

break down and absorb these substances; nor can the system recuperate, of itself, from the devastating effects.

At least one startling example of how the delicate balance of nature can be upset is provided in the Great Lakes region of North America. Lake Erie is, or was, one of the largest fresh-water lakes in the world. Through persistent neglect, and inadequate remedial measures, this great lake has been converted from a source of food, fresh water and recreation into a chemical tank, in which pleasure-boating, let alone swimming, is done at peril. If you fall from a boat in Lake Erie, you are advised to have a tetanus injection. As for food from the lake, it should suffice to say that the blue-pike fish-catch of 6,900,000 pounds in 1956 had dwindled to less than 200 pounds by 1963.

The message for all of us is this : That we must act to arrest the abuses of our environment and to remedy the abuses already inflicted upon it; and that this challenge to life itself should rank in importance with the major issues of our time. Our technology in the past has been directed to control our environment for the production of goods and services. What must now be conquered and put under control are the forces of environmental deterioration and destruction which have been released by contemporary industrial and urban activity. Technology must now be directed to restoring the normal balance in our human environment. New techniques are available to reduce waste, to cleanse polluted areas and to improve industrial and urban processes. It is not that we lack the knowledge but that in the use of our present knowledge we lag behind, a result undoubtedly both of insufficient awareness of the consequences and concern about the costs involved in making use of these new techniques.

New Appraisal Needed

A proper appreciation of what must be done involves making a new appraisal of the value to our peoples of a clean environment. For the purpose of this determination, fresh air, fresh water and clean soil, for the first time in man's history, must be considered in the same economic terms as food, clothing and electricity. The latter are valuable because they provide the basis for a good life and because, as commodities, they have a determinable cost of production. What has now to be understood is that air, water and soil must be regarded as of equal, or even greater, economic importance as central elements of life, which make everything else possible.

The United Nations family has already made a contribution in many areas. In the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the United Nations has provided us with a definition of the human goal toward which we should be working, and that is "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health". The Convention has also placed responsibility on member states to take steps toward "the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene". Individual countries as well as the world community as a whole must be concerned when these rights