

PREFACE

The development of electromagnetic energy for power and communications is widely regarded as a boon to mankind and even as “the manifestation of civilization at its finest.”* Although one cannot dispute that mankind’s mastery of this silent force is most responsible for our present global technology, disquieting questions have arisen over its present safety and the wisdom of continued unlimited expansion in its use. The electromagnetic force is, like the nuclear force, one of the four basic physical forces of the universe. While the ego of some men exults in “mastering” giant forces, have we once again acted like children playing with fire? Thus far we have been able to keep the nuclear genie for the most part in the bottle, but the electromagnetic genie is out of the bottle and all around us. There is no place left on earth that is free of manmade, abnormal electromagnetic radiation. Have we already done perhaps irretrievable harm to the biota, or is there time to step back, look at what we have done, and plan for a safe, logical, and environmentally sound use of this silent force?

When I set in motion the affair described in this book with my letter to Joseph Swidler, then head of the New York Public Service Commission, I naively believed that the questions I raised over the possible hazards of powerline radiation would be settled by the logical, dispassionate methods of science. As *The Electric Wilderness* shows, that was most certainly not the case. Our arguments, based on what we considered clear scientific data, were met with a ferocious onslaught—not only against our data but our reputations and even our livelihoods. Legal, political, and bureaucratic maneuvering extended from the local level to the highest levels of the Federal government. Why? Was it simply that we were calling into question a favorite technological application and with it the egos of the engineers, or that our actions might diminish the profits of the industries concerned?

In my opinion we faced a concerted and coordinated effort to suppress the truth, which emanated from the military establishment and was simply aided and abetted by the greed of the utilities and the tarnished testimony of scientists for hire. Today the military is planning and constructing the largest expansion of electromagnetic emitting facilities in history, with the aim of fighting and winning the next World War. In the process the very population, culture, and civilization they are sworn to protect may be placed at risk. Although someone has apparently weighed the relative risks and decided that this was the path to follow, the decision has been made not only without input from the citizens, but with every effort to conceal the risk from them. It seems the same mind-set that led to disaster in Vietnam is still operating—that “in order to save the village from Communism, we have to destroy it”—only now the villagers are not our “enemies” but our own citizens.

*Review by Samuel C. Florman of *Networks of Power* by Thomas P. Hughes (Johns Hopkins, 1984), in *The Sciences*, New York Academy of Sciences, 1984.

The decisive information that would help citizens contest this expansion will not be available; as this is being written, the decision has been made to terminate all Federal funding for electromagnetic hazards research. Thus those of us still committed to this fight are effectively deprived of the conclusive proof of hazard which has just begun to emerge. If a serious hazard does exist, no one is to know about it, least of all the citizens of the village. If opposition to a facility develops, no matter how small or obscure, the full weight and power of the establishment will be brought to bear to insure that it is constructed, and that all questions of health hazards are submerged in a sea of doubletalk and outright deception.

The citizens of this country are poorly served by the present system. They lack funds, battalions of lawyers, paid scientific experts, and organization. Their one source of power, concerted action at the ballot box, is continuously subverted by misinformation and distortion. Meanwhile the issue is obfuscated, the public is convinced that no hazard exists, and the scientists who insist on open and public debate are unmercifully attacked.

This book is important not only in the issue it raises of the probable hazard of electromagnetic technology, but in the hazards it reveals that are the result of *raising the issue*. It spotlights the present defects in our political system that leave the citizen defenseless against the powerful manipulations of the government. The truly important questions of our time are those relating to technology and its uses and abuses in relation to human beings. The public has a right to the relevant scientific information, and cannot be denied the right to have a voice in decisions that affect their health, safety, and quality of life. However, though scientists can provide the information, any scheme that calls for "experts" to make the decisions of relative risk tends to have little value. The only valid and ethical risk analysis must be made by those who are at risk. That requires that citizens have access to the truth. *The Electric Wilderness* is the truth.

Robert O. Becker, M.D.

Lowville, N.Y, 1985