

bringing it all back home

by Sid Stephen

People are polluted. Wherever the human is found, he generates garbage, and the amount of garbage increases with affluence.

The first time I visited Alberta, one of the things that most impressed me were the signs along the highways enjoining the passerby to "Look up: the cleanest air in the world is directly above your head", or something to that effect. I stayed here for three years, then moved away for six years. In September I came back to Alberta, and though I'm sure I've travelled the same roads, I seem to have missed the signs. Or perhaps they were obscured by a cloud of smoke from a burning crude oil pit . . .

Cleanest air in the world?

Pollution of the environment seems destined to be the overriding concern of a good many people in the '70s, and if you can believe your eyes, ears and sense of smell, it's about time. Maybe the very ability to adapt to changing conditions which have made homo sapiens dominant on planet Earth will be a contributing factor to his extinction. The philosophy of "you'll get used to it" has prevailed in areas where there is now, has been in the past, and for all that's been done about it shall continue to be massive environmental pollution. Try it yourself: crossing the High Level bridge some morning when the ice fog caused by the 105th St. power station has trapped somewhat more than the usual amount of exhaust and smoke particles in the river valley, ask one or two of your fellow passengers what they think of the view, or lack of it. From my own experience, most will just shrug their shoulders and go right on ignoring it. After all, the radio and TV repeatedly tell us that it's just "water vapor", and after all, the stacks have been raised 100 feet so that the smog can diffuse.

Or better yet, walk through the

valley on such a morning. Get a little of that oily film which coats the windows in the area into your lungs, and try to imagine what it would be like to live with that sort of thing all the time.

Mr. S. L. Dobko, who is responsible for air pollution control for the province (his phone number is 229-4551, if anyone is interested), tells me that "pollution monitors" have been used in Edmonton since 1961 to measure and record pollution levels in the air we breathe, and that despite a considerable increase in the population of Edmonton since that time, smoke pollution has actually

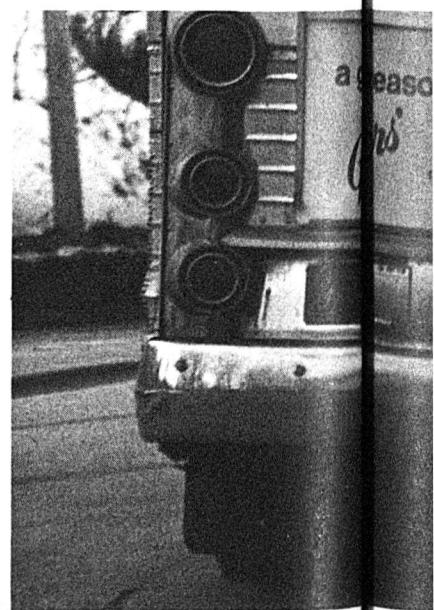
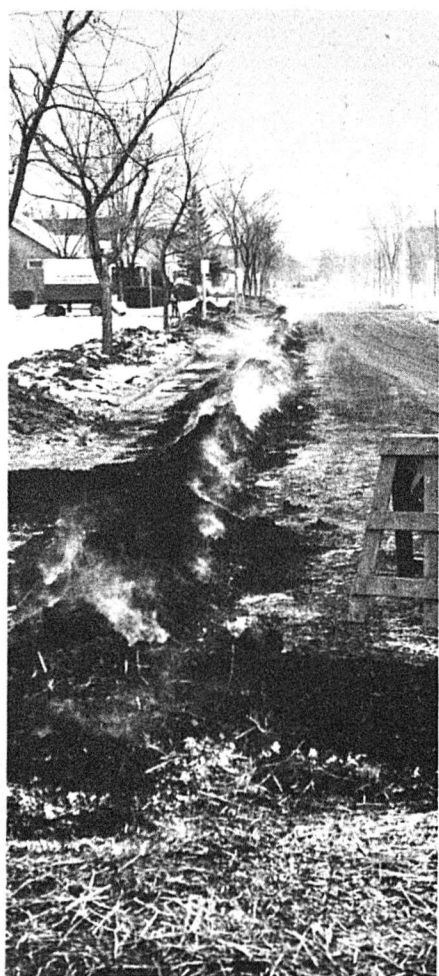
decreased and other pollution levels have remained "about the same". I should think that the decrease in smoke pollution would correspond to a switchover to natural gas as a major source of fuel, as has been the case here. He stated that Edmonton has the same problem with automobile exhaust that faces every urban area today.

Well, I'm contributing to the auto exhaust problem. If I take a bus to campus, I have to transfer three times and waste the equivalent of two class periods on the bus. But I'd gladly buy a car that doesn't pollute if one were available; when was the last time you saw a usable transportation device without an internal combustion engine? One of the blessings brought to mankind by the auto and oil industries mentioned in the January 1970 issue of Ramparts magazine, in an article by Barry Weisberg: "Already the children of Los Angeles are not allowed to "run, skip, or jump" inside or outside the schools on smog alert days." He goes on to say that "If the oil and auto industries had spent a fraction of their advertising budgets on research on a smog-free engine, our air might be safe for future generations."

But it's not enough to simply damn all business interests for messing things up. True, in a recent article of The Edmonton Journal, Mr. William Gunn, president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce is reported as saying that pollution is a by-product of success, and any advanced nation cannot escape it and shouldn't try. (Italics mine.) Mr. T. A. Edwards, who serves on the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce Urban Affairs Division, and who has been involved in the area of pollution control for several years, expressed himself this way: "I should be appalled if anyone suggested that you shouldn't be concerned about pollution." The Chamber of Commerce and the business community here have repeatedly asked the

government for some ground rules regarding air, water and land pollution, he said.

"So far as I know there are no criteria laid down for air pollution in Edmonton," though there are some standards having to do with the emission of particles such as nitrates and sulfates into the atmosphere. This is a long way from having over-all ground rules and standards governing all forms of pollution; business will accept pretty strict regulations, as they do not in other countries, providing the



are clearcut and understood, being th added.

The biggest complaint of the business community, Mr. Edwards said, is that government services are some of the major polluters. He gave examples the ETS buses, city incinerators and the power plant which