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Cancer Wars

How Politics Shapes
What We Know and Don't Know
About Cancer

ROBERT N. PROCTOR



BasicBooks

A Division of HarperCollins Publishers

1995

...l through the chimney to
...g boys"—were employed
...their parents for a small
...light and therefore easier

...was not optimistic about
...sweeps had been found to
...out the first English laws
...labor of this sort did not
...raised to ten in 1834 and
...d, evaded, and frequently
...hat chimney sweeps still
...pation,³² and even as late
...y to die of scrotal cancer
...ilar results, only slightly

Hueper denounced the
...nd sprayers of arsenic in-
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...of the journal. Several of

Hueper's editorials did appear—unsigned, as was the practice—until 1949, when Fishbein was replaced as editor.³⁶

In 1948, Hueper's pioneering efforts in the area of environmental carcinogenesis won him a post as founding director of the Environmental Cancer Section of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), a position he held until his retirement in 1964. The NCI had been founded in 1937 by a special act of Congress; it was part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, the research arm of the Public Health Service. The NCI had greater autonomy than other branches of NIH (until 1944 it was the only branch authorized to provide grants to outside investigators) but, as we shall see, it was not entirely free of political pressures. Medical research funding was growing rapidly in this period: the NIH budget, for example, rose from only \$180,000 in 1945 to more than \$46 million in 1950.³⁷ Hueper's appointment came in the middle of this period of rapid, almost euphoric, growth, fueled by the optimistic faith that scientific research was the key to social progress.

Paul Starr's history of *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* states rather categorically that scientists at this time "enjoyed autonomy within the constraints of professional competition." This was indeed the position articulated by the official in charge of the NIH Division of Research Grants—Hueper's superior—who, in 1951, wrote:

The investigator works on problems of his own choosing and is not obliged to adhere to a preconceived plan. He is free to publish as he sees fit and to change his research without clearance if he finds new and more promising leads. He has almost complete budget freedom as long as he uses the funds for research purposes and expends them in accordance with local institutional rules.³⁸

The NCI may well have enjoyed greater autonomy than other branches of the NIH, but for Hueper personally, there were many strings attached to freedom. Shortly after joining the NCI, he received a letter from the Federal Loyalty Commission informing him that he was under investigation for disloyalty to the United States. G. H. Gehrmann, Du Pont's medical director, had denounced him as a Nazi, a trumped-up charge that was dismissed when Hueper was able to show that it came from a former colleague jealous of the acclaim Hueper had won for his work. Gehrmann later wrote to the director of the NCI accusing his foreign-born colleague of harboring communistic tendencies, though this was shown to have no more substance than the Nazi charge.

Political pressure was also felt from the Public Health Service's own Division of Industrial Hygiene (DIH), which was wary of Hueper's untiring quest to document chemical and nuclear hazards. On one occasion, the DIH director forced Hueper to remove his name from a study identifying lung cancer hazards in the chromate industry: industry officials with influence at the DIH—notably A. J. Lanza—pressured the PHS officials (via Surgeon General Leonard A. Scheele) to tone down or withdraw the paper, which eventually appeared under the sole authorship of Thomas F. Mancuso, director of the division of industrial hygiene at the Ohio Health Department.³⁹ On another occasion Hueper learned, to his astonishment, that carbon copies