

For Canada that might be an overstatement, but it contains a truth that is very obvious to us all. Professor Ezra Mishan of the London School of Economics, and an economist of world stature had this to say in his book "Technology and Growth: The Price we Pay":

"As the carpet of 'increased choice' is being unrolled before us by the foot, it is simultaneously being rolled up behind us by the yard....In all that contributes in trivial ways to his ultimate satisfaction, the things at which modern business excels, new models of cars and transistors, prepared foodstuffs and plastic objets d'art, man has ample choice. In all that destroys his enjoyment of life, he had none."

Life-destroying things Professor Mishan has in mind include, of course, the pollution of our environment in the widest sense - not only the poisoning of earth, air and water but the destruction of the human environment by the soul-destroying proliferation of urban sprawl, the systematic rape of the countryside within reach of our cities, the filling of our homes and our lives with the cheap and ugly. The process has not gone as far in Canada as elsewhere, but this is a function of our relatively low population density rather than our imagination or vision.

To state the problem is not to solve it. We have much to learn, and little time in which to learn it. The same people that decry growth for growth's sake expect to have well-paid jobs with annual increases in salary. They may protest against pollution but they insist upon driving their own cars. It is a commonplace for people to say that to regain a harmonious natural environment and enhance the quality of life we may have to accept a drop in our material standard of living. But do they mean it? Are they ready to embrace the implications of what they are saying?

Professor Mishan suggests that we may not have much choice. He points out that we have consistently underestimated prices in the technological age by ignoring the costs of environmental pollution, costs for which the bills are now coming in.

It is not necessary for me this evening to get into a long discussion of the environmental question, I use it only as an example of the crisis of confidence that has overtaken Western society. Even as governments are called upon for day-to-day accountability and urged to share their responsibilities with the people on a continuing basis so are some of the