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How CBS News might explain the river mess

By Curt Andersen
News-Chronicle

Here is the CBS Evening News headline for May 23, 2001. (Please imitate Dan Rather as best you can.)

"DID ECO-TERRORISTS BURN DOWN THIS BUILDING?"

Footage showed the charred remains of the University of Washington urban horticulture center in Seattle. The building housed scientists that work with genetic modification of trees to make them "bigger and more useful" to the timber industry.

Our clever FBI believes that the fire was the work of the Earth Liberation Front. But for all the FBI knows, it could have been the work of timber companies who wanted a boost of public support for their efforts tinkering with what nature took eons to create.

You'll note that Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, and Tom Brokaw have not come to Green Bay to ask how the Fox River became polluted. Their so-called "liberal" news organizations are not allowed by their corporate owners, who are everything but liberal. Just the same, let's imagine how the story might be told if corporations did not control our news.

(Do your official Dan Rather voice again.) "DID ECO-TERRORISTS POLLUTE THIS RIVER? We'll go to reporter Michael Zagaba for the story."

"Yes, Dan, it is true! Eco-terrorists did pollute Northeast Wisconsin's Fox River, but the eco-terrorists are everyday capitalists who wanted a fatter bottom line. The region is choked with paper mills that have turned the river and Green Bay into a chemical sewer.

"Oddly enough, Dan, this area used to be one of the most fertile estuaries on the planet. Now it is an industrial dump site for the paper industry. Further complicating the story is the fact that not only do people eat the fish from these polluted waters, they are also drawing drinking water from Lake Michigan,

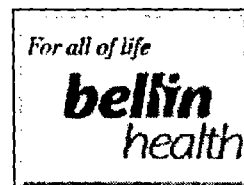
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endangering their health. "Dan, every local fourth-grader knows Green Bay is attached to Lake Michigan. This is like fouling one's own nest."

"Our research shows that when the PCBs were dumped into the Fox River, these mills were not in dire danger of financial collapse, but instead wanted bigger dividends for stockholders, no matter what the cost to the health and welfare of local citizens.

"Some people we interviewed, who did not want their names used, stated that they had been led to believe that some mills were struggling to survive, and some citizens felt that the dumping was the mills' last hope to remain competitive. This is not the case. The mills have made record profits over the years."

"Further, our research has shown that the pollution continues to this day. It appears that well-oiled lobbies for the chemical and paper industries wrote the laws that determine how much pollution mills could dump into the state's rivers. To our astonishment, we discovered that if they had too much pollution, they could simply mix more water with the chemicals or just ask for a permit to dump more. It was sort of a rubber-stamp affair for the paper industry.

"This way, the mills could legally pollute the very water the people in this area drink. Dan, an extension of that reasoning could conceivably legalize the poisoning of one's neighbor. Was a crime committed here? Only time will tell, Dan. This is Michael Zagaba reporting from Green Bay, Wisconsin."

"Thanks, Michael. Next, how to get the perfect facial."



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