

While it must be acknowledged that administration of pollution abatement in some States may in the past have left a good deal to be desired, this can hardly be accepted as evidence that Federal control must be thrust upon all States. Yet this view is being aggressively promoted.

As a result two things are happening. State agencies instead of being inspired to put forth their best efforts are either being embroiled in jurisdictional matters and thus rendered less effective, or they are being diverted from matters they regard as having priority in order to accommodate to Federal edicts. The Federal bureaucracy is swelled in manpower (often by stripping the best from State agencies) and financial resources to undertake what the States are being handicapped in doing.

Those who understand the intricacies—technical, economic, and social—of pollution-control endeavors, question the propriety and the desirability of the National Government assuming the central role for decisionmaking and responsibility. Among other things, they point to the fact that contrary to undocumented pronouncements of those who have recently “discovered” the pollution problem, the record of many State agencies has been outstanding in dealing with it.

The record shows, for example, that long before pollution became a high-pitched political issue—and with only modest outlays for administration and with no subsidies available to municipalities—substantial progress was being made by the States in advancing water pollution control. In this connection one might scrutinize accomplishment prior to 1956 in such States as Illinois, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa, California, and Pennsylvania, to name some of those with outstanding records. (In Illinois, for example, less than 2 percent of the population had sewage treatment in 1929; by 1964 the percentage had increased to 98.6. Other States have equally impressive gains.)

Some 30 years ago, as revealed in testimony before a congressional hearing, ships in Philadelphia could not embark passengers on the evening before sailing because the stench of the Delaware River was unbearable; such a condition does not prevail today.

Reports of the Chicago Sanitary Commission a half century ago show that the streams in that metropolitan area were so grossly polluted with sewage solids that chickens, dogs, and cats could scurry back and forth across the scum-encrusted surface. Not many years later Chicago began the construction of sewage-treatment facilities that today are acclaimed as one of the “seven wonders of the engineering world.”

These examples are cited not to suggest that everything is well in the control of water pollution. But they might serve as documentation that solutions to the problem were being effectively advanced somewhat antecedent to the last few years and at places in the Nation rather remote from Washington. What is still lacking is a realistic documentation of the present quality of our waters and of the public and private waste treatment plants actually built over the last 5 to 10 years.

*Issue No. 2.*—An assessment of the appropriate place within the Federal establishment to lodge responsibilities for pollution control calls for a bit of background.