

Lying For Justice

She saw herself as a detective, investigating a cultural crime of great magnitude: the vast scientific deception of publics everywhere by "ideologists in a white smock" - high-level, regulatory scientists.

It's been many years since U.S. journalist Edith Efron published her classic work of investigation, *The Apocalyptic: How Environmental Politics controls What We Know About Cancer* (1984). Her book was a powerful antidote to the published rants of environmental extremists who favour "lying for justice." Which is to say: scaring the public with scientific fear-mongering. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Paul Ehrlich's, *The Population Bomb*, were earlier examples.

Such books are united, she says, by a kind of visceral animosity toward capitalism, a general anti-technology attitude that characterizes modern civilization as producing "torrents of toxic and carcinogenic [cancer-causing] substances," implying that "industrial chemicals are the primary source of cancer...in fact the cause of 90 percent of all cancers." Most people still believe that.

Underlying this notion is the enduring flower-child conviction that nature is good, and man, "chemicals," and industry, are bad. Rachel Carson wrote that "man is the only living entity that could create cancer-causing substances." Wrong. Paul Ehrlich wrote that "massive famines will occur soon, possibly in the early 1970s, certainly by the early 1980s." Wrong again.

Efron took the sharpest scalpel to all of this, and the result is liberation of the mind. She did not argue that there are no carcinogens in some industrial chemicals. But neither did she agree with such as Joseph Califano, then Secretary of Health Education and Welfare, who fulminated in 1978 that there were more than 7,000,000 industrial carcinogens. Life is just toxic hell, folks.

Shortly after his panicky outburst, however, France's IARC, one of the world's most respected cancer institutes, published a list of known industrial carcinogens. There were ten. Ten!

The difference in magnitude was astounding. Efron concluded that industrial chemical dangers have been vastly exaggerated by sloppy research, by false inferences from animal experiments (believing that if mice die of something, therefore humans will, too), by false premises based on the "one-molecule," or "no-threshold," theory (if something in large doses is bad, therefore even one molecule is bad), and most of all, consciously hiding the truth about natural carcinogens to keep the political heat on industry.

"Natural carcinogens?" It's mind-boggling. For natural cancers have always existed. They are even found in Egyptian mummies. Earth is bombarded daily by thousands of forms of cancerous cosmic radiation. About two-dozen metals found almost everywhere in the earth's crust, are carcinogenic, as is common sand dust, inhaled by us all daily. Carcinogenic asbestos is found in

half of all continental bedrock. Volcanoes spew incalculable volumes of carcinogenic chemicals into the atmosphere (lead, arsenic, mercury, sulphur, and so on). Nature is bad for you!

Even ordinary oxygen is very toxic and corrosive. It is a "sink", or receptor for the body's electrons, causes severe toxic reactions and the creation of super-oxide radicals, breaks in DNA, and in general, a slow poisoning. Can't live without it - or with it.

Everyday lightning creates many nitrogen-based carcinogens, including ozone. Common soil world-wide is naturally radioactive, and contains most carcinogenic and mutagenic metals. Nine of the thirty-odd elements essential to life - are carcinogenic. Even 100% pure water is highly corrosive, toxic, and carcinogenic - though drinking it would poison you before any cancer formed.

As for common foods? All caffeine beverages such as teas, colas, coffees, and cocoas, and safroles in spices such as pepper, nutmeg, mace, cinnamon, and the like, and the ingredients in many fruits, dates, and strawberries, and the acetaldehydes found in all alcoholic drinks and ripe fruits - are carcinogenic. Carcinogenic plant aflatoxins, tannins and phenols, are found in food plants all over the world. Well-known University of California Professor of biochemistry and environmentalist Bruce Ames recently underlined the natural toxicity of nature when he wrote that "99.9% of all pesticides that humans eat are produced by plants themselves in their own chemical defense."

Natural proteins, cholesterols, and sugars such as fructose and lactose, are carcinogens. So are common salt (one billion tons of air-borne sea-salt fall on earth every year), and all forms of hydrocarbon (forests produce about 175 million tons of hydrocarbon every year - more than six times the amount created by man-made sources). Most cooking - smoking, barbecuing, frying, fermenting - is highly carcinogenic. Onions and garlic cooked at high temperatures are both carcinogenic, and highly mutagenic. (Groan)

This is absurd, says Efron: the very same stringent cancer standards used for the wholesale condemnation of industry, if used on the world itself, turn all of nature into a living hell.

All this doesn't mean we can't enjoy a good meal on New Year's Eve. But it does mean we have to take what scientists who lie for justice tell us with a grain of salt.

Uhhh... skip the salt.

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