During the past year, our readers have been sending suggestions for "what we must do" to take control over the toxics crisis. For the most part, our readers (as distinct from the movement for environmental justice) have allowed themselves to get caught up in no-win debates such as cost-benefit analysis and risk assessment. In their well-meaning but misguided desire to be viewed as "reasonable" in terms defined by our adversaries, the leaders of the environmental movement have fallen into snares laid by industry lawyers and technocrats. Industry has been allowed to frame the debate in narrow, technical terms. No wonder they're winning.

It is time for new departures, new ways of thinking. As the burgeoning "movement for environmental justice" begins to see itself as a coherent, connected whole, it is right and good to establish new goals, new visions of where we want to be 10 years from now. Do we want to be hunkered in conference rooms debating what constitutes "best available control technology" with engineers employed by some poisoner? Do we want to be arguing with an army of lawyers whether it's OK to kill one in a million of us at random, versus killing one in a hundred thousand? If we force some government agency to give us the lip service of one more public hearing before they issue the next license to the next polluter, is this what we will call "progress" and "success?" We think not.

From our readers, and from other friends of the movement for environmental justice, here is a series of ideas that can stoke the engines of change, and may—if we will adopt them—make a difference.

We must establish our right to a clean environment. Who gave the polluters all the rights anyway? We can transform the environmental justice movement into a civil rights movement. The principle of "no dumping" must be established. This has been advocated most eloquently by Dr. John Gofman, M.D., Ph.D., professor emeritus at University of California, Berkeley, and former Associate Director of the Livermore National Laboratory. Dr. Gofman says, "The no-dumping principle simply means no one has any right to dump anything into the world's common supply of air and water... The point is that the no-dumping principle and highly industrial societies can become compatible, if the will exists to do it. Of course it cannot happen overnight, which is all the more reason to adopt the principle immediately. Then you apply it gradually. It's both practical and fair to be gradual in the transition to new rules, because current operations began in good faith under the old rules. But there is all the difference in the world between adopting a good principle gradually, versus denying the principle, which is what we do today. Today people are claiming polluters have a right to kill some people, at random, for the economic benefit of some others. Only the exact number is debated. [For example, see RHWN #41 and #95—P.M.] It's called the 'risk-benefit' doctrine. I call it premeditated random murder," says Dr. Gofman.

Dr. Gofman says, "The key to stopping every type of pollution begins with convincing people to agree on a really simple principle of human rights, whose fairness is self-evident. It can be stated in one sentence:

"All peaceable people (that excludes criminals) are entitled to hold themselves and their property free from coercion, intrusion, and fraud, provided they secure the identical right for each other. This definition of human rights clearly prohibits people who own property from letting it intrude on anyone else's body or property, which includes the common air and water."

"We've all known the headache of owning some pieces of unwanted property, say a derelict car or an old mattress. But we clearly have no right to dump them in someone else's driveway or in the public forest, although neither is even toxic."

"Unwanted medical, chemical and radioactive wastes also belong to someone. They are the property of whoever owns their source, until title has been transferred to some willing recipient. So the owners of waste are obliged to do whatever it takes, regardless of cost, to keep their property from intruding into either common or private property."

"It is not the obligation of other humans to prove that the dumping would be lethal or even a hazard at all. There is just no right to let your property intrude on others, and you'd better consider that before you make it or buy it."

Dr. Gofman has put his finger on two important principles: first, we have an inherent right to clean air and water, the polluters do not have a right to dump on us. Second, the burden of proof is not on us to show that exotic chemicals are harmful. It doesn't matter whether exotic chemicals are harmful or not—no one has a right to dump them into our air or water. Period. We can say, "I don't want to be dumped on, and that's that." We don't have to prove that 1,1,1-tri- whatever is bad for us; it's sufficient that we don't want our children and ourselves exposed to it. Who gave the polluters all the rights in the first place? We must take back America from the polluters, starting with first principles: no dumping allowed.

Dr. Gofman heads the Committee for Nuclear Responsibility (CNR), P.O. Box 11207, San Francisco, CA 94101; CNR has no phone. Donations to CNR are tax deductible. Dr. Gofman is the author of what we think are the best books on the effects of radioactivity on humans, including RADIATION AND HUMAN HEALTH (1981), X-RAYS: HEALTH EFFECTS OF COMMON EXAMS (1985) and RADIATION-INDUCED CANCER FROM LOW-DOSE EXPOSURE: AN INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS (1989). To see where the "no dumping" principle could take us, read Theodore Taylor and Charles Humphstone, THE RESTORATION OF THE EARTH (NY: Harper & Row, 1973).

--Peter Montague

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Descriptor terms: what we must do; regulation; philosophy; principles; radiation; landfilling; accidents;