally, have been asked to continue in their service as the Section's Membership Committee, again with Carole as chair. These "old hands" will be joined by two new appointments: Gary Williams, who was recently elected to the Council himself, will chair the Nominations Committee, and Gene Rosa has agreed to serve as Chair of the Outreach Committee. And last but certainly not least, Riley Dunlap and Bill Michelson are moving toward closure on the Section's forthcoming *Handbook of Environmental Sociology*.

In sum, the people already in office are working out well, the business affairs of the Section are in good shape, and we even have a healthy balance in the bank. There seems to be no pressing need for any wholesale changes in the way in which the Section does business.

With things sounding that good, maybe we ought to start worrying. That logic isn't quite so contrary as it may sound. Sociologists of environment and technology can list any number of examples to support the hypothesis that complacency goes before the fall--from dinosaurs before the Ice Age to Detroit before 1973. Beyond that point, however, the underlying logic here is that the healthy state of the Section's *business* affairs may give us all an opportunity to stop and think a bit more carefully about the Section's *intellectual* affairs. The challenge is one that I believe needs to be taken on by the entire Section membership, not just the officers; my goal here is to enlist your help.

Intellectual Matters. In the early days of the Section, a significant proportion of members' writing time naturally wound up being absorbed by efforts to delineate the field--to decide just what was and was not "environmental sociology," for example, and to say how it differed from the work that had managed over time to take on the name of "human ecology." Section members also explored the ways in which the various subfields of environmental sociology related to one another, or grappled with the obvious question of how/why most other sociologists could have ignored environmental issues so completely. Still other energy was expended in arguments for and against various kinds of advocacy, from support for various environmental movements to attacks on the insupportable Durkheimian notion of social facts being explainable only in terms of other social facts.

In addition, the past 15 years or so have seen a second set of efforts that have helped to define the area in a way that is less direct, but arguably no less important. A number of Section members--including some of the very people who played key roles in preparing self-conscious descriptions of environmental sociology--have worked hard on substantive topics, ranging from the built environment to the building of environmental coalitions, and from toxics to tourism. Indeed, enough

progress has been made in enough of these areas that it is appropriate for the Section to be moving toward the publication of the aforementioned *Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, which should serve us all well as a way of summarizing and bringing to closure many of the important streams of work that have been carried out to date.

Many of these traditional issues of the field, and more, are likely to continue being salient in years ahead. Even today, after all, many sociologists still define "environment" as something like "other organizations out there," while others use the term to denote the aspects of the *social* environment that are simply being treated in a generic rather than a specific way. It may be, however, that we can consider some of our long-standing challenges to be more or less under control, at least for now. If so, this may be a particularly useful time to start thinking about the challenges that remain.

While it is clear to virtually everyone by now, for example, that environmental sociology is quite different from the environmental movement--or even from studies of the environmental movement--battles over environmental preservation and economic development continue to constitute a major nexus for the industrialized societies' relationships with the environment. And the battles as well as the relationships seem to have changed. At the time of the first Earth Day, in 1970, most of the politically salient environmental concerns had to do with pollution that could be seen, smelled, or even felt or tasted. By the time of Earth Day 1990, most of the focus had shifted instead to such diffuse concerns as global warming, ozone holes, and probabilistic risks.

Similarly, the appropriateness of the usual prescriptions no longer seem so clear. One view has been that greedy corporations are the problem, with government regulation providing the only clear solution; while greed can scarcely be ignored, experience has shown that governmental agencies themselves have often failed to implement regulations either

efficiently or effectively, sometimes showing more talent for *creating* pollution than for cleaning it up. Another view has been that the problems trace not just to a few greedy corporations, but to broader forces of capitalism itself; despite the impressive progress that such critical analyses have already made, as can be seen for example through the articles in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, the glories of *glasnost* have revealed that the experiences of at least the empirically existing socialist societies can sometimes be even worse. In the United States, meanwhile, there is at least some reason to be nervous about treating "capital" as a relatively unified actor. Superfund-related litigation has not only provided an incentive toward pollution prevention, but has also caused some of the giants of capitalism to turn their lawsuits loose on each other, rather than on agencies or community groups. In particular, the insurance industry single-handedly accounts for roughly 6% of the U.S. gross national product, and at least by some accounts, insurance companies are the nation's most significant "owners of the means of production." At the moment, however, literally hundreds of insurance companies are involved in lawsuits against major, multinational petrochemical corporations over amounts that run into the hundreds of *billions* of dollars.

Or to turn back to the environmental movement itself, despite all of the predictions that the environment, too, would go through and issue-attention cycle and then disappear from public awareness--something that appeared to be happening at least through most of the 1970s--the latest polls have found even higher levels of support for environmental protection today than in the era immediately following the first Earth Day. What explanations can we put forth to account for this resurgence--and importantly, to predict what will happen in the years ahead?

Even these limited examples should be sufficient to make a point: While the sociology of the environment (and technology) has made

important advances over the past decade and a half, the challenges and needs that lie ahead of us are probably even greater.

To deal with the challenges of the future, we may find we need to be both outward-looking and inward-looking. The unexpected emergence of "new" problems--and unexpected progress toward the solution of old ones--are among many of the factors that originate from outside the boundaries of our Section but that exercise an influence on our activities. Some of those influences are as fundamental as helping to identify the topics to which our intellectual energies will be turned. Such "outside" factors are important, and there is little reason to believe that they will cease being so in the near future. In addition, it is vital that we remain alert to *intellectual* developments that take place external to the sociology of environment and technology, both those occurring in other areas of sociology and those unfolding in other disciplines entirely.

At the same time, however, given that the Section has now been in existence for a length of time that would qualify a human being for adolescence, perhaps we have reached the point where a higher proportion of our intellectual activity ought to be internally directed--not as in being more self-conscious or introspective, but as in setting our intellectual agenda in a way that is more self-conscious and deliberate. At the same time as we need to remain alert to what is happening in the world around us, in short, perhaps we need to be doing more to assure that the world around us will need to remain alert to us.

The central requirement, it seems, is for an increased emphasis on selecting topics for "intellectually selfish" reasons--selecting them not because they are currently "topical," nor because they will help us to decide what the sociology of environment and technology does or does not entail, but rather, because they are identified by the inherent logic of our analyses as important for understanding the complex interrelationships among environment, technology, and society. This is a call, in

short, for the intellectual work of our Section not so much to be self-conscious as to become self-directed.

I would welcome your reactions, whether you agree or disagree. I would also welcome your participation. Our Section is one of unusual breadth and diversity, as well as one of unusual vitality. The breadth and diversity may ultimately prove to be as important as the vitality in helping us to deal with what clearly will remain a significant set of challenges. Two heads are only better than one if those two heads don't agree (but do communicate), and we're all needed for this one.

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1990 Meeting Sessions

The following are the current plans for the Washington meetings. The scheduled meeting day is August 15th. Roundtables will run in the first hour scheduled for the business meeting that day [hopefully 4:30-5:30 and 5:30 to 6:30, respectively].

SESSION I: *DOWNSTREAM RESPONSES TO RESOURCE UTILIZATION*

ORGANIZER: Allan Schnaiberg
PRESIDER: William Freudenburg

All the news that's fit to create: Agenda setting by the New York Times, Allan Mazur, Maxwell School, Syracuse U

Public reaction to toxic waste contamination: analysis of a social movement, Susan Masterson-Allen, Brown U. & Phil Brown, Brown U & Harvard Medical School

Entropy entrepreneurs: Marketing the greenhouse effect, Michele Eayrs, Northeastern University

The sweet smell of money: the impact of economic dependency on local environmental political mobilization, Ken Gould, Northwestern U.

DISCUSSANT: Penelope Canan, University of Denver, Denver CO 80208

SESSION II: *SOCIAL CONTROLS IN UPSTREAM TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEMS*

ORGANIZER-PRESIDER: Allan Schnaiberg

Growth machines in the jungle: The social organization of tropical deforestation, Thomas K. Rudel, Dept. of Human Ecology, Rutgers U.

Maculinity, violence & occupational health & safety: observations of self-employed builders, Simon Carter, Centre for Science Studies & Science Policy, Lancaster University, UK

From pollution control to pollution prevention: how does it happen? Andrew Szasz, UC Santa Cruz

Green limits: economic growth, environmental protection & the political process in Japan, Jeffrey Broadbent, U Minnesota

DISCUSSANT: Claire McAdams, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX 78627

ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

1. *THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIOPOLITICAL RESPONSES*

Convenor: T. Jean Blocker

From limits to growth to global change: contrasts & contradictions in the evolution of environmental science & ideology, Fredrick Buttel, Ann Hawkins, & Alison Power, Cornell U.

The politics of blame in a natural disaster, T. Jean Blocker, University of Tulsa, E. Burke Rochford, Jr. Middlebury College, & Darren E. Sherkat, Duke U.

Toxic torts, forensic ecology, and the politics of truth, Anthony Bale, Dept. of Epidemiology & Public School, School of Medicine, Yale U.

2. MOBILIZATION OF OPPOSITION TO PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES

Convenor: Robert Bullard

The environmental equity movement: Black communities fighting back, Robert D. Bullard, U. of California Riverside, & Beverly Hendrix Wright, Wake Forest U.

Technology & development: Toward an ecological approach, Donald E. Davis, Univ. of Tennessee

Decentralization of control: The US nuclear power controversy since Three Mile Island, Christian Joppke, Un. of Cal. Berkeley

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL REFORMS

Convenor: Barbara Farhar
Environmental values & political legitimacy in the three federal agencies, Harry R. Potter & Fur-Jen Denq, Dept. of Sociology/Anthropology, Purdue U.

Environmental law in the 1970s and 80s: a case study of the surface mining control & reclamation act of 1977, James Unnever, Radford U, Paulette Higgins, Duke U., & Tom Shannon, Radford U.

Federal technology transfer planning for the buildings & community systems energy efficiency R & D program, Barbara C. Farhar, Solar Energy Research Institute

4. THE CONSTRUCTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Convenor: Allan Schnaiberg

New w[h]ine in old bottles? Recycling the politics of recycling, A. Schnaiberg, NU

Institutionalizing rationality in natural resource decision-making, Wendy Nelson Espeland, U Chicago

Pesticides & nontraditional agriculture: a coming crisis in US development policy in Latin America, Douglas L. Murray, U. Texas, & Polly Hoppin

5. THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EXTRACTION

Convenor: Carole Seyfrit

Is there more than one way to milk a cow? social & economic vulnerabilities of advanced biotechnologies in the U.S. dairy industry, Charles Geisler & Thomas Lyson, Cornell University

Social impact of North Sea oil development on rural youth: migration expectations & aspirations, Carole L. Seyfrit & Donald L. Patterson, Mississippi State University

Cancer & other causes of death among Kansas farmers, 1983-88, R. Scott Frey, Dept. of Sociology, Anthropology & Social Work, Kansas State University

6. SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF PRODUCTION ORGANIZATION

Convenor: Robert Gramling

Socio-cultural factors in Haitian agroforestry: applied research in 4 regions, Paul Starr, Auburn U.

The impact of a boom/bust economy on women's employment, Robert Gramling & Sarah Brabant, University of Southwestern Louisiana

The symbiotic relationship between ideology & structure in creating obstacles to a balanced ecosystem, Allen Lummus, U Tennessee

If you have problems locating addresses of any of the above, please contact Schnaiberg.

THE NEW RESOURCE WARS

A video directed by Al Gedicks, U. Wisconsin-La Crosse, on conflicts between impacted groups and resource developers, will be shown. Discussants will be welcomed after the 45-minute presentation. This informal presentation will be scheduled during our meeting day, in one of the executive rooms.

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We will probably schedule our informal get-together Tuesday night rather than immediately following the Wednesday business meeting; the latter is in the 5:30-6:30 time slot, with roundtables at 4:30-5:30.

AN EDITORIAL PLEA

In an effort to try to make up for time lost in the Newsletter due to Fred Buttel's recent illness, I have rather hurriedly put together this issue to communicate some information to the members of the section. I had hoped to present materials received from contributing editors and the section membership at large, but both of these ecological information systems seemed to have more withdrawals than additions this year.

Accordingly, you may find this issue a moral exemplar of how not to create a newsletter. Part of my goal in this newsletter is to encourage you to make regular and sporadic contributions [*i.e.*, enough content to give me some choices in how to structure a particular issue, since I won't commit to accept or present immediately all submissions]. Otherwise, you will be stuck with my own limitations, which are considerable.

In short, I cannot work beyond my capacities. I think I have good analytic taste, am reasonably catholic in theory and method, and open to innovation in many arenas.

Try me as an editor, then, rather than as a feature writer. To facilitate movement of ideas rather than just retyping (I do have modest secretarial help, if need be) your contributions, you have several options:

- i. send me either PC or Macintosh disks with your contribution. I have conversion capacity for most common word-processing programs in either form. [I use MacWrite II for the Newsletter.]
- ii. you can fax me contributions at 708-491-9907.
- iii. mail me hard-copy contributions:
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NORTHWESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

As one means of expanding dialogue among the membership, I am sharing some of the research-in-progress here in the intellectual niche of environmental sociology at Northwestern University.

RECYCLING POLICIES [RE]CONSIDERED

Allan Schnaiberg

Over the past year, I have been observing with considerable interest the growth of policies aimed at some form of material recycling. In Illinois, there is heat (and occasional light) at all levels of the State, ranging from state government to municipalities. At the local and regional level, there is a diversity of social movement organizations, as well as coalitions of such SMOs, sometimes incorporating non-movement institutions as well.

I have been repeatedly struck by the similarity between much of this activity and my earlier reflections on the energy scene in the latter half of the 1970s. This isomorphism exists at several levels: (1) at the types of policymaking and policy actors involved in energy and recycling; (2) in the apparent consensus on some major tenets of goals and means of social policy in both issue areas; and (3) in the lack of theoretical reflection by sociologists on some of the social and political-

economic structure underlying these policymaking activities.

The nagging question that set me off digging through contemporary dustbins of history is: how *reformist* are the recycling policies that are emerging from these state and social movement activities? At one extreme is the Marxist concept of Andre Gorz, that of *non-reformist reforms*. My earlier research on energy policies had led me to conclude that most of these policies were non-reformist, and given the persistence of the treadmill of production, could not be otherwise. In the years since those energy analyses, I have come to similar conclusions in analysing the blunted thrust towards appropriate technology, some limitations of toxic waste resistance movements, the limited autonomy of scientists involved in workplace hazards, and the variation in the efficacy of environmental movement organizations generally across the last 20 years of the "environmental revolution". All of this uneasiness became more crystallized as I worked on issues of unconsciousness about political-economic dimensions of environmental policymaking in the past few years, preparing a chapter for the forthcoming Handbook of Environmental Sociology.

A number of themes seem to come together in the analysis of recycling programs and policies currently being debated and/or implemented. First, recycling is rather different from a *materials policy*. The latter would treat the entire issue of waste production more holistically, tracing both the generation of and the transformation of wastes in the treadmill of production. On an ecological basis, it would document levels of withdrawals from and additions to ecosystems associated with each stage of the flow of materials. Likewise, it would analyse the political-economic impacts of altering production processes in each stage, in an effort to create an enduring managed scarcity synthesis of the societal-environmental dialectic around issues of waste production.

As with my earlier work on energy and related resource problems, my preliminary work suggests some counterintuitive aspects of the current recycling "boom". The most uncomfortable inference I have drawn so far is

that much of the current drift of waste management policy promises to leave basic issues of waste production largely unaddressed. There are some exceptions to this situation, but generally they demonstrate how low the ecological consciousness is under the range of recycling policies. Moreover, because of the paucity of political-economic analysis of interests and political influences involved around them, the predictions of ecological relief from recycling policies are likely to be far too optimistic. One of the peculiar indicators of this paucity is the fact that recycling policies have been subject to far less intense political lobbying than have bottle or container bills that have been proposed in many states. Yet the material logic of bottle bills is a mere subset of much of the logic of recycling.

A related inference is that enforcement of recycling has many policy "leakages". Much of what has been labelled as recycling policies really regulates recyclability only. Most of the programs I have reviewed have very limited state intervention in markets. They rely on economic motivations, rather than on ecological or political consciousness.

Paradoxically, what my work suggests is that even when recyclability becomes transformed into actual recycling of waste products into socially usable products, this does not enhance social consciousness of ecological limits. Indeed, an extreme form of this analysis suggests that what the new processes actually achieve is a heightened awareness of waste as an economic commodity. Rather than recycling then increasing our social concerns about our ecosystems as a fragile infrastructure of use values for society, we may instead be extending the commodification process, imbuing garbage and other wastes with still more exchange value. If this argument is at all valid, the net effect of recycling may not be ecologically benign, despite the accompanying reduction of pollution threats.

For me, this work reaffirms my longstanding concern about environmental sociology's drift into policy justification. While we can certainly attest to the social impacts of some proposed policies, our

analyses are often truncated, particularly insofar as we are working under institutional mandates that restrict our intellectual agenda. Sociologists then become unwitting supporters of some populist policies that have much more complex social and ecological impacts than many of their partisans (and opponents) realize. I am reminded once more that: 'she or he who pays the piper calls the tune'. We confront the familiar dialectical tension between support for our research and the degree of control we retain over our own research designs.

COMMUNITY RIGHT TO KNOW & LOCAL MOBILIZATION

Adam S. Weinberg

Major environmental groups in Illinois have recently developed an innovative approach to the problem of toxic substances. The problems associated with the implementation of this approach are lending support to theories that the environmental movement is less a debate over ecological ideology, and more a class struggle over power. Like many contemporary environmental disputes, this struggle is over the power to control the commodification of natural resources. This is a public-good problem of who has the right to draw the line between whether a natural resource or negative externality belongs to a community or a company.

Five of Illinois largest interest groups have recently formed a loose coalition called the *Community Right to Know*. This coalition of environmental groups, public interest law firms and public interest groups is drawing upon a recent law to develop innovative approaches designed to prevent environmental abuses by toxic substances. The law, which is entitled The Federal Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986 (Title III of 1986 Superfund Reauthorization Act), requires companies that use, produce, emit or store hazardous substances to report technical information and provides access for citizens to that information.

The coalition operates at two levels:

community and interest group. At the grass roots level, they devise strategies to alter the regulatory process. The objective is to empower citizen groups who can help regulate local companies. In this way the regulatory efforts of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) and the courts will be supplemented. The strategy is to conduct local workshops across the state, which will establish indigenous community right-to-know groups that will: (a) oversee and monitor local facilities to ensure compliance with IEPA and MWRD emission permits; (b) audit the facilities manufacturing process and use technical experts to develop a list of cost-effective steps that the company could take to become environmentally sound; and (c) employ activists to develop strategies which will force the plant to adopt the recommendations.

At the interest group level, the coalition is gathering information through the community groups and their own research staffs about company abuses and regulatory weaknesses. This information will contribute to a more precise understanding of the actions undertaken by companies and state agencies. These insights will then be utilized to create and lobby for the passage of a comprehensive environmental bill in the state legislature.

In addition to addressing environmental questions, my research can provide data to sociologists interested in social movements, law and society, social organizations and other intersecting areas of interest both academic and political. I am executing this research as participant observer. I have traced the coalition from its inception, completing to date six months of what will likely be a four-year study.

My early observations can be categorized as follows: regulation, technology, State agencies, environmental groups, and grass roots concerns. Observations are as follows:

(1) Regulation as defined by the IEPA and MWRD has often been defined as monitoring. By this, I mean that no standards have been set, but rather the IEPA and MWRD have often

let companies set their own emission thresholds and report their own emissions levels.

(2) Technical information about environmental practices and possible alternatives is exclusively controlled by a small category of corporate elites. Thus regulatory efforts are often doomed, as companies reclassify the information so that it does not have to be reported, do not report it at all, or delegitimize the danger posed by the substance.

(3) The bureaucratic nature and functional realities of State agencies force them into an unequal alliance with companies against citizen groups. Even an environmentally conscious official is over-worked, dependent on cooperation from companies to keep up with their constant work load, assessed for job promotion by the amount and ease with which work is done, and hampered by weak laws, a strong appeal process and little support from agency heads.

(4) The environmental movement itself is hampered by differences between the social-reconstruction goals sought by ecologists and the narrow market interests of the movements' middle class adherents. To use Richard Flacks' (1988) categories, there is a difference between those who are seeking to make history and those who are just trying to make their lives better.

(5) At the grass roots level issues are most often expressed using the language of safety, economics and territory. The three questions most often asked are: is my family going to be safe?; are my property values going to decrease?; and how can we decide what risks the company takes? Ecological phrases like: "the atmosphere is being destroyed," or "we must preserve resources" are rarely uttered.

Paradoxically, in Illinois contradictory outcomes seem inevitable. Since current reforms are not ecologically-based, they are likely to have a minimal effect. On the other hand, the creation of these alternative approaches could bring more people into the movement. This support could serve to replace the state and courts as mediators of environmental deputies. Since these new participants have an economic, political and

recreational stake in slowing ecological degradation, at least some positive, if not radical, change could occur.

Although these findings are preliminary, they do suggest that sociologists interested in understanding this movement, and/or helping it attract a wider audience, perhaps need to rethink the concept of "the environmental movement." I think this research indicates that the environment has become the arena in which many of society's central power struggles are taking place. Thus as an entity the environmental movement may be less about ecology and more about tangible, economic goals. This, in turn, has both positive and negative repercussions for the environmental movement. I would welcome comments and especially look forward to active discourse with people who disagree with my assessments.

Reference:

Flacks, Richard, 1988. *Making History : The American Left and the American Mind*. New York: Columbia Press.

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SOCIAL MOBILIZATION IN THE GREAT LAKES

Kenneth Gould

The past decade has seen a remarkable growth in the number of locally-based social movement organizations aimed at remediating or preventing ecological disorganization in local communities. Although much has been written by environmental sociologists about these newly emerged health and environmental SMOs, from Love Canal to the proliferation of NIMBY groups, there have been relatively few attempts to systematically examine the local socio-economic and political conditions that give rise to these phenomena. My current research project is an effort to gain a greater understanding of where, when and why certain communities mobilize around local health and environmental issues and why others do not.

I set out to conduct a comparative analysis of six Great Lakes communities

impacted by various levels and types of toxic contamination. A dimensional sampling model was used to select three matched pairs of U.S. and Canadian sites from the 42 Areas of Concern designated by the International Joint Commission. U.S. and Canadian sites were initially paired according to the nature of the local pollution problem, the relative distance of communities from political and scientific resource centers, and the type and diversity of pollution sources. This research required me to spend many weeks in the selected communities and in the regional resource centers in which national and regional ESMOs are based. The project was funded in part by the Canadian Embassy's Graduate Student Fellowship Program.

The data includes numerous personal interviews with members of affected communities, government agency/ministry personnel and environmental social movement organization activists. In addition, I've assembled an extensive collection of government and ESMO documents, and articles from local newspapers. I was also able to attend a number of public meetings on remediation and monitoring issues in the selected communities. My analysis examines the interactive impacts of economic dependency or diversity, industry unconsciousness-making efforts, environmental social movement organizations, government agencies or ministries and the social visibility of environmental disruption, on the formation of local consciousness and political mobilization in response to the emergence of localized pollution problems. The socio-economic and political constraints and opportunities presented by the role and relative position of communities in national and regional economies is also considered, as it bears on local resource conflicts.

Although data analysis is still in the preliminary stages, a few of my initial impressions may be of some interest. In regard to economic dependency on polluting industries, the data indicates that the effectiveness of the "control capacity" of industry is increased to the extent that communities are (or perceive themselves to be)

dependent upon a given industry. It also appears that this economic and political leverage is further increased in communities whose economies play a peripheral role in regional and/or national economies and are relatively isolated from resource centers.

A nearly universal theme among the mobilized community residents and ESMO activists that I spoke with, in both the U.S. and Canada, was frustration with the perceived inadequacy of existing public participation structures established by government agencies and ministries. Most people involved seem to feel that they are being neither heard nor heeded. Many have also expressed suspicion that these structures were established to diffuse community reaction and stifle local dissent. These participation structures generally afford minimal genuine interaction between the public and the agencies and ministries which dominate the processes.

Another common theme is the ambiguity of the role of government actors in local environmental conflicts. In some instances the government is seen to be the only voice for remediation of a specific site, supporting the view that government environmental agencies may represent an institutionalization of the environmental movement. However, in cases where a strong local and/or ESMO voice for remediation is present, government agencies and ministries appear to play a more conservative role, promoting only the minimum allowable remediation in the face of local support for more substantial efforts. Government agency/ministry support of weak remediation alternatives is often defended in the name of cost-efficiency.

Finally, despite the recent rise of media attention to global ecological crises, my discussions with residents in polluted communities indicate that the impact of environmental disorganization on the health of local residents is the primary motivating factor in the formation of what has been referred to as local "environmental" consciousness. The potential negative effects of local environmental problems on the health of individuals and their families appears to be a more powerful mobilizing issue than the larger ecosystemic

consequences of the dispersal of PCBs, radionuclides, heavy metals and other toxins. The primacy of health concerns may call into question some of our conventional notions about what defines environmentalism and environmentalists.

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EARTH DAY 1990

I would like to invite the members to use the occasion of Earth Day 1990 (April 22nd) to do some comparative-historical reflections. In the next issue or two, I would like to publish accounts from members who were participants and/or observers of Earth Day at its inception, in 1970, and do as systematic a comparison as possible with their experiences of the 1990 activities in their community of work/residence.

Among the many topics I would welcome in this historical-comparative perspective would be: types of participants, level of conflict ascribed to environmental protection issues, thematic emphases, priorities of types of environmental problems, and the centrality and nature of student involvement in planning these events. On a slightly more reflective or whimsical level, I would be particularly interested in older members' reactions to youth or student involvement that is reinventing social history rather than learning from the social trajectory of environmental protection struggles of the last two decades.

Allan Schnaiberg

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IDEAS COLUMN

Beginning in the next issue, I would like to start a column of members' ideas for papers, commentaries, evaluation projects, or innovative methods for projects. Short items, of about one paragraph, would be especially welcome. Others might be included as commentaries in a separate part of the newsletter. Illustrations of such ideas could include the following, recycled from my own recent work on recycling policies:

- one waste-generation consciousness-raising idea I have seen is to have a few students carry large plastic garbage bags with their own solid wastes around for a week. The demonstration effect for them and fellow-students is apparently quite powerful. Some analysis of the contents and the consumer (rather than the producer) value in the packaging might be a useful extension of this.

- encouraging students or colleagues to do some flow charts of recycling actions in their communities. This would include tracing the decision-making actors in government, the private sector, and social movement organizations, assessing their interests in current or proposed changes in recycling policy, examining conflicts within or between them around proposed changes in waste policies, and following both the implementation of local changes and the state's monitoring of such implementation. A useful extension of such projects would be a trace of the interests involved in virgin materials extraction and processing that eventuates in local wastes as well, and examination of how these interests may be represented in the entire waste treatment process.

- increasingly, the problems of waste treatment are turning from waste collection and waste reprocessing to creation of new markets for recycled products. Projects on resistance to such products would be useful, ranging from our own workplaces to state and private sector organizations in our communities.

- conflicts between waste processing organizations seem to be growing, in part because of the economic value of wastes and their reprocessing (or disposal alternatives). Local projects on decision-making about wastes, and how the market interests and conflicts among market actors are reflected in such political-economic processes would be terribly value projects.

- it seems clear that recycling is going to generate new opposition of a NIMBY [not in my back yard] type, since a number of

recycling processes require extensive land areas to separate types of wastes. It would be instructive to see how political and economic actors are responding to such direct action -- or the potential for such action (following earlier experiences of landfill and incinerator siting and operation) -- in their decision-making. This may be a time for us to do the research proactively.

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MEMBERSHIP NEWS & NOTES

Robert D. Bullard [U Cal Riverside] is researching grassroots mobilization around environmental justice issues and dispute resolution strategies employed in minority communities. His grants for this work come from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Fund for Research on Dispute Resolution. Westview Press will publish his book this summer entitled *Dumping In Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*.

John K. Thomas [Rural Soc, Texas A & M] has received (along with Clark Adams) the annual publication award for wildlife literature from the Texas chapter of the Wildlife Society for their article on *Public Uses of Texas Wildlife and Natural Areas*. The authors are currently surveying 12,600 landowners who have purchased permits for leasing their property for hunting or other recreational purposes, to study the effects of lease economics and ecological diversity on wildlife and habitat conservation practices. Dr. Thomas will also initiate an environmental problems course this fall in the Sociology department.

Lawrence C. Hamilton [U New Hampshire] has been involved in extensive environmental examples of statistical methods. His forthcoming advanced work [*Regression and Graphics*] will draw heavily on pollution and conservation examples. His two 1990 books, *Modern Data Analysis: A First Course in Applied Statistics* and *Statistics with Stata* [both published by Brooks/Cole], have numerous environmental examples.

Elizabeth Peelle [Technology & Soc Systems Gp, Oak Ridge National Lab, PO Box 2008, Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6200] is interested in a variety of waste-management issues, including: institutional organization of hazardous/toxic nuclear waste systems, public acceptance of another nuclear power era, technical expertise and citizen participation in energy/waste decision-making. Her recent presentations include: "Innovative process & inventive solutions: nuclear waste packaging facility case study," pp.143-169 in B. Depart & M. Clawson, eds., *Public Interest in the Use of Private Lands*, Praeger, 1989, and "Two citizen task forces & the challenge of the evolving nuclear waste siting process", at the April 1990 High-Level Radioactive Waste Management Conference, at Las Vegas. She is chairing one of six social science sessions at this conference, convened by the American Nuclear Society and the American Society of Civil Engineers, and will report in the future on whether a discourse was really established there.

Paul Shrivastava, Howard I. Scott Professor of Management [Dept. of Management, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837], is interested in industrial crises and disasters, and environmental management and policymaking. He welcomes submissions in these areas to the *Industrial Crisis Quarterly*, a journal that he edits.

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NOMINATIONS

Ballots in preparation for two section officers include these nominees [from Gary Williams]:

- Penelope Canan, Dept. of Sociology,
U of Denver, Denver, CO
- Barbara Farhar, Energy & Environmental
Analysis Institute, Solar Energy
Research Institute, Golden, CO
- Eugene Rosa, Dept. of Sociology,
Washington, State U., Pullman, WA
- William Van Vliet, Dept. of Sociology,
U of Colorado, Boulder, CO

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Environment, Technology , and Society , No. 59

TO: Members of the Environment & Technology Section

FROM: Allan Schnaiberg, Dept. of Soc., Northwestern U., 1810 Chicago, Evanston, IL 60208

PLEASE SEND THIS TEAR-OFF SHEET OR A COPY FOR INCLUSION IN FORTHCOMING EDITIONS OF THE NEWSLETTER. MANY THANKS...

Your current research interest you'd like to share with others:

New literature you've published, or found especially helpful. Give full citations.

Upcoming meetings and conferences. Calls for papers. Papers you've recently presented.

Activities of related social science environmental groups.

Name: _____
Address: _____

