Pure Waters

Several years ago with suitable fanfare and hoopla the State of New York embarked on the "pure waters" program to clean up the Hudson River. Small villages were threatened with severe financial penalties if they did not install costly sewage treatment plants: their officials were even threatened with jail if they did not cooperate. The five riverfront villages in Greene County have together spent well over $10 million in this effort.

These villages were not wealthy and the cost has been borne by people who have had to scrimp in order to pay. But there was some comfort in that the money spent would mean a clean river: a body of water suitable for swimming, fishing and recreation. Many felt it was money well spent.

Now comes that same Department of Environmental Conservation telling us not to eat fish from the river, because they are so loaded with toxic, cancer-causing PCB chemicals that they pose a hazard. The chemicals are supposed to come from a huge GE factory upriver.

Where were the experts and the legal wizards when GE was doing all this? Breathing down the necks of the little villages whose contribution to pollution, as one mayor said, "amounted to no more than a pinch of salt in five pounds of sugar." No one ever said the wastes from these villages would cause cancer or threaten human life.

But of course, a small village is a lot different from a corporation. A little village has no power, no money to hire high priced legal talent and no "clout." But a big corporation has power, money and lawyers, and this is why the PCB goes into the river and the little village's sewage does not.

Now the State is demanding that the same little villages install expensive metering devices on outlets so that, the few times a year the heavy rains deluge treatment facilities, the flow can be measured.

Why don't they measure the PCB instead?

It's a sad commentary on this state government that the small and weak are asked to bear the expense of cleaning up the river, while the mighty and powerful are allowed to dirty it up at will. The so-called concern for the environment has been nothing but a sham and a false face, designed to persecute the little village, while pollution from other sources continues unabated.

The river may have been damaged irreparably, but the discharges continue. It's the old story, "Might makes right."

(A.B.J.)

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