

EDITORIAL

Never underestimate the power of the individual

What difference does one person make?

To feel our individual responsibilities, contributions, and liabilities make any appreciable difference becomes increasingly difficult with passing years. Numbers tend to overwhelm us. The vast sea of humanity submerges our identities. A wave carrying masses of people sweeps over the surface of the earth and engulfs our sense of singularity.

We need, however, only to examine what individuals have accomplished recently, and in only a few short years, to realize we have enormous powers and wide influences as individuals. Our power and influence may exceed our perception, but need not exceed our imagination.

Conservation of fossil fuels, certainly an achievement dependent upon individual effort, resulted in the oil glut, destroying OPEC's ability to maintain the high prices oil-producing countries established. Fuel costs are dropping.

Restricting consumption of electricity, while not yet bringing much lower electric bills, slowed spiralling demand to the point that utilities are scrapping plans to build more nuclear power plants. As demand levels off, fewer plants operate at capacity. Forecasts of future needs are scaled down enormously.

Cleaner air and water, preservation of wetlands and natural resources, and protection for endangered species have come from effort made by concerned individuals who believe future generations deserve to find a hospitable and habitable world.

We must also accept the responsibilities of individual powers and influences and see how we damage ourselves. Individually, we resisted paying high prices for new American cars; now auto producers have fallen on hard times. Because the ripple effect lowered demand for steel, tires, plastics, and car-components, millions of Americans in smoke-stack cities are unemployed. Ripples are still spreading in all directions. High interest rates contributed to buyer-resistance but, since interest payments are tax-deductible, they are not a root-cause of auto industry problems.

Individually, through demands for ever-higher wages, labor priced itself out of the market at the same time people in other countries accepted lower incomes (but still maintained a high standard of living). Americans, one-by-one, opted to run their old heaps another couple of years or bought imported cars because those offered better mileage, innovative

engineering, and met transportation requirements.

Finally, we need to be aware of how we threaten our own physical and mental health and our personal futures. As individuals, Americans by the hundreds of thousands are drug users. If there were no market for drugs, there would be no traffic in drugs. Whether legal, like tobacco and alcohol, or illegal, like marijuana and cocaine, drugs are used widely in our society . . . and in all instances detrimentally to individuals. Billions of dollars pass from hand to hand; it takes individual consumers to make the markets.

You, and I, and each other single person who chooses or chooses not to conserve energy, to support ecological movements, to buy one car or another or none at all, to light one more cigarette or quit, to have a cocktail or switch to apple juice, to smoke a joint or not, to sniff cocaine or resist the temptation, has an effect on the whole picture.

And everyone has but to look back only a few years or months to find proof that the decisions each of us makes, one-by-one, do make a difference. I am everybody. And so are you.