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Everybody's Column

Editorial Reply

TO THE EDITOR:

As president of the Council of Industry, I would like to reply on behalf of our board of directors to your editorial of Jan. 28.

It is very easy to build the General Electric/PCB controversy into a melodrama in which the "good guys" all wear the white hats of the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and anyone who disagrees with or questions their mandates is a villain who "endorses dangerous pollution of natural resources." Real life is never that conveniently simple.

The Poughkeepsie Journal has editorially criticized the Council of Industry for "lending its weight to one side of this issue whose solution calls for cooperation rather than contention," seeming to suggest that we are for the latter and against the former. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Through Mr. Hayes' letter, we endorsed Commissioner Dyson's public position on the PCB matter precisely because he called for a negotiated settlement between General Electric and the DEC. On the other hand, DEC, acting as prosecutor, judge, and jury, wants to impose an arbitrary requirement of zero discharge by Sept. 30, 1976 — even though the federal agency's standards would allow the company until June 1, 1977 to reduce its discharge to three ounces.

We think Mr. Dyson's proposal comes much closer than DEC's to the

spirit of "cooperation" the Journal rightly calls for.

In supporting Mr. Dyson, we are accused of "placing economics above human welfare." The jobs which sustain 1,200 New York State families represent human welfare in its most elemental form. The effects of small amounts of PCB's in the Hudson River are open to debate and speculation. The personal tragedies involved in the loss of those jobs are not. By what standard is a crisis in human welfare dismissed as "economics" because it isn't happening in Dutchess County?

Economics cannot be contrasted to human welfare. Economic activity is the process by which human welfare is achieved. It is the means by which productive effort and productive capital create the wealth without which man could not live on earth.

Literally thousands of jobs in the General Electric Company alone have already evaporated in upstate New York because the corporation has found it impossible to compete, especially in consumer products, from a New York State location. The deteriorating GE situation has been a major contributing factor to New York's status as the greatest net loser of industrial jobs in all the 50 states.

DEC, blindly mandating standards of strictness which are imposed nowhere else in the nation, shows no sign of understanding the problem.

We applaud Mr. Dyson because he does.

EUGENE W. SMITH
President