



*Rochester Committee  
for Scientific Information  
Rochester, NY*

*RCSI Bulletin 158  
Scientists' Institute for Public Information Tenth Annual Meeting*

*By: Byrna Weir  
April 1973*

# The Rochester Committee for Scientific Information

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## SCIENTISTS' INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION TENTH ANNUAL MEETING\*

By  
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### Summary

The Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI) is a national organization of scientists (SIPI Fellows) and laymen (SIPI Members), which has as its affiliates local science information groups such as RCSI. *Environment* magazine is published by SIPI. The tenth annual meeting reviewed previous accomplishments and planned for the future. In the past SIPI was active in bringing about the test ban treaty and in the ban on using herbicides in combat in Vietnam. The organization has moved from pure concern with science and technology toward a broader scientific interest in social and political changes. Present concerns include the effects of Federal cuts and impounding of funds, the negative effects of chemicals and technology on workers, and the need for scientific aid to Indo-China. The need for specific changes in the uses of energy, resources and land were discussed. RCSI compared very favorably to other local committees in the country, in terms of accomplishments and membership.

### Introduction

The Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI) is a national organization of scientists and laymen, which has as its affiliates fourteen local science information committees across the country. RCSI is one of these fourteen committees. The others are Colorado, Fresno, Minnesota, Montana, Monterrey, Nashville, New York, Northern California, St. Louis, Stanford, Staten Island, Westchester, and Wisconsin. While SIPI in no way controls local groups, it does provide coordination and leadership. It also publishes the magazine *Environment*, which aims specifically at providing scientific information on environmental science to the lay public. SIPI is probably best known to the public for its series of eight environmental workbooks, *Air Pollution*, *Environmental Costs of Electric Power*, *Environmental Education*, *Environmental Effects of Weapons Technology*, *Hunger*, *Nuclear Explosives in Peacetime*, *Pesticides*, and *Water Pollution*. These have recently been updated and reprinted with an announced publication date of April 1, 1973. Margaret Mead, current president, and Barry Commoner, chairman of the board, have been two strong guiding forces in SIPI for some time.

The Berkeley meeting was made up mainly of several working sessions which defined concerns and planned future action. There were, however, three large meetings open to

\* Board members Byrna Weir and Reveira Wilcove attended this meeting on the University of California Berkeley Campus March 8-11, 1973. They were sponsored by RCSI and SIPI.

the public:

- 1) a panel on "Secrecy in Technology and Science"
- 2) a panel on "The Worker's Environment" and
- 3) Margaret Mead on "Can We Survive the Present?"

These three topics were also discussed in the working sessions and this note will deal with the conference as a whole, rather than as separate sessions.

### Background

SIPI is one of the groups which fostered the environmental movement of the 1960's. It began by providing the public with information needed to bring about change, thus linking science with social action. Commoner, who was a pioneer of the environmental movement, confessed that there was "arrogance, faith and optimism" when scientists assumed that citizens would take their advice. SIPI was instrumental in bringing about the test ban treaty (the biggest reversal in foreign policy since World War II), and in persuading the government to stop using herbicides in Vietnam. SIPI is presently suing the AEC for an environmental impact statement on breeder reactors. Interests have expanded from the physical sciences to the social, including problems such as race and hunger, since it has become more and more evident that the total environment suffers when viewed in a piecemeal fashion and the social and economic aspects cannot really be separated from the physical aspects. A new goal has emerged as the group moves from pure science information to concern with social and political changes.

### Concerns

Many concerns were expressed by SIPI, including the following:

-- The scientific community is flat on its back at this point, as a result of Federal cuts and impounding of funds. The public is completely unaware of results of Nixon's moves: the Communicable Disease Center in Maryland is cut to where it cannot keep vaccines available to fight disease; leading universities have had to cut back severely in their programs, e.g., entire science buildings have been closed at Harvard; the abolishing of fellowship support in medicine could lead to medicine stagnating at its present scientific level; and an order not to fill any vacated positions at NIH has led to fear and speculation about the future of NIH. A possible solution is for the scientific community to help itself, as Nixon asked of all groups in his inaugural address. If Federal aid is, indeed, to be cut or eliminated, then medicine and other areas must find ways to maintain service to the public.

-- Engineering projects are crippled by the impoundment. The \$6 billion impounded on sewage treatment may mean that Lake Erie will receive no help; if so, the oxygen level may reach zero in a year and the lake may become one huge cesspool. If this happens, "Nixon will be responsible for the biggest sewage back-up in history," according to Barry Commoner. He asked that President Nixon provide an environmental impact statement on the impoundment of funds, since such statements are required by NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) on all projects which affect the environment.

-- Private enterprise should not be allowed to take over areas which are better managed by charities or institutions. In the United States there is ten times the amount of hepatitis and other such illnesses as in Britain; this is true only since private business has been buying and selling blood in the United States. In Britain blood is still handled on a voluntary, national basis and there is no shortage of blood. Rochester blood banks work entirely on the British model. Supposedly, a shortage in this country led to private enterprise entering the picture; but many feel that if needs are truly known, people will always appear to donate "good" blood. When money enters in, blood is sold by those interested only in money, with no concern for the quality of their blood.

-- Scientists must develop a link with labor, to work on common issues, such as the use by companies of chemicals which can harm workers. There are 47,000 chemicals being used in US industry, but only 6000 have been tested to check whether or not they cause cancer or some other harm. The task of testing that many chemicals properly is illustrated by the following numbers: the number of mice needed to test them is six times the present world population of mice; ten times the present population of lab technicians would be needed to care for the mice and to do the testing. Since testing on this scale will obviously not be done, the untested chemicals should either be taken out of use, or handled in ways that are proper for hazardous and poisonous materials, with more care for the health of workers.

Work injuries are down in coal mining and construction, but up 20% in manufacturing. In the petroleum industry, injuries went up 60% between 1958 and 1968. In rubber, the same period showed a 100% increase. SIPI's new program will aim for close cooperation between scientists and labor unions to stop such misuses of technology.

-- Scientists should aid Indo-China. SIPI is asking the Department of Defense to declassify herbicide data. A task force, not SIPI itself, will analyze these data, relate the information to domestic usage of herbicides, and exchange information with scientists in Indo-China.

#### A look to the future

Margaret Mead said, "We must take the responsibility for our grandchildren. This means we must look ahead to 25 or 50 years from now and people just don't think this way." She went on to say that dollars are drying up and the world is shrinking, but people under forty are neither used to this nor ready to deal with it. New strategies and new sources of funding are demanded.

Barry Commoner commented on specific changes needed:

-- Solar energy must be investigated more thoroughly before the breeder reactor is considered as the only answer for producing electricity. Ways are being found to use solar energy, but they are not yet considered convenient enough or economical. This may be another area where economics will have to change or a domestic problem will have to be given priority over something else, such as defense or space exploration.

It is not true that cutting down on the use of electricity will cut American affluence, as in many cases cutting simply means more efficient use. In air conditioning, for example, 50% less electricity used may give the same amount of cooling, simply because many units are so inefficient in their use of energy.

-- Shipping has social value in that freight must be moved from one spot to another. However, a city truck uses six times as much fuel as rail. Thus, truck shipping is one-sixth as efficient as rail shipping. Fuel can be saved without reducing the social value. It is true that work has social value and more workers are needed for trucking than for rail, but these people can shift to another type of work. (If Americans cannot run railroads, they should go to Europe and learn how.)

-- In general, there should be a move toward using more labor and less energy, such as electricity, as long as there is a surplus of labor.

-- There must be a shift from using nylon to using cotton and from plastics to cellulose. Growing cotton is a simple, obvious way to use solar energy; it makes no sense to use petroleum to manufacture synthetics when it can be done naturally with the sun. "When people realize this, they'll see the social insanity involved."

-- Idle land must be brought back into use for agriculture so that most chemicals can be given up. This can be done without causing economic problems; since there will be lower dollar returns per acre, the farmer will need to be paid more for producing instead of being subsidized for not producing.

-- The East Coast can produce all the milk it needs. At present, milk is shipped in from Wisconsin, wasting fuel. This is an economic problem, which should be remedied.

-- Everything has an environmental impact, but we must decide which impact we want. Values are involved and must be viewed closely.

#### How RCSI compares to other local committees

RCSI has been a leader in terms of both accomplishments and membership. It has produced 156 bulletins and has nearly 400 members. It has been commended for its work on water pollution, radiation and solid waste. RCSI's bulletins have consistently avoided being unduly alarmist in their approach and have made recommendations for dealing with problems. As a result, the action which has occurred in the greater Rochester area has surpassed that in many other areas of the United States. SIPI has asked to market the do-it-yourself handbook, the *Environmental Self-Guide*.

#### SIPI membership procedure

The annual fee for SIPI membership is \$25. Of this total, \$10 covers a subscription to *Environment*. This magazine, which will now include social science concerns, has 26,000 subscribers, but needs 50,000 - 100,000 to break even on subscriptions alone.

SIPI's address is 30 East 68th Street  
New York, NY 10021

*Environment's* is PO Box 755  
Bridgeton, Mo. 63044

Subscription rates are \$10 for one year, \$18.50 for two years, and \$27 for three years.