

Save the Great Lakes

A Call to Action

Fifth Estate Collective

1988

The Evergreen Alliance, a Detroit-based federation of individuals devoted to stopping the Detroit trash incinerator, has put out a call for a Regional and International Mobilization to Save the Great Lakes, May 13-May 16. [See schedule in this issue.] This weekend of activities has been organized to focus attention on the systematic destruction of the Great Lakes bioregion. The weekend will include a large-scale demonstration which will march past the Detroit incinerator now under construction and a rally at the Wayne State University campus. A conference and forum the following day will serve to educate participants with workshops, and several nationally known speakers have been invited to participate. A direct action contingent will utilize civil disobedience to blockade the trash incinerator on Monday, May 16.

The concept of the Mobilization evolved out of the growing awareness among the anti-incinerator forces of the need to link up the many different assaults on the environment in this region of which the incinerator is only one. According to the "Call to Action" printed by the Evergreen Alliance (available from them or us), the Great Lakes, once known as "sweetwater seas," have been converted into "dumping grounds and sewers for heavy industries such as steel, auto and chemical."

While some of the most obvious pollution dumping has allegedly been curtailed since the 1960's, when evidence first surfaced that the Great Lakes were in danger of choking to death on raw sewage and the dumping of heavy industry, new and even more serious threats to the lakes have emerged. All species of fish in the Great Lakes are contaminated to the extent that warnings have been issued to not eat or to limit one's consumption of fish. The human population of the Great Lakes region contains much higher concentrations of toxins in their bodies than are found elsewhere in the nation. Even the mist at Niagara Falls is toxic!

The issues raised by the Alliance's Call are as follows:

Stop the Detroit Trash Incinerator: Air pollution accounts for 60% of the toxins in the lakes. This monstrosity will be the world's largest incinerator and therefore an appropriate symbol of industrialism's assault on the natural environment. When fired up it will belch out acids, dioxins, furans, heavy metals, etc.

Shut Down Fermi 2. Stop the Nuclearization of the Great Lakes: This plant, described by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as one of the nation's most dangerous, threatens to turn Monroe into the next Chernobyl. The entire Great Lakes coast line is dotted by nuclear plants. Declare the Great Lakes a nuclear free zone.

Stop Chemical Dumping—Shut Down the Chemical Industry: "The Lakes are being used as an industrial sink for the multi-billion dollar chemical industry." The contamination is traveling through the entire food chain to the point where the breast milk of every nursing mother contains the toxic spill-off of Dow Chemical and other polluters.

Defend and Extend Great Lakes Wilderness, Wetlands and Coast: Stop the developers who would destroy the Lakes' natural shoreline to develop industry, housing and shipping. (Currently 85% of the coastline of southern Lake Michigan and 70% of Lake Erie coastline are developed). Current plans call for year-round shipping and further dredging. The delicate interrelatedness of the ecology of the Lakes is of little concern to those who seek profits from them.

Stop the Growing Toxic Waste Incineration Industry: Industrial technology is producing astonishing amounts of toxic waste much of which is slated to be incinerated in new and existing facilities in the Great Lakes region (the City of Detroit, in particular, is actively seeking toxic incinerators).

Stop Turning the Earth into a Toxic Landfill: The ground water is becoming contaminated through the leaching of municipal, toxic and radioactive landfills. Even incinerators add to this problem as their ash laden with toxins is landfilled.

Around the Great Lakes many different individual struggles are under way to halt the destruction. For the most part these are locally organized citizens' groups which aim to stop one particular incinerator, dump, nuke plant, etc. The time is ripe to link these struggles together as all are related to the consumption-oriented, mass technological, industrialized society which seems hell-bent on destroying the Earth. It is not enough to stop only those projects in one's own backyard.

This line of thought is representative of the evolution of the Detroit-based anti-incinerator fight which has now been going on for two years. In part the Mobilization grew out of the renewed interest in stopping the incinerator, in part generated by the visit to Detroit of Lois Gibbs of the Citizens Clearinghouse on Hazardous Waste. Gibbs, who played a leading role in the Love Canal struggle against chemical companies, stressed the need to stop incinerators through political mobilization. Lawsuits and experts have proven ineffective in battling government and corporations. This public meeting, organized by local residents calling themselves People for Clean Air, energized the community to step up the fight.

In the anti-incinerator movement meetings that followed, the community began discussing a broadened perspective on the problem. A number of actions followed including a 100-strong picket line of a posh dinner for Mayor Coleman Young, and a Halloween ceremony to cause an earthquake to destroy the incinerator. A 16-page tabloid was also produced at the end of 1987 which set the tone for a widened view of opposition to ecological devastation of the region.

The Evergreen Alliance emerged from these actions and discussions, embracing the principle of a confederation of affinity groups, communities and individuals. Many different viewpoints and projects are accepted within the Alliance which does not impose one position or strategy or otherwise control the activities of the members. By working on such a confederational, decentralized, non-hierarchical form, and by broadening its focus to a general contestation of ecological devastation, the Alliance has made links with people working on issues such as opposition to the Fermi 2 nuclear reactor, other incinerators, and toxic and nuclear wastes. The possibility of a liberatory, earth-oriented community is emerging in all of these connections. The Call to Action declares, after conservationist Aldo Leopold, that people must become members of the total ecological community. "As we become kin to the land, we will see more clearly how to defend its long-term health and biological diversity, which are the only guarantees of our own survival." An ecological society in harmony with the land is possible, it concludes, and would best promote "human liberty and community."



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Fifth Estate #328, Spring, 1988

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