

'Earth Muffins' rising to mark Earth Day

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Self-described Earth Muffins around the world are eagerly anticipating Earth Day 1990, which will be Sunday, April 22.

The event will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the first Earth Day — the Day of Pente-cost for the environmentalist movement.

Utah County Earth Day will be observed April 21. The local agenda will include an environmental march and an environmental fair at Kiwanis Park. The Deseret News reports that "A guest appearance by Brigham Young is even anticipated."

Shawn Humphries of the local Earth Day Committee is delighted by the prospect of the first Utah County Earth Day celebration: "We really want to be with the rest of America in doing this. It's exciting; the whole country is changing." Indeed it is.

The first Earth Day led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, which has been used as an outpost of the counter-culture in government. According to Richard Hoppe of the Wilderness Society, Earth Day 1990 should see the elevation of the EPA to cabinet rank. Fred Smith and Kathy Kushner, of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, advise us that "The EPA ... is becoming one of the most powerful economic-planning agencies in the world." Earth Day 1990 could accelerate the momentum toward economic centralization.

Earth Day's founder, former Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, was inspired by an article in "Ramparts" magazine describing anti-Vietnam War "teach-ins." Nelson decided to organize a nation-wide ecological "teach-in."

"Ramparts" magazine, the publication that inspired Earth Day, was the flagship journal of 1960s-70s radicalism; its editors, Peter Collier and David Horowitz, have since recovered. Collier describes a lot of what he published 20 years ago as "shrill ecological hysteria; it had a very apocalyptic tone." Although still concerned about the environment, Collier derides the "chic hysteria" that currently characterizes much environmental activism, calling it the "ecological equivalent of a fashion statement."

Horowitz describes environmentalism as an impulse attractive to "intellectuals and students who feel underappreciated compared to 'pragmatic people,' such as business people." Horowitz, who knows whereof he



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speaks, describes environmentalism as a refuge for radicals who have been bouncing from cause to cause since Marxism began to lose its allure during the mid-1950s.

Utah has begun to reflect what Horowitz describes as a media-driven change in public attitudes about the environment. According to Ken Alkema, of the Utah Division of Environmental Health, since the mid-1980s, "there's been a real change in the public's perception of environmental problems," particularly regarding air quality.

According to Alkema, air quality actually improved in Utah during the 1980s; the "issue of the 1990s," Alkema observes, will be determining how much Utahns are willing to spend to solve "aesthetic" problems of air pollution.

If Earth Day 1990 proves to be an exercise in recreational idealism, it will be harmless enough. The event will emphasize recycling and reforestation, which are two laudable ideas on their own merits.

However, participants will be encouraged to "Think Globally and Act Locally." This makes an effective mantra, but it's not a very helpful formula for dealing with problems that affect us directly.

A sensible environmental ethic would be one that is divorced from its radical pedigree and shorn of its global pretensions. It would involve pragmatic calculations and the ability to think in terms of trade-offs. As it stands, environmentalism is largely a political hobby for those who can afford it. David Brooks of the Wall Street Journal observes that environmentalism produces "a stewardship in which somebody else always pays the bills."

Since the first Earth Day in 1970, government's power to make us pay for dubious environmental crusades has expanded formidably. This is hardly cause for celebration.