

REMARKS TO REGIONAL CLEAN AIR INSTITUTE,
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES, NEW YORK CITY

May 8, 1967

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Fresh air is as natural and necessary and normal as human life . . . so essential that we have assumed its existence a constant in nature and presumed upon its capacity to replenish and sustain itself.

In past centuries organized political society regarded human life in much the same way — God ordained that man was to be born, to reproduce, to suffer and to die. The fittest were to survive. Each man was to contribute according to the station of his birth and not according to his ability, his talent or his desire. War decreased the surplus population and the iron law of wages proved that neither individual volition nor enlightened government could alter the pessimistic course set by a grim Malthusian Nature. We shudder when we review these cruel, barbaric and fallacious premises which justified the actions of political authority in the past. All that we as progressive administrators seek to accomplish contradicts the underlying presupposition of these concepts. We know that human life and the individual is a vital, viable and above all valuable entity. That the individual is not a means but an end, not a commodity to be abused for society's gain but the essence and reason for society's being. That if we take for granted the individual's soul, destroy the individual's identity and ignore the individual's natural capacity we will undermine the development of our society as a whole and inevitably destroy the philosophical foundation upon which our particular political system was built.

If all this is true of human life, ladies and gentlemen, it is more true of the air upon which human life depends. We can no longer afford to ignore, to abuse, to contaminate our air with the justification that it is an expendable means to achieve greater gains for the glory of civilization, that it is an infinite source for the disposal and elimination of the forces of our factories and furnaces, that it can never be exhausted nor consumed by a geometrically exploding population on an arithmetically developing planet.

The capacity of air, like the capacity of an individual — no matter how talented — is finite. Nature has provided us with a twelve and one-half mile layer of air for animal life to breathe and vegetation