Letters

The factor of competence

SIR: It was with bitter satisfaction that I read K. Burrows' commentary on competence as a factor in discrimination. Apparently the way which her scorned predecessors paved for her is a firm one. Perhaps from her position of competence and self-assurance, she will find the grace to develop also some social insight.

Edward Donley, Ellis K. Fields, George B. Hegeman, and Robert W. Todd.

The factor of competence

SIR: Burrows apparently has not been given the opportunity to prove herself in both arenas. It seems a challenge not only to intellectual competence, but to psychological competence as well. Burrows apparently has not been given the opportunity to prove herself in both arenas. Perhaps it behooves her to share a little of the credit for her success with her professional ancestors, and to pass it along by developing a sensitivity to the perhaps quite different experience of some of her sisters, who could use a hand up, rather than yet another slap in the face.

Lelia M. Coyne
Senior Research Associate, Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, Calif.

Comments to John McKetta

SIR: I read with interest your article titled "Academic Silence" (C&EN, Sept. 22, page 5) by John McKetta. I disagree in part with what he said about professionals in the chemical field speaking up against government regulations. I am now working in an academic environment, but I have past experience in industry to know that it's not fun going to work eight hours a day breathing harmful fumes, working around unsafe machinery, and complaining to a company safety committee with a deaf ear.

In addition, I have been holding for years about recycling industrial waste until I am blue in the face. Perhaps industry is waiting until all the natural resources are depleted. The public image of industry (especially the chemical) can be improved by complying with government regulations on cleaning up the environment. I'm sure the authorities in industry are getting tired of taking lumps from such organizations as the Environmental Protection Agency, National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, and the Occupational Safety & Health Administration. After all, who wants to live with acid rains and Love Canals year after year?

It's easy for industry to blame the government, but if industry ignores the complaints of the public, then the public has no alternative than to seek federal help.

A case to point out is the fact that many state agencies regulate game management. However, in recent years, sportmen have noticed a depletion of game animals during the hunting season. Could it be that the improved efficacy of agrochemicals available to farmers is responsible for this? Another black eye for the chemical industry. I am not "anti-chemical" at all, but I think we have a moral obligation to ourselves, humanity, and good old mother earth. In closing, free enterprise bit the bullet on this one; now it has to pay the price.

Ronald F. Ramaka
ACS Member, Upland, Pa.

Comments to John McKetta

SIR: I wish to respond to John McKetta's recent speech at the Conference on Cooperative Advances in Chemical Science & Technology at Lehigh University, where he expressed concern that government overregulation is killing free enterprise and economic growth.

First, McKetta completely ignores the small company in economic development. Government regulations burden small companies to a larger degree than large corporations by creating a greater percent increase of "red tape."

Second, "free enterprise" died years ago. When a small number of interests control the majority of the market, an uncompétitive environment arises, which kills free enterprise. How many U.S. car companies are there? Government overregulation did not create four U.S. car companies.

Third, McKetta disregards the "root" or cause of government regulation. The government protects the public from being treated unfairly. Government regulations originate from the inability of industry to self-regulate in the public interest, and to make necessary adjustments to social changes.

I do agree with McKetta that as members of the chemical profession, we should address social issues and propose solutions to problems.

Gary Hunt
SIR: I have before me a guest editorial by John McKetta. After rereading it two or three times, I am left with the impression that he is exhorting the membership of the professions of chemistry and chemical engineering to defend the chemical industry against government regulation, for example in the area of environmental pollution.

If I misread your intent, McKetta, please for...
worked for many years with the Borden Co., where he was head of the research laboratory. He was recognized by the U.S. Quartermaster Corps for his work in World War II with the preparation of whole milk and egg powder. His methods for preparing these products are still used by many manufacturers. In 1946 Shipstead joined the University of California, Davis, as research professor in the dairy industry department. He retired in 1959 and was appointed professor emeritus. Joined ACS in 1923; emeritus member.


Letters

Continued from page 4
give me, but next time try to state your case clearly and unemotionally. Do you really mean to suggest that we should have spoken up in support of dumping of chemical wastes in leaky barrels, pollution of water and air by unregulated emissions, excessive use of toxic pesticides, and use of potentially dangerous food additives?

On the contrary, we chemists and chemical engineers, uniquely qualified to know better, have stood silently by while the chemical industry has helped to create a nationwide environmental mess. Rain with a pH of 4, increase of atomic chlorine in the stratosphere, concentrations of hundreds of parts per million of chlorinated insecticides in the flesh of raptors—these conditions threaten our own comfort and the very lives of our children. It is utterly irrational to hold the hope that present practices will be tolerated in the future, let alone to wish that we could return to the bad old dirty days!

Yet it is hardly reasonable to expect the chemical industry to start policing itself, nor will the chemical industry do anything about regional or even national in scope. Only the federal government can provide nationwide uniform standards, even-handed and vigilant monitoring, and funds for adequate research and development programs to help solve our problems. (It is up to us to see that it is done!)

Our faith in private enterprise is great, but in the area of environmental pollution, reason tells us that Uncle Sam is going to have to shoulder the responsibility and foot the bill.

M. Jerome Bigelow
Pocatello, Idaho

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