

## Question of values

Somewhere along the line, a decision regarding priorities will have to be made in the battle for control of the environment. Now seems like an appropriate time to make that decision.

Wednesday night's debate between Eric Sloth of Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) and Sierra Club representative J.A. Fagerstrom precisely pointed up the question at hand in the environment vs. technology fray—when do we stop the flow of technology to preserve and benefit the environment?

Sloth claims, quite rightly, that the question is one of value judgement. If future technology is to follow the lines of past ecological debacles, keeping the machine as the supposedly benevolent despot of our society, our values will be clear—improve the technological standard of living, no matter what the result. The more rational, long-range value is obvious—control technology in time to preserve society from its own destructive course.

This all ties in closely with several decisions now pending on NPPD expansion and procedure. One decision, now pending before the U.S. Supreme Court, will determine whether the district has the right to degrade Nebraska's environment, currently well above national standards, to where it barely would meet federal requirements.

Should the Supreme court decide the district can't lessen the quality of air and water it would mean a great victory for Nebraska ecology. And while other areas of the nation are busily attempting to salvage their already-failing environs, Nebraska will be able to keep itself out of such future straits.

Halting the flow of technology at this point may cost the consumer in more than one way. Electric rates may climb as power districts are forced to seek environmentally desirable methods for producing



Why break up a winning team?

power. Industry may have to pay more for its power, passing higher prices on to the buyer. And the individual may be forced to cut back on non-essential uses of power, due to shortages while government seeks new power sources.

But one thing is clear—no matter what the cost, it's worth it. The environment must be the winner in the current earth-technology tug-of-war. If it isn't, Man will be the ultimate loser.

## How hard it is to care about human suffering

For more than a month now the front page has talked of peace. For more than a month now the diplomats have advanced and retreated in a ritual as stately and unhurried as the mating dance of peacocks.

And for more than a month on page 11 or 14 or 24 there has been a brief daily story about shellings and battles and our continuing bombing raids—the heaviest of the entire war.

"American B-52 bombers yesterday dropped another 1,200 tons of bombs on Communist positions..."

I find now that I glance at this brief daily story on page 11 or 14 or 24—I glance at it and turn the page.

How hard it is to conceive of the explosive force of 1,200 tons of TNT. How hard it is to envision the blinding flash, hear the eardrum-splitting roar, feel the agony of torn flesh, smell of the stench of death.

How hard it is to care.

It's been 10 years now since last I cried. I remember the day well. It was the day 83 people were killed in a plane crash. It was the day my dog died.

The dog was old and sick and in pain. I carried him down to the pet hospital in my arms and gave him to the young veterinarian. I patted the dog one last time on the head and told the vet to kill him and walked out with the unstoppable tears flowing down my face.

I didn't weep for those 83 people. I wept for my dog. The dog lived in my world for fifteen years. I didn't know any of those 83 people. They had never existed in my world. Therefore, the fact that they had ceased to exist affected my world hardly at all. I couldn't weep for them.

arthur  
hoppe  
**innocent  
bystander**

I've thought about that day often. I think that we all live in our own little worlds. I think the real world out there exists only when it touches our own.

I care more about my weight than I do about the starving in India. I care more about my tax bill than about the jobless in the ghettos. I care more about my leaking roof than the thermonuclear bomb.

I believe that my own little world comes first—not because it should, but simply because it does. That is the way of things. And because that is the way of things, I believe my first task is not to save the real world, but to save my own.

My power to erase the misery and injustices of the real world is virtually nil. But my power to make my own little world a better place is immeasurable.

I know I must care about death and suffering in the real world. I must try to care because every time I don't, I callous over a corner of my soul. Every time I don't, I make my own world a slightly less decent.

But now that our leaders say that peace is just around the corner, how hard it is to care.

So the diplomats continue their intricate maneuvering, the bombs I helped pay for continue falling, and the human beings I never knew continue dying—dying now for no good reason at all.

Surely these pointless deaths now are the most tragic of this decade-old war. Yet so inured have I become in that decade to the suffering of others, so hardened to their pain, that I can now callously flip the page.

I wish I could weep again. I wish I could weep, not only for what we are doing to them, but for what we have done my own little world.

I wish I could weep. But how hard it has become to care.

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