

The environment battle

ment withdrawal from pollution control and research. The Reagan administration, says the president of the National Audubon Society, one of the leading U.S. conservation organizations, is "deliberately undercutting the nation's environmental laws and programs." Such concerns are by no means restricted to environmental groups. The Chicago Tribune, for example, while supporting editorially the President's defence and economic policies, bluntly states that "as far as the environment is concerned, Mr. Reagan is a menace."

The goals and orientation of the new regime are nowhere better symbolized than in a current campaign to purge "undesirable" material from EPA's publications list. A January, 1982, Washington headquarters memorandum listed almost 70 agency publications which were no longer to be made available. Included on the hit list were reprints of articles from the EPA *Journal* quoting Carter administration officials and material identifying industries as polluters. It may be going too far to argue, as some critics have done, that this move amounts to "environmental book-burning," though such a view is not difficult to understand. What the action does reveal is the apparent extent to which those now in control of EPA regard as anathema the often mild banalities of previous policy statements and informational publications.

The impact of the new regime specifically on Canada-U.S. environmental relations can be seen from recent developments in a number of issues. These include the continuing question of water quality in the Great Lakes, the relatively recent problem of acid rain and the long-range transport of air pollution, and, in a different way, such controversies as that over the Garrison Diversion. The major development with respect to the Great Lakes has been the substantial budget cuts proposed by the Reagan administration. On acid rain, the recent problems stem from the administration's efforts not only to oppose needed controls but also to weaken existing air pollution regulations, and from its efforts to weaken EPA. The revival of Garrison reflects indirect more than direct impacts.

Great Lakes water quality

The basic framework of Canada-U.S. efforts with respect to pollution control in the Great Lakes is provided by the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1978, a more comprehensive version of an earlier 1972 accord. The original emphasis was on urban sources and particularly the role of phosphates in the eutrophication (advanced aging) of the lower lakes. Since 1972 over \$6 billion has been committed to improved municipal wastewater treatment programs. By 1978 most treatment facilities in the basin were meeting target levels for phosphate removal from effluents. Nevertheless, the lake waters improved only marginally. Western and southern Lake Erie and western Lake Ontario were in 1981 still in an advanced eutrophic state. Large numbers of beaches were still closed in summer due to bacterial contamination, often from malfunctioning treatment plants. The lack of significant improvement was due in part to the enormity of the cleanup task, particularly on the U.S. side, in part to inadequate funding, and in part to the more recently recognized fact that much pollution enters the Lakes from non-point sources, including agricultural runoff and the atmosphere.

The focus of the 1978 agreement was, more than its predecessor, on such less well-known forms of pollution and on the increasingly serious problem of industrial sources and toxic pollutants. Compared to attacking municipal pollution, this new task is infinitely more complex and difficult. It is almost a losing battle merely to keep informed about the vast numbers of new chemicals available and being developed. Monitoring their presence in the lakes and determining their effects on biota and humans will involve a staggering scientific effort. Moreover, industries are less easily strongarmed than local governments when control programs are being devised and implemented. Although Ontario's record of securing industry compliance even to existing, inadequate regulations compares poorly with that of the states and EPA in the U.S., the much greater concentrations of industrial development on the American side of the lakes has meant that most of the "areas of concern" designated by the joint Water Quality Board, such as the Niagara River, are in the U.S. Joint action on these problems seems much less likely now than it did prior to November 1980.

The Board's most recent report to the International Joint Commission (IJC) emphasizes the critical need for more and better information, particularly about the presence and effects of toxics; for greater co-ordination among state, provincial, and federal governments of research and monitoring activities; and, in particular, for the development of new toxic substance and non-point source control programs under existing statutes. More activity and new programs, of course, require money and expertise. The Board was clearly worried that even existing levels of resources would not be maintained, but they did not point the finger.

The report of the more independent Science Advisory Board was blunter. "Under the proposed U.S. budget for 1982," it stated, "reductions in Great Lakes research and surveillance programs will be particularly severe." Cuts of 50 percent were likely, the scientists said, and the effects were already being felt. Agencies were "demoralized" and "immobilized," new laboratories were threatened with elimination, and program planning was in disarray. The essential research capacity was "in danger of being dismantled," and as a consequence, environmental management would be crippled. Although Great Lakes congressmen were able to restore funds last year to some laboratories and programs, the same cuts reappeared in the latest Reagan budget for 1983. Congress has not been able to prevent the dismantling of virtually the entire EPA pollution control enforcement unit. The impact of these reductions on the Great Lakes themselves, ironically, will probably not be known for years precisely because of inadequate surveillance and monitoring. The lakes and those living around them, though, clearly will suffer.

It might be noted that budgetary and personnel changes are not always intrinsically and invariably bad. Some government-run scientific research organizations probably could benefit from the occasional shakeup and trimming, given the less-than-fully compatible interests of creative science and job-secure bureaucracy. But the changes being forced on the EPA cannot be so defended. The reductions are not selective and informed but wholesale and blind — at least in environmental terms; the best