

# to the editor

## Critique of Nader report

SCIENCE NEWS, in its critique of Ralph Nader's Center for the Study of Responsive Law's report on water pollution (SN: 4/17/71, p. 262) bemoans the "moralistic" philosophy and "color[ed] selection of facts" in the report.

The support for SCIENCE NEWS' critique? The words of an assistant director of EPA's Water Quality Office that Nader's researcher, Curtis L. Kehr, a graduate student (are we supposed to read "lowly"), "couldn't possibly appreciate what we were doing."

The truth of the matter is that the lack of appreciation is directly related to the lack of an adequate program on the part of WQO, both two years ago and now.

The "critique" itself can only lamely repeat Kehr's own description of the hell and high water that Muskegon County, Mich., had to go through to get WQO money for its clean water program. But Muskegon *did* get the money, we are informed. Big deal! With victories like that Pyrrhus lost a war.

But to get to the heart of the matter. Nader has never been shy about admitting that he is looking for a

political response to his research. This is the point of demanding that the big corporations clean up their effluents immediately. For there is nothing but bitter experience on Nader's and our side (those of us outside [hopefully] soon to be cleaned up Muskegon) that tells that all the corporations and all the governmental regulatory agencies will sit around muttering pieties about what is "technically possible" or "economically feasible" until the ecopolypse is upon us—unless they are given a good, swift, polemical kick in their political behinds.

Of course the political nature of Nader's enterprise does not absolve him from the obligation of being factually accurate in his research. But he has been just that, by SCIENCE NEWS' own admission. This is much more than can be said for the corporations who have been fouling our environment at as rapid a rate as ever, even now that they know better—with the Government running interference for them.

We are all thankful for small favors from WQO, like Muskegon's program. But let's stop kidding ourselves that someone like Nader could do a "greater service" if he stopped drawing attention to the mountainous failures of WQO in order to give credit to its hillolock triumphs. In relation to the actual problem we are facing Kehr's report is disproportionately generous to WQO by mentioning its kick-and-screaming support of the Muskegon project at all.

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The article on the Nader report on water pollution, does not carry the conviction I am sure you hoped it would.

1. It is not signed; we have no way of knowing the qualifications of the editor—although we do have the names of Kehr, Cywin, Tanner.

2. You assert that as of last September the WQO is reformed—as witness that it has been forced to give a grant to a Muskegon plan. Giving in to force may indicate a lot of things but by itself does not indicate a change of heart or policy.

3. You say "the evidence . . . is that important new directions are evolving and that WQO deserves credit for them" yet you give NO shred of evidence, except for the Muskegon grant.

4. You assert that Nader would perform a greater service if he would not allow his moral philosophies to color his selection of facts. Where are the specific examples showing this has happened? What other principles would

you use in the necessary selectivity which any report or article writer must perform? Isn't the very effectiveness of the whole Nader movement due to its attempt to bring moral principle into Government and business?

5. For some reason you appear to have great faith in Allen Cywin. It may be justified. Nothing in your article indicates such justification, however.

You appear to admit, in backhanded fashion, that the Nader report may be factually accurate . . . but you find its punitive recommendations (for various unnamed reasons) inappropriate. From this vantage point, a very large number of firms did not take ecology seriously until they began to face punitive action. Indeed, the very freedom of most Texas polluters from effective state or local penalties has produced a massive indifference here to the whole subject!

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(The critique was written by our environment editor, Richard H. Gilluly, a veteran reporter on environmental matters and a former Congressional aide. His reply, in part: "As I thought my article made clear, my primary disagreement is with Nader's moralistic recommendations. Obviously Prof. Crane and Mr. Reno feel differently about these, and they have every right to their opinion. My acknowledgement of the general factual accuracy of the Nader report, and my praise for its style, was not backhanded, but quite explicit. I did not say WQO had reformed, but that new directions were evolving and that rehashing of past sins is futile. One piece of evidence: WQO and the Army Corps of Engineers are joining together to explore the innovative new techniques in detail, spurred partly by the Muskegon plan, which may be applicable to wide areas of the nation and thus far more important than Prof. Crane appears to believe. As to Mr. Reno's quotation from my article re Cywin's evaluation of Kehr's work, he should have read further, to where I said, of the situation two years ago, ' . . . it is possible Kehr captured better than Cywin admits what was going on in WQO.'"—Ed.)

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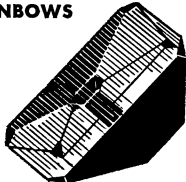
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