



The Waste Crisis in Québec Help! Resources are Buried and Burned

BY GABRIELLE PELLETIER

The daily act of throwing something in the garbage may seem insignificant. Garbage is filled up, emptied out and whisked off elsewhere. But there isn't really an "elsewhere" when it comes to garbage. The waste we are producing doesn't disappear. It is just transformed into something different. And talking about waste removal, whether it is burned or buried, is an illusion which masks reality. Sanitary landfills that have no negative impact on the environment don't exist, and incinerators can never remove waste or contaminating substances, because they are in reality released into the air or transformed into ashes.

Presently, there is a waste crisis in Québec. With over 7 million tons of garbage buried annually, Québec is crumbling under its waste. This crisis results from the inaccessibility and the generalized lack of concern of public and private officials regarding waste management and the declining quality of life from an ecological, democratic and community-based perspective.

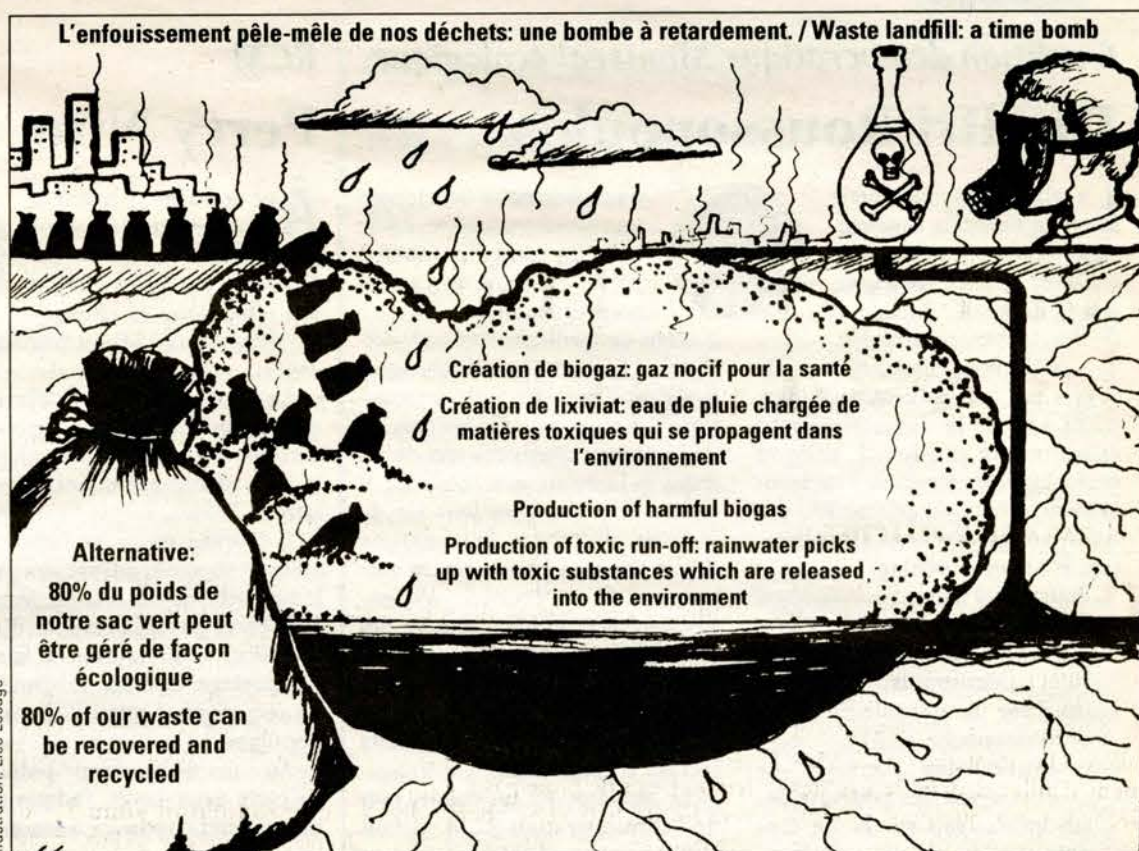
In the last few months, for in-

stance, the city of Montreal has been discussing the possibility of carrying out an integrated waste management co-project with the intermunicipal waste management company of the island of Montreal (*Régie intermunicipale des déchets sur l'île de Montréal*). Unfortunately, the proposed plan includes the construction of an incinerator in Montreal-Est and a jumble of composting facilities in the west part of the island. These are, however, polluting technologies which are in contradiction with the goal of an intensive recycling programme.

According to studies on the contents of the average household garbage bag, over 80% of its weight can be recovered, re-used, recycled or composted. Contrary to popular belief, our garbage bags are filled with resources. Why is it that these resources are considered to be waste? Because we put it all in the same container, that's why! What happens is that the mixed substances contaminate each other and make it impossible to reuse them.

Why is action needed now?

Burying garbage brings about its decomposition. When organic



matter decomposes without oxygen: it creates a stench as well as a variety of substances such as biogases and a blend of organic acids. Biogases are a health hazard and may explode if concentrated in a place devoid of air. Rain water filters through the garbage where it picks up chemical and organic substances produced by the decomposing waste. This water then becomes toxic, spreads into the environment and risks contaminating the water table, the water we drink. Landfills also suffer from problems involving a high concentration of odours, dust, vermin and seagulls.

The situation in Montreal

The landfill at the Miron quarry is a shocking example of what is wrong with our waste management practices nowadays. It contains over 30 million tons of garbage. The quarry covers 192 hectares, which is equivalent to the combined areas of the Islands of Ste-Hélène and Notre-Dame as well as the Olympic Park. What is really astonishing is its depth, which reaches 72 metres.

In Montreal, the production of domestic, commercial and industrial waste reaches close to 1 million tons annually. In 1992,

the amount of domestic waste rose to 548,091 tons, which amounts to 500 kilos per person, per year.

There are solutions

For several years, community and environment groups have explored ways of managing waste (which is in fact a resource) in an ecologically sound manner. The ecological way of managing waste is based on the 3Rs-D, which stand for Re-using, Recycling-Composting and Reduction within democratic processes allowing viable development at local and regional levels. The ecological management of waste can include neither burying nor incineration.

Unfortunately, multinational companies that deal in waste management obtain the support of administrative and government agencies which allow them to set up their waste management projects such as building mammoth incinerators, filling old quarries and mines, or importing waste.

For more information on the waste crisis in Québec, a new book has just been published by Les Éditions Écosociété: *Le scandale des déchets au Québec*, by Michel Séguin. The author describes the waste management situation in the province. The book also explains how waste is presently being treated, how to manage waste with an environment-friendly approach, and also explains to citizens ways to participate in the process.

Le scandale des déchets au Québec, by Michel Séguin, published by Les Éditions Écosociété, is available for \$17.95. To obtain a copy, or for any information, contact Gabrielle Pelletier at Action-RE-buts: 398-7457. ♦

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