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## THE RACE FOR SURVIVAL

*There's one born every minute, said Barnum;  
at least, says Mr. Moses, and he's not talking about overpopulation.  
Thoughts on the Great Environment Battle,  
as a leading source of air pollution*

# Bomb Shelters, Arks and Ecology

ROBERT MOSES

**A**N ACT OF CONGRESS in 1957 sought to establish a Civil Defense Department to build bomb shelters. The Luce and other publications ardently supported this program. So did foundations, savants and scientists. Every home, the ballyhoo said, must, at the imminent risk of extinction, build a combined bombproof basement shelter, rathskeller and rumpus room to dive or crawl into on the alarm and pray in until the all-clear sounded. The cost, they said, would be thirty billions. It was one of those journalistic crusades into which Harry Luce would throw himself with missionary zeal reminiscent of the white rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland* or of Dante's *Inferno*.

One would have thought we were in the south of England in 1940 after the retreat from Dunkirk. Sean O'Casey, the great Irish writer, living then in Totnes, near Plymouth, told the story inimitably in *Sunset and Evening Star*:

... There had been straight talks and runabout arguments as to where lay the best place to crouch should an air-raid come. A safe, strong hiding-hole. No use to go into a church, for sanctuary had lost its meaning; altar rails or altar horns were no damned good now. Even the bird sanctuaries might suffer. Some said the coal-cellar, some said under the stairs, a few poor minds said under a table. Hoosh the cat from under the table. One thing was laid down as a law—always be behind a wall and always keep away from the windows, for they had become mad, magic casements, opening out on to a terrible death. Some built Hans Anderson shelters at the ends of their little gardens, damp, unhealthy holes, more dangerous than the bombs themselves. Under the kitchen in the O'Casey house was a cellar about as big as a double and a single bed, laid side by side. The floor was of earth, moist and maggoty, giving out a musty smell. This they tried to strengthen by a



few uprights and struts; covered the floor with straw and the straw with canvas; added a few kitchen chairs, cushions, set up a shelf on the wall for a jug of water, biscuits and some sweets for the children, with a pack of cards for a possible game. The cellar was reached from the outside by a number of steep, slippery steps of firebrick, requiring great caution and some gift of balancing when descending them; but to get to these it would be necessary to circle half the house. Experience told them that in the haste of an air-raid it would be quite easy to break a neck. It wouldn't do; Sean had a lame leg for a week after trying a quick descent. So a trapdoor was cut out of the kitchen floor, and a roughly-made step-ladder brought them down from the kitchen into the mouldy and miserable place that wouldn't make a decent tomb. There, then, was this handsome zone of security waiting for them when the tense moments of a bomb-raid came flooding over them. Safety right beneath their feet. Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices!

This happened to the O'Caseys seventeen years after the Second World War and before Harry Luce electrified the country with his shelter scheme. With the roar of the Stukas overhead, the bomb shelters described by O'Casey had to be underpinned and made escapable, but in the United States in 1957 there was no such emergency, and the stimulated need was supported by nothing more than scare headlines and the clink of counterfeit coin. Some saps fell for it for awhile. Apologists say that we don't do things that way, but we do under the guise of philanthropy, patriotism, love of nature and the struggle for survival. Such movements show that the world is full of potential joiners who make impulsive commitments to high-sounding causes which take no time, cost nothing, involve no sacrifice and can be abandoned at will.

Today the rage is ecology, environment, pollution and ekistics and it will last just about as long as the shelter brainstorm. The flourishing term ekistics, which sounds like a byword and a hissing, was invented by a Greek planner called Doxiadis. It is not in the standard Greek dictionaries and seems to stem from a word for house. Ecosystem has just managed to crawl into Webster. As Professor Parkinson would say, language must expand to meet the needs of more experts.

After ekistics will come abortion, backbone transplants, pot, plankton breakfast food, idea art, marijuana parties, controlled population, equal rights for women, transparent ballet costumes, invisible bikinis, Israeli Old Home Week, harnessing the Jordan, the preservation of the Old Moulmein Pagoda, habitat housing, be kind to vultures week and Beatle music.

Prohibition, sponsored by earnest

fanatics, was repudiated after an exhaustive trial. The bomb shelter program was abandoned by its sponsors after a few weeks. The exploiters played on escape, fright and terror, and lost. Ecological hysteria may last a year, but not much more.

In precisely the same publications which insisted that all of us must build rabbit warrens underground on penalty of mutilation and extinction, we now learn that you can't be serious about the environment without being a revolutionary. Why are these pundits any more trustworthy about environment than they were about shelters?

Consider the grand ecology campaign and supreme environmental offensive which is taking the country by storm. Ecology is simply landscape architecture on a grand scale. It has been well-defined as the beautiful and efficient adaptation of land to human use. Beauty and use are compatible and can be reconciled. This truth is often forgotten by radical ecologists and conservationists.

Up in their Ivory Tower, known in the classics as the "thinkery," the planners have established fantastically equipped, endowed and underwritten laboratories where the big thinking on man's relation to environment and his war against death by pollution is being done. Here theory, philosophy, law and political strategy are distilled and will be marketed.

### *The End of Humor*

The planners already predict drastic regulation of the population by law to insure a future stable, comfortable, balanced society and economy. This consummation will be arrived at on the basis of scientific, impartial, unbiased study of long-haired, bewhiskered, sideburned experts who will of course be completely divorced from politics, extraneous considerations and conflicts of interest. Soon, however, the experts will run up lightning rods and study help wanted ads. Don't think you can frighten the average American go-getter with bogeys of overpopulation. He believes in growth as proof of progress and regards the new census as the Book of Revelation. You may appeal to his latent idealism, but you won't intimidate him.

The ecological eyrie looks more and more like the Tower of Babel with its confusion of tongues. What with philosophers, prophets, researchers, swamis, gurus, medicine men, law givers, old

men with visions and young men with dreams, we wonder who is calling the shots. At the beginning we heard fire, smoke and commandments, but now hear bearded muezzins mournfully calling the few remaining hours before the end of the world.

A leading metropolitan paper came out on a recent Sunday morning with a scare headline article entitled "The Case against Man." The gravamen of the charge is that man is spreading like terminal cancer over the globe. The author says that before long we shall reach that dead-end. He ends with this prediction: "At the rate we are going, without birth control, then even if science serves us in an absolutely ideal way, we will reach the planetary high-rise with no animals but man, with no plants but algae, with no room for even one more person. . . ."

A loose-tongued candidate for United States Senator from New York livens his campaign by broadcasting that treated sludge dumped twenty miles in the Atlantic Ocean off Sandy Hook in fifty feet of water will within two years wash in to shore, pollute Jones Beach and make it unsafe for bathing. There is not an expert who would support such hogwash. The degree of hysteria we have reached is illustrated by a statement of Norman Cousins of the *Saturday Review*, chairman of the New York City Air Pollution Task Force, that a proposed three-year study of Long Island Sound is tragic because "we must realize that the human race is operating under the starkest of deadlines" and that we don't have three years left. We shall pay a heavy toll for hectic, shamelessly stimulated and largely undocumented, gruesome prophecies of pollution of the earth, ecological suicide, overpopulation, starvation, cannibalism and imminent extinction of the human race. Our leading ecologists stop a little short of Dean Swift's modest proposal to raise children to be sold for eating. The four pale horses of the Apocalypse are back again, this time with a wealth of scientific guff calculated to force conservation by terror instead of promoting it by logic, honest arithmetic, patience and sacrifice. Some clever publicist should devise a thermometer or fever chart to show day by day how fast emotion is pushed up into hysteria.

The exponents of primitive nature want all the comforts of modern living without paying for them—electric blankets, hot and cold running water, percolators, radio, television, rapid tran-

sit, autos, telephones, office and plant miracles, movies, parkways, expressways, home. New England nutmegs become incoherent when anyone mentions that nature boy Henry David Thoreau, who tired of the chill at Walden Pond and moved into town for the amenities which protect ecologists from the raw midwinter Massachusetts environment. Inconsistency is the birthright of transcendentalists.

Humor has fled when eager beaver legislators, anxious to be in the van of every movement, rush through bills diverting the police from murder, arson and rape to spot elegant ladies on Fifth Avenue swathed in rare leopard and tiger skins, shod with alligator and iguana, topped by heron feathers and adorned with other fauna threatened with extinction in distant places.

### *' . . . Like Grandma Knew'*

Mythology is swamped with tales of floods. Every ancient religion exploited them. Usually man was not entirely extinguished. Survival and repopulation were assured by quaint and clever devices. Noah got his family and the animals two by two safely off the Ark on Mount Ararat. Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha, disembarking at Parnassus, tossed behind them stones for the foundation of a new genealogy. There must be a way of capitalizing this idea in the present contingency.

The ecological crisis, the *New York Post* tell us in an excited message from a correspondent in Rome, is worldwide. This is what is predicted:

There will be seven billion people by the turn of the century, twice the number now. They are not going to have enough to eat: half the world's population is starving already, and four or five of the seven billion are expected to. They will not have enough habitable living space, even by our own generation's shrinking standards.

Actually the lake of Zurich is as irredeemably dead as Lake Erie; the Rhine is filthier than the Hudson; Swedish forests are withering under acid rains bearing sulphur from the Ruhr; the Japanese, Finns and Dutch fall deadly ill from eating mercury-tainted shellfish; sturgeon (and so, alas, caviar) is disappearing from the Caspian Sea; the Baltic's oxygen content is dropping at an alarming rate; the lifespan of a Milanese is three years shorter than other Italians' because of smog; and in some parts of the Tiber a fish will die in fifteen minutes. . . .

The *New York Times*, a stickler for

preserving the environment, recently ran a fantastically illustrated section advertising ingenious new water schemes. The lead article advocated turning Long Island Sound into a fresh water lake, creating the biggest reservoir in the United States on the edge of water-hungry New York. This was called a comparatively modest proposal. All it requires is a couple of jolly little eight-mile dams with sea level locks for shipping, toll highways on top and little inland streams supplying fresh water. Tolls and water sales would pay for it. The total estimated cost was \$2 billion (a more realistic estimate would be \$20 billion). The same advertisement said: "We make water taste like grandma knew."

The leading advocate of this scheme is a Columbia University researcher at the Lamont Geological Observatory on top of the Palisades. The area was leased to the Observatory on the promise to keep it in its natural state without disturbance of habitat, plant or animal population. I had great difficulty some years ago in obtaining the right-of-way for the Palisades Parkway through this same estate. Tom and Florence Lamont objected because this was where, Mrs. Lamont told me, their son Corliss "did his thinking."

### *Money in Garbage*

Dean Swift, in describing the philosophers on the island of Laputa in *Gulliver's Travels*, showed them extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers to warm the air. The difference lies in the fact that the Gloomy Dean was writing satire and ribbing his readers whereas the Lamont professor wants to be taken seriously. Every ambitious planner and utopian perfectionist has become a Lord of Flies who can purge the elements, halt the spread of contamination and purify the environment. The trouble is that he promises to do it overnight by stamping on honest moderates and calling them names.

I fear our propagandists on their periodic, idealistic sprees. I distrust engulfing tidal waves of piety which sweep everything before them and then recede, leaving a litter of dissent and skepticism. There is no genuine reform by impulse and no steady progress by fanaticism. Only moderation and persistence change bad habits and produce lasting improvements.

Unfortunately it is not far from more



or less harmless lunacy to illusions of grandeur, and from illusions of grandeur to regimentation and control under the guise of super-planning and preserving the balance of nature. The numbers, occupations, arrangements, industries and ultimate objectives and destinies of hapless human beings are exploited by ambitious PhDs. Pretty soon the pseudophilosophers' eyrie becomes a laboratory of dangerous instruments and dials devised by ambitious operators to run the whole show. These philosophers are aided by foundations which are running out of ideas, invent new scientific terminology and make their grants under the head of experiment and research. When the man in the street becomes suspicious of this new tyranny and gets mad and destructive, the Ivory Tower is likely to be his first demolition project.

Most dabblers in environment with their new-found expertise have little knowledge and training to cope with immense issues. Peter Freuchen, the Danish explorer, geographer and romancer, points out in his *Book of the Seven Seas* that an alteration in one of the major sea currents, such as the cold water Humboldt current, would turn our globe to dust. Contrariwise, a canal through the Sahara Desert built by atomic energy would convert the northern wastes into temperate and indescribably rich land.

*Field and Stream* Magazine said recently that the North American polar region is about to be wholly destroyed by pipes and tankers lugging oil to refineries, with ensuing global disintegration. The unsullied Arctic ice will be

quickly contaminated beyond redemption with spreading terrors beyond description. The editor says the situation is already hopeless due to selfish exploitation, corrupt officials and an indifferent public. Colonel Lindbergh recently gloomily announced that Western civilization has probably already entered the period of breakdown. To whose ichthyology do you subscribe when Little Necks decline and monstrous geoducks multiply and flourish?

Public hysteria is no new thing in this country. The Puritan penchant for witch burning is well documented. Anyone who mildly questions attacks on the devil and his works must have an itch for the gallows and a thirst for martyrdom. If you have devoted a lifetime to nature it won't help much when you run afoul of the witch burners.

I am a nature boy myself, but in viewing intemperate attacks of indoor critics on everything that invades nature, I often think of my friend K. T. Keller of Chrysler, who was making tanks for the Army in the Second World War. He spent a day in Washington shuttling back and forth from the generals who demanded action to the lawyers and quibblers who sought to prevent it. Returning to Detroit by plane, he landed at the tank works utterly disgusted, joined the night shift with his old buddies, regained his sanity in a happy motorized atmosphere and emerged fresh as a daisy for breakfast in the morning.

Let's not be too contemptuous of the Kellers who have created our machine civilization, whatever its crassness, noise,



ension and other limitations. We must depend on it for the wherewithal to bring the finer things within our grasp. Who will ridicule the nervous system of the former grease monkey risen to command an intricate machine to whom the hum of the generator is the soothing song of industry?

In all the current discussions about dumping, incineration, separation, processing and recovery of garbage, the poor old pig who long enjoyed succulent leavings doesn't get a tumble. What will become of Philadelphia scrapple in the great Assizes before us? And think of the mulligans, ollapodridas, *kraftsuppes*, *pot au feus* and chowders that boiled the offscourings, slops, insides and other tidbits of the kitchen, farm and woods into the finest broths vouchsafed to man. Shall there be no Weird Sisters stirring the cauldron for Macbeth? Not logic but ridicule finally prevails, whether the subject be chivalry or ecology. It is only when people begin to laugh that sanity returns.

Recycling of wastes, especially solid wastes, is no new concept. Said a shrewd observer recently, "A lot of big blue chip companies smell money in garbage. . . ." Proposals to incinerate garbage and use the heat are sensible. Collecting garbage through an underground vacuum system and returning the heat to the homes is not practical. Recycling will depend on the willingness of progressive, intelligent and public-spirited consumers to absorb the cost, or on prolonged litigation. Litter and refuse will continue to be a national headache until individuals develop

enough community pride to stop tossing garbage out of windows and dropping dirt in the streets.

Consider the consummate gall of an overnight soil expert who demands that the entire disposal system of a vast metropolis be reorganized to meet the timetable of an ambitious, hard-pressed candidate for Congress. Maybe the New York disposal area should be further out, but not until the scientists have agreed, and surely not to elect Louis Loudmouth, Betty Bray or Eddie Ear-Splitter to high office.

We are told that we are shortly to be afflicted with a swarm of locusts. The environmentalists, national and worldwide, are no doubt armed and ready, but with what weapons? Has this curse been precipitated by bad agriculture, war or other human devilry? Has it something to do with the balance of nature? Is there no bureau in Washington, no adviser in the White House, no swami in the United Nations to rid us of this ancient pest? Is there no scapegoat to be denounced in an election year?

Sophisticated critics delight in labeling every public work as an ecological calamity. Let me give you an example:

One of our best known and most widely read and quoted critics, historians, urbanists and philosophers characterized the entire Jones Beach plan as the work of crude roughnecks. Such writers get their vogue by appealing to pretentious Babbitts who like to be seen reading learned books. At any rate, the Jones Beach tower was singled out for special malediction although it was de-

signed by four of the most distinguished architects of the day on the basis of my suggestion that they follow the lines of the Campanile at Venice and use Barabizon brick and Ohio sandstone to blend with the sand and shore. This critic did not even know that the *function* of the tower, regardless of its form, was to hold a column of fresh water drawn upward from 1,100 feet below the beach and stored to serve peak load crowds. He thought it was just a decoration imitating a lighthouse. It all depends on what is in the eye of the beholder. If it is jaundiced, what is a vision in the wilderness or in Venice is a horror at Jones Beach.

### *Ecology or Power?*

The communications industry, which violently attacks the poisoning of our environment and threatens the extinction of mankind, is supported by corporations which sell the very chemicals that the press denounces. Take the detergents which have largely replaced soap. They depend on phosphates, which raise hell with the environment. Total removal of phosphates without an effective replacement might reduce sanitation and cleanliness, have an adverse effect on hospitals, dairies and restaurants and make dishwashers obsolete.

My successor as Chairman of the Power Authority of the State of New York, Jim FitzPatrick, said recently:

"When the Niagara Project was built, the Power Authority joined with the Niagara Frontier State Park Commission and other agencies in a pioneering program, similar to that undertaken at St. Lawrence. It was designed to prove that conservation and technological advances could be pursued in tandem. It sought preservation, restoration and enhancement of the environment as an adjunct to the production of electricity. This program was launched before conservation became a popular cause. . . ."

Public officials demand ecology one day and more electricity the next. They have taken an oath of office and pledged fearless pursuit of truth, but they join in the hue and cry for extreme conservation, and then withhold licenses for power plants; hide, delay, evade, refrain, postpone, deprecate and finally wait for the brouhaha to die down and normalcy to return. Torn between fission and fish, they don't know which way to turn.

Biologists posing as experts on power suggest solar heat as the answer to power

shortages and blackouts. Solar heat may be an ultimate, but surely is no immediate answer. If the most distant goals are being considered, why not experiment with breeding a giant electric eel to produce prolonged shocks without atomic piles, magnifying lenses, penstocks, turbines or generators?

Environmental extremists lightly toss around the word "tragedy." Those brought up on the classics will recall Aristotle's rule that the principal objects of tragedy are pity and terror, to be arrived at by prescribed means, not by "decoration." Decoration is contrived melodrama, exaggeration, appeal to passion and shock treatment. Today's rhetoricians call the rape of the environment tragedy. They should find out what tragedy is. Pity and terror are dangerous ends, not to be reached by decoration.

President Nixon is reshuffling several respected, old-established government bureaus to create a new Environmental Protection Agency in order, he says, to "maximize both the effective coordination of all and the effective function of each." The spokesman who thought up this fine phrase should certainly receive the 1970 White House award for the best slogan of the year. (Governor Al Smith, it may be said parenthetically, called them "slocums.") Among other things, the phrase will help mightily to "dismantle" the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

### *Middle America Wants . . .*

The Army Engineers may perhaps not be the most highly imaginative builders since Caesar, but as decent, honorable and reliable a constructive force as walked quietly in mufti, they are now commanded to hold up every pending improvement to insure environmental purity. They are to require that every dam, bridge, industrial, protective, safety and other public work be insured against every conceivable disturbance of the environment regardless of cost. This is stultifying the honest expert in the name of conservation and trying to make aesthetes out of engineers. Are the Army Engineers to be "dismantled" to save the world for ecology?

We have been reading heated, exciting stuff about the rape of Alaska, how the beauties of the wilderness are about to be exploited and sacrificed to inhuman greed, how a break in an oil pipeline will inevitably destroy the entire environment, how a good road will give bears,

caribou, esquimaux and seals nervous prostration. Do we so woefully lack the engineering skill to tap natural resources for oil-starved industry without destroying nature?

We Americans, seemingly emancipated from puritanism, have become a strange, humorless people. This spasm of hysterical, obscene, dessicated, ecological wurra wurra, from beriberi to Chinese rot to cannibalism, leaves us without a gleam of cheer. As Ben Hecht used to say: "Social Consciousness has driven out Sociability." It's temporary aberration, not really in the American makeup, and it's high time we got back to normalcy.

The big ecological drive has had some good effects but their meaning can be over-estimated. Great industries proclaim faith and cooperation. Business interests rush into the ecological field. Consider, for example, the Program for the Preservation and Use of the Walt Disney World Conservation Area of 7,500 acres out of a total development area of some 27,400 acres in Central Florida. The advisers, appointed by the Disney management, include conservationists of the very highest reputation and standing, as well as representatives of federal, state and local regulatory agencies.

This project has been widely advertised, but I can find no guarantee that the program will be carried out or that the area will forever remain in the public domain and will not be sold when necessary for sound business reasons. The plan, therefore, preserves for the time being only a princely domain. In the next decades the company will get the advantage of exceptionally favorable government treatment. It may profit in terms of scenic tours, nature studies,

fishing, hiking and horseback and other recreation, but in the end unless statutory or contract protection, not now in evidence, is provided, only condemnation at tremendous prices will keep it from being subdivided and developed on a strictly commercial basis. That's the way the ball bounces. I do not discount the public spirit back of this program nor impugn the motives of the planners. I simply state the facts.

Ecology is not our only concern. We are swamped with other problems—the full emancipation of blacks, youth revolt, enlightened college education, crises in the Far and Near East, repeal of the Monroe Doctrine, drug addiction, urban housing to replace ghettos, censorship, decency on stage and screen, violent public confrontation, law, policing, order, safety and a score of others. We are being brainwashed by sensational stuff and militant minorities. Ours is a remarkably resilient country and most of our people on reflection will not sell it short to dissident minorities however articulate, well motivated, persuasive, violent or threatening.

What does the backbone of America, as distinguished from the big metropolitan concentrations and the critical sophisticated Eastern seaboard, stand for? May I offer this answer? They want:

1. Facts without fanaticism;
2. Perspective without distortion;
3. Conviction without dogmatism;
4. Debate within bounds of decency;
5. Experimentation without violence;
6. Change without revolution;
7. Respect without subservience;
8. Leadership without demagoguery.

The environmental drive and the others aimed at overcoming the evils of our day will succeed only if they become respected habits. □



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