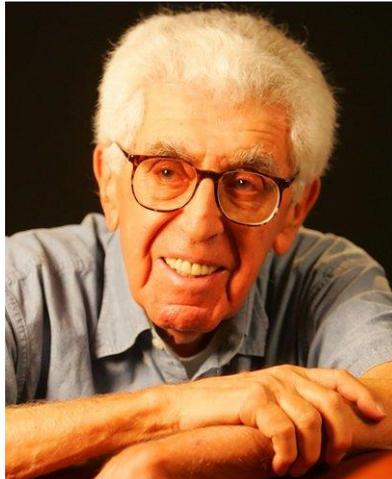


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BARRY COMMONER (25.05.1917 - 30.09.2012): 100 YEARS FROM HIS BIRTH



It is possible that some of our Romanian colleagues may wonder why our journal pays homage to a North-American ecological activist, who had no direct connection with Cluj naturalists or botanists.

First, we would like to say that this ecologist was in fact “*a scientist, an activist and a radical ecologist*” (Butler, 2012), an early champion of recycling, organic food and reducing fossil fuel use. His biographer (M. Egan, 2007) says that Commoner practically invented the science information movement, “*a method of communicating technical information so that the public could better participate in complex social, political, and environmental debate*” (Butler, 2012). For a significant part of his life, Commoner campaigned for the participation of researchers in public debates, in order for the wide public to know and understand the great scientific problems of that time (Dreier, 2017). Even at almost 90 years of age, Commoner emphasized: “*We, who are environmental advocates, must find a way — for the sake of the planet and the people who live on it — to join a historic mission to end poverty wherever it exists. That is what is yet to be done*” (ap. Egan, 2007).

This is an obligation (a duty to future generations) forgotten by most of our researchers (and not only by them), who are much too concerned with achieving the cumulative indices based on which their studies are assessed!

Then, we believe that such a complex and dynamic personality deserves to be honored by the entire community of naturalists. The characterization given by Dreier (2017) seems to us very complete and suggestive: “*Commoner linked environmental issues to a broader vision of social and economic justice. He called attention to the parallels among the environmental, civil rights, labor and peace movements. He connected the environmental crisis to the problems of poverty, injustice, racism, public health, national security and war*”.

Shortly after the publication of Rachel Carson’s book (*Silent Spring*), Commoner

published *Science and Survival* (1966), with a first translation into French and a highly suggestive title: *Quelle terre laisserons-nous à nos enfants?* (1969). Starting from this translation, another question increasingly arises today: *What children will we leave to this Earth?* The same year (1966), Commoner founded at Queens College the Center for Biology of Natural Systems, a center which in 2015 was renamed in his memory the Barry Commoner Center for Health and the Environment.

Perhaps the best known of Commoner's books is *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (1971, also published in Romania by the Political Publishing House, 1980), in which the author formulates the four ecological laws in a very plastic manner: i) *Everything is connected to everything else*, ii) *Everything must go somewhere*, iii) *Nature knows best*, and iv) *There is no such thing as a free lunch*. The complex analysis of the environment led Commoner to state: "*We are in an environmental crisis ... The present system of production is self-destructive; the present course of human civilisation is suicidal ... Once the social origins of the crisis become clear, we can begin to design appropriate social actions to resolve it.*" Especially in that socialist period, reading this book and being able to give our students a different perspective on the relationship between Man and Nature was a real pleasure for us.

In addition to his research conducted in the mentioned center and his political activity (as a member of the Citizens Party), Commoner continued to publish volumes such as: *The Poverty of Power: Energy and the Economic Crisis* (1976), *The Politics of Energy* (1979), *Making Peace with the Planet* (1990).

In the 2007 interview with the *New York Times*, the 90-year-old Commoner remained the relentless radical: "*I think that most of the 'greening' that we see so much of now has failed to look back on arguments such as my own — that action has to be taken on what's produced and how it's produced. That's unfortunate, but I'm an eternal optimist, and I think eventually people will come around*" (ap. Dreier, 2017).

Finally, we invite our colleagues to read at least some of the work of this scientific personality and to follow his example as an ecological activist, but especially to understand the message conveyed by him! Our duty to the next generations is to get involved in achieving total peace: peace between people, peace between humans and the environment.

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