

# BARBARA REID

## ROOTS OF CRISIS

*Outside the General Electric Stockholders' Meeting  
Minneapolis, Minn., April 22*

What we see here today is the beginning of a movement, it is a movement determined to make the corporate, governmental, and educational institutions of this country responsive to the needs of the people. To get at the roots of the environmental crisis we face on this planet, we must begin to talk about the decision-making structure of our society. Pollution and the Vietnam war are symptoms of misplaced priorities and a warped conception of human values. To many of us it seems that individuals have lost control over their lives, that they are manipulated by a system with an inherent death wish rather than one in which enhancement of life is the primary goal. The major symbol of this death culture is the institutionalized violence perpetrated upon people and the land by corporations such as General Electric.

Corporations can no longer operate in isolation; corporations can no longer reject the demands of the people. . . . General Electric stands high on the list of those institutions that have propagated our overconsumptive and "planned obsolescence" culture. It is the fourth largest corporation in the country. It is the second largest defense contractor in the country. It is directly tied to the military-industrial complex, employing ninety former high-ranking military officers. Two of its directors formerly held the office of secretary of defense. Its military business has grown by leaps and bounds since the beginning of the Vietnam war. From 1962 to 1968 they netted over \$8.5 billion from military business. It foists upon the consumer mounds of



technological gadgets which supposedly contribute to the "good life."

We can no longer afford such waste. We can no longer afford such toys. One of GE's major products, the light bulb, does not last even half as long as those produced in Europe. This is planned obsolescence. We must be prepared to make GE contribute to a more ecologically sound world. We must begin to make some sacrifices ourselves, and those adjustments in our life-style cannot continue to be judged in terms of profit alone. GE must also begin to make some sacrifices. We must begin to judge our actions and the actions of corporations like GE in terms of their effect on people's lives.

We stand here today to let GE know that the people are aware of the mindless consumption of gadgets that it helps to foster. We stand here today to let GE know that such practices will be tolerated no longer. We stand here today to symbolize the death of those ecologically unsound practices and affirm life: for us, and for our children.

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BARBARA REID is midwestern coordinator for Environmental Action.