

Agribusiness Lobby Kills DDT Regulation



Is this the dormant season? Aerial spraying of grape vineyards, July, 1969.

SACRAMENTO, July 29--The Assembly Agriculture Committee killed legislation today which would have banned the use of DDT in California by 1972.

The legislation, which had been introduced by Sen. John Nejedly of Contra Costa County and unanimously passed by the State Senate, was a mild bill which would have outlawed the sale, use, or possession of DDT after December 31, 1971. However, the Director of Agriculture could have extended this date for one year if, by the end of 1971, he felt that there was no reasonable substitute pesticide available by that time.

This bill was a watered-down version of Nejedly's original bill, which would have provided for the immediate (1970) banning of DDT, parathion, and various other pesticides. The State Department of Agriculture strongly opposed any bill, and finally succeeded in eliminating reference to all pesticides except DDT in the Senate version of the law. By the time the bill got to the Assembly, Agribusiness was strong enough to totally kill the bill.

The Montrose Chemical Co., largest producer of DDT in the nation and the only producer in California, led the fight in behalf of chemical companies and growers to defeat the bill.

Testifying in favor of banning DDT, Dr. Charles F. Wurster, professor of biological sciences at the University of New York, stated, "This is the most serious single pollution problem we have in the world today." Dr. Robert W. Risebrough of the University of California warned that there have been cases where mothers' milk has been found to be contaminated by four to eight times the amount of DDT

permitted by regulation in cows' milk. "We may reach the point when we will have to recommend that women no longer breast feed their infants," he warned.

Officials of the State Department of Fish and Game also testified that DDT was exterminating several varieties of birds and has poisoned many varieties of fish so that they are no longer safe to eat.

Nejedly concluded testimony by saying "We have clearly demonstrated the problem is getting worse every day. We must respond to it today." But California agribusiness and their servants on the Assembly Agriculture Committee don't seem to agree.

Republican State Senator Howard Way of Tulare County, a former grower and now president of the Senate, strongly criticized the Agriculture Department and the state's agribusiness lobby for trying to block control of pesticide laws. "It is discouraging," said Way, "to see your department and the agricultural community in general not willing to recognize the hazards of DDT."

EL MALCRIADO SAYS: We feel the State Assembly's action is more than "discouraging", it is almost criminal disregard for the health and safety of the people of this state. It ignores the huge mass of scientific evidence that DDT is poisoning the environment and is a danger to man. Once more, California agriculture has imposed its motto, "Profits before People" on the entire state population.

U.C. "ADVICE" ON DDT

The University of California Agriculture Department recently "advised" farmers to stop using DDT on a variety of crops including most fruits and vegetables. But the U.C. professors specifically left off the list grapes and cotton, the two largest crops in money value in the valley. "Even the 'impartial' professors are afraid to give 'advice' that might infuriate the huge grape and cotton barons who dominate agriculture in this state," noted a union spokesman. "The Agricultural Extension Service seems more interested in keeping the growers happy with its advice, than they are with protecting the people of this state from the dangers of economic poisons."

UNEMPLOYMENT PAY BILL KILLED

SACRAMENTO, July 1--The California State Legislature is about to close, after once again killing all bills aimed at providing unemployment insurance to farm workers. At least four bills were proposed, and while the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee was unenthusiastic about some of them, the expectation was that at least some kind of coverage would be passed. After all, no group in the nation needs unemployment insurance more than farm workers. Hawaii is the only state which protects its farm workers with such a law.

But none of the bills were allowed out of the Assembly Finance Committee. Another star performance by the California legislature.