

## LETTERS

risson" is pure fantasy, built perhaps on an imagined past. Perhaps our hard-working commuters and their equally hard-pressed wives, the elderly, and the retired army officers would be complimented.

FREDERICK OSBORN  
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William Tucker's article asserted that the environmental movement has been dominated by the "leisure class" for the purpose of protecting its standard of living at the expense of the majority, including, in particular, the poor. Mr. Tucker chose as his example the proposed Storm King pumped-storage plant.

Mr. Tucker, however, had a serious problem with his choice of Storm King. The opposition to Storm King was not limited to a few rich landowners in the Hudson Valley, but included the city of New York and numerous environmental and consumer groups in New York City who were more concerned with the cost and reliability of Con Edison service than with the preservation of the Hudson Valley.

Contrary to Mr. Tucker's assumption, these opponents of Storm King were not duped by the wealthy landowners. Rather, the opponents were convinced that Storm King would have been an economic and financial disaster for Con Edison and its customers and would not have made a significant contribution to the reliability of the system. Recent information, ignored or misinterpreted by Mr. Tucker, has vindicated the opponents of Storm King.

Mr. Tucker asserted that the pumping energy for Storm King would have been supplied by nuclear plants with excess capacity so that the use of inexpensive nuclear fuel would have overcome the relative inefficiency of a pumped-storage plant such as Storm King. For this assertion, Mr. Tucker relied on statements made by Con Edison in the 1960s. Unfortunately, he ignored Con Edison's admission in a 1976 report to the Public Service Commission that the pumping energy could not have been supplied by nuclear plants until the 1990s, because of cancellations in nuclear plant construction.

Thus, had Storm King been constructed in the 1960s, the pumping energy would have been supplied by oil-fired plants, including old and inefficient plants, with much of the elec-

tricity produced by such plants being lost in the process of pumping. Moreover, even Con Edison's new projection is likely to prove overly optimistic since the availability of nuclear generation for pumping in the 1990s requires that all major new power plants in the state be nuclear and that, contrary to experience, they be constructed and operated in accordance with projected time schedules.

Mr. Tucker argued that the opponents of Storm King have not suggested any viable alternatives. For this argument, he conveniently ignored the 1973 proposal we developed for the New York City EPA that gas turbines, coupled with boilers to recover wasted heat for additional steam and electric generation, could be substituted for Storm King. Unlike Mr. Tucker, Con Edison has not suggested that the technology is "just on the horizon." Rather, Con Edison has conceded that such an alternative is currently available, and would have costs comparable to Storm King even if the pumping energy for Storm King were primarily supplied by nuclear plants (as set forth above, this is unlikely even in the 1990s), and the alternative would be substantially *less* expensive than Storm King if the pumping energy were supplied by oil or coal. Moreover, the alternative would have the additional benefit of supplying New York City with significant tax revenues, as compared with Storm King, which would have provided tax revenues to the residents of Cornwall, including some of the rich landowner opponents of Storm King.

Finally, Mr. Tucker asserted that Storm King would have prevented the recent blackout. The investigations by the city, state, and federal governments have shown that the blackout was caused by lightning striking transmission lines designed to bring electricity from outside of New York City to the city, and by a series of miscalculations by Con Edison, including the failure to have personnel at facilities that could have provided quick-starting energy to avoid the collapse of the Con Edison system.

Thus, Storm King could have helped prevent the blackout only if the lightning strikes had not hit the transmission lines associated with the plant. We will never know if the lightning would have struck these transmission lines. We do know that the alternative to

Storm King described above would have avoided the blackout since the alternative was based upon building generating facilities in New York City. Con Edison has also asserted that the best defense against future lightning strikes is more in-city generating capacity.

We have not attempted to respond to most of Mr. Tucker's omissions and misstatements, including his grossly incorrect thesis that the poor performance of nuclear plants is attributable to fluctuations in demand rather than design and operational problems. It is unfortunate that Mr. Tucker had to distort the Storm King controversy in order to question the relationship of the environmental movement to the wealthy. By so doing, Mr. Tucker failed to make a meaningful contribution to any debate on the environmental movement.

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KEN SEMMEL  
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William Tucker's article purports to tell the truth about environmentalists by reviewing the controversy over Con Edison's proposal for a pumped-storage facility at Storm King. Mr. Tucker's Storm King story is all wet.

Tucker shows his bias at the very start of his article. He begins by asserting that environmentalists are aristocrats who live at the end of long winding country roads. From experience with our own membership, we know the opposite to be true. The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, which intervened in the Storm King case, has 4,000 members in New York City, which doesn't have many long winding roads. Our New York members (as do most of our 200,000 members throughout the United States) must work for a living. Nor do we receive six-figure salaries for our work, the way the Con Ed executives that Mr. Tucker champions do. We are equally certain that few of the 4 million members of the National Wildlife Federation and the 300,000 members of the National Audubon Society earn such salaries.

Mr. Tucker argues that environmentalism began with Storm King; once again he is in error. The Sierra Club, for example, was established in 1892. Ever since 1892 our motto has been "opposition to blind progress, not blind opposition to progress." Con Ed's