

**T**he RIO-92 Conference marked a new phase in the environmental policies formulated twenty years ago. In 1968, took place in the Paris the Intergovernmental Conference of Experts which approached the scientific foundations of the rational utilization and conservation of resources in the biosphere. Four years later, in the Stockholm Conference, a new paradigm for development and conservation of resources was discussed. This paradigm incorporated social and economic concerns into the scientific knowledge of ecology. Therefore, one can consider the Stockholm Conference as the initial landmark of political ecology.

The major methodological characteristics of the ecological approach is the holistic analysis. The aim is to identify the relationships between the links in the ecosystem, i.e., the bio-geochemical cycles. The classic approach centered in the parceled analysis of substrates or of species occupying specific niches, gave place to a concern with the process of nutrient cycling, energy transfer, and ecosystem conservation.

In the protection of health, interventions targeted towards disease control or combat gave place to strategies of environment engineering in order to eliminate certain risk factors. In addition, the concern with ethic aspects of economic development introduced new issues that led to the questioning of ongoing reductionist policies.

Between the Stockholm Conference and RIO-92, the concerns of political ecology were defined, emphasizing the following issues: a) the exploitation and conservation of natural resources; b) the use of potentially dangerous chemical substances; c) the transport and treatment of toxic, mutagenic, and radioactive residues; d) the effects of the usage of sprays on the ozone layer and the green-house effect; e) human migrations, colonization movements, and unplanned urbanization; f) the extinction of species.

Nevertheless, it is important that political ecology finds solid support from facts and concepts from its basic discipline — ecology — as in the case of geopolitics, political economy, and political sociology, in relation to human geography, economy and social

sciences.

As a contribution to RIO-92, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) carried out a number of activities that preceded the Conference. Two of these activities should be pointed out.

In September 1991, it was held the National Meeting on Environment, Development and Health, with the following themes: social inequalities, education and health, vector ecology and control, and ecotoxicology. The Meeting counted with the participation of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro and brought together 50 scientists, who conducted critical evaluations about health aspects related to environmental factors. The papers given by the participants are coming out soon in a special issue of the *Memórias do Instituto Oswaldo Cruz*. In April 1992, the conclusions and recommendations of this meeting became the central theme for the International Conference on Environment, Development, and Health, whose results are consubstantiated in two documents: the *Statute of Health* and the *Sanitary Agenda*.

During the same period, Fiocruz's National School of Public Health promoted a series of meetings, out of which the following two-volume publication was produced — *Saúde, Ambiente e Desenvolvimento* (São Paulo: Hucitec/Rio de Janeiro: Abrasco, 1992), organized by M. C. Leal, P. C. Sabroza, R. H. Rodriguez and P. M. Buss.

It is expected that these initiatives result in the strengthening of a research group capable of producing basic knowledge from which new technologies can be drawn.

This will be the answer to Louis Cloty, who came from France to teach biology at the Polytechnic School of Rio de Janeiro, in 1879, and analyzed the scientific development of Brazil in his time: *And when I indicated above so many scientific problems in Brazil, it was just in order to show that their solution implies in the increase of wealth or in the improvement of public health and material development in its various forms.*

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