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Symbol of failure

The ban on commercial fishing in the Hudson River shows that the battle for pure waters is far from over and a mandate from the people to eliminate pollution has not prevailed.

New York State voters, at a referendum a few years ago, approved the expenditure of millions of dollars in order to curtail pollution in the lakes, rivers and streams.

The people said, through this vote, they were prepared to spend the money as an investment in a better, cleaner environment. And so the work began to build sewage treatment plants and to end industrial pollution.

There are obvious signs that the Hudson River is cleaner. Some species of fish have returned, other types of wild life have been detected in greater numbers.

The general public had looked forward to further improvements along these lines and many had looked to the day when the river could be used safely for swimming, with public beaches along the shores.

But evidence has been ac-

cumulating that dumping of PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyl), a chemical, into the Hudson has led to a buildup of concentrations within fish and made them unsafe as food.

Threatened, also, is the shad fishing industry even though shad grow to adult size in the Atlantic and return to the river only to spawn. The question will be how much of the pollutant has accumulated in these fish. Tests carried out at the start of the spring run will determine whether or not they are safe to eat.

We think the ban on commercial fishing is a correct decision by state officials concerned with the health of the people.

But more than that, we think it is a symbol of the failure of the pure waters program and an indication of how much work lies ahead. Pollution of the river by anyone, municipalities and industries, must be ended. In this case, General Electric, the source of the PCB's, must be brought in line. The river belongs to everyone and no one has the right to destroy it.