



FOUNDED 1893

"THE DISASTER LOBBY"

by Thomas R. Shepard, Jr.

Published by ILLINOIS MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION

135 South LaSalle Street, Chicago 60603 • Telephone 641-6771

April, 1971

FOREWORD

Not everyone will agree with all the observations included in this recent speech, "The Disaster Lobby", by Thomas R. Shepard, Jr., publisher of Look Magazine. In making this address available to its membership, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association does not imply that every part of it is unqualifiedly endorsed by the Association. Some readers might be of the opinion that the seriousness of some of the problems discussed, such as air and water pollution and drug usage, is unduly minimized.

Nevertheless, the address is thought-provoking, coming as it does from a man who occupies a unique position to view and appraise the American scene. The I.M.A. Board of Directors has concluded that Mr. Shepard's speech includes many statements that need to be said, and that it should therefore be distributed to member firms. Every reader, of course, is free to evaluate the material and base his conclusions on his own knowledge of the subjects discussed. If reprints are desired for employees, shareholders or others, copies can be ordered from I.M.A. for 10¢ per copy.

E. EDGERTON HART,
Executive Vice-President

THE DISASTER LOBBY

By THOMAS R. SHEPARD, JR.

Publisher, LOOK Magazine

One morning last fall I left my office here in New York and hailed a cab for Kennedy Airport. The driver had the radio tuned to one of those daytime talk shows where the participants take turns complaining about how terrible everything is.

Air pollution. Water pollution. Noise pollution. Racial unrest. Campus unrest. Overpopulation. Underemployment. You name it, they agonized over it. This went on all the way to Kennedy and as we pulled up at the terminal the driver turned to me and said — and I quote — "If things are all that bad, how come I feel so good?"

Ladies and gentlemen, I wonder how many Americans, pelted day after day by the voices of doom, ever ask themselves that question: "If things are all that bad, how come I feel so good?"

Well, I think I have the answer. We feel good because things aren't that bad. Today I would like to tell you how wrong the pessimists are, and to focus an overdue spotlight on the pessimists themselves. These are the people who, in the name of ecology or consumerism or some other "ology" or "ism," are laying siege to our state and federal governments, demanding laws to regulate industry on the premise that the United States

is on the brink of catastrophe and only a brand-new socio-economic system can save us. I call these people The Disaster Lobby, and I regard them as the most dangerous men and women in America today.

Dangerous not only to the institutions they seek to destroy but to the consumers they are supposed to protect.

Let's begin with a close-in look at that drumbeat of despair I heard in the taxicab and that all of us hear almost every day. Just how much truth is there to the Disaster Lobby's complaints?

Environment Misconceptions

Take the one about the oxygen we breathe. The Disaster folks tell us that the burning of fuels by industry is using up the earth's oxygen and that, eventually, there won't be any left and we'll suffocate. False. The National Science Foundation recently collected air samples at 78 sites around the world and compared them with samples taken 61 years ago. Result? There is today precisely the same amount of oxygen in the air as there was in 1910 — 20.95 per cent.

Other Fallacies

But what about air pollution? You can't deny that our air is getting more fouled up all the time, says the Disaster Lobby. Wrong. I *can* deny it. Our air is getting less fouled up all the time, in city after city.

In New York City, for example. New York's Department of Air Resources reports a year-by-year *decrease* in air pollutants since 1965. What's more, the New York City air is immeasurably cleaner today than it was a hundred years ago, when people burned soft coal and you could cut the smog with a knife.

Which brings us to water pollution. The Disaster Lobby recalls that, back in the days before America was industrialized, our rivers and lakes were crystal clear. True. And those crystal-clear rivers and lakes were the source of the worst cholera, yellow fever and typhoid epidemics the world has ever known. Just one of these epidemics — in 1793 — killed one of every five residents of Philadelphia.

Our waterways may not be as pretty as they used to be, but they aren't as deadly, either. In fact, the water we drink is the safest in the world. What's more, we're making progress cosmetically. Many of our streams will soon *look* as wholesome as they *are*.

Perhaps it's the fear of overpopulation that's getting you down. Well, cheer up. The birth rate in the United States has been dropping continuously since 1955 and is now at the lowest point in history. If the trend continues, it is remotely possible that by the year 4000 there won't be anyone left in the country. But I wouldn't fret about *under*population, either. Populations have a way of adjusting to conditions, and I have no doubt that our birth rate will pick up in due course.

I now come to the case of the mercury in tuna fish. How did it get there? The Disaster Lobby says it came from American factories. The truth, as scientists will tell you, is that the mercury came from deposits in nature.

To attribute pollution of entire oceans to the 900 tons of mercury released into the environment each year by industry — that's less than 40 carloads — is like blaming a boy with a water pistol for the Johnstown Flood. Further proof? Fish caught 44 years ago and just analyzed contain twice as much mercury as any fish processed this year.

Speaking of fish, what about the charge that our greed and carelessness are killing off species of animals? Well, it's true that about 50 species of wildlife will become extinct this century. But it's also true that 50 species became extinct *last* century. And the century before that. And the century before *that*.

In fact, says Dr. T. H. Jukes of the University of California, some 100 million species of animal life have become extinct since the world began. Animals come and animals go, as Mr. Darwin noted, and to blame ourselves for evolution would be the height of foolishness.

Then there is the drug situation. Isn't it a fact that we are becoming a nation of addicts? No, it is not. Historically, we are becoming a nation of *non*-addicts. Seventy years ago, one of every 400 Americans was hooked on hard drugs. Today, it's one in 3,000. So, despite recent experimentation with drugs by teenagers, the long-range trend is downward, not upward.

Another crisis constructed of pure poppycock is the so-called "youth rebellion," to which the Disaster Lobby points with mingled alarm and glee. But once you examine the scene in depth — once you probe behind a very small gaggle of young trouble-makers who are sorely in need of an education, a spanking and a bath, not necessarily in that order — you can't find any rebellion worth talking about.

A while back *Look* commissioned Gallup to do a study on the mood of America. Gallup found that, on virtually every issue, the views of teenagers coincided with those of adults. And on those issues where the kids did *not* see eye-to-eye with their elders, the youngsters often tended to be more conservative.

The same assessment can be made of the putative black rebellion. There isn't any. Oh, there are the rantings of a lunatic fringe — a few paranoid militants who in any other country would be behind bars and whose continued freedom here is testimony to the fact that we are the most liberated and least racist nation on earth. But the vast majority of black Americans, as that same Gallup study revealed, are staunch believers in this nation.

How about unemployment? The Disaster people regard it as a grave problem. Well, I suppose even one unemployed person is a grave problem, but the record book tells us that the current out-of-work level of 6 per cent is about par. We've had less, but we've also had more — much more.

During the Kennedy Administration unemployment topped 7 per cent. And back in the recovery period of Franklin Roosevelt's second term, unemployment reached 25 per cent. So let's not panic over this one.

That word "panic" brings me to the H-bomb. Some people have let the gloom-mongers scare them beyond rational response with talk about atomic annihilation. I can't guarantee immunity from the bomb, but I offer the following as food for thought. Since World War II, over one billion human beings who worried about A-bombs and H-bombs died of other causes. They worried for nothing. It's something to think about.

One final comment on the subject. Members of the Disaster Lobby look back with fond nostalgia to the "good old days" when there weren't any nasty factories to pollute the air and kill the animals and drive people to distraction with misleading advertisements. But what was life *really* like in America 150 years ago?

sumerists—in the hope, I suppose, that if we are accommodating enough the danger will go away.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, it *won't* go away. If I accomplish nothing else today, I hope I can make that fact transparently plain.

Nader's Interests

Take the Nader group, for example. I have heard many businessmen dismiss Ralph Nader and his associates as well-meaning fellows who sincerely want to help the consumer by improving business methods.

Forget it. Mr. Nader isn't interested in seeing American industry clean house. What he wants is the *house*—from cellar to attic. His goal is a top-to-bottom takeover of industry by the government, with Mr. Nader, himself, I would guess, in charge of the appropriate commission.

Find it hard to believe? Then listen to this Associated Press report of a speech he made last September:

"Consumer advocate Ralph Nader has proposed that corporations that abuse the public interest should be transferred to public trusteeship and their officers sent to jail."

Well, we all know which corporations abuse the public interest in the eyes of Mr. Nader, don't we. *All* of them. The automobile companies. The tire companies. The appliance companies. The drug companies. The food companies. And yes, indeed, the soap and detergent companies.

What Mr. Nader really desires, ladies and gentlemen, is for the government to take over *your* companies and to toss all of you into the calaboose, presumably without a trial. At least he never said anything about a trial.

Does anyone still think Mr. Nader and the rest of the Disaster Lobby are just some harmless do-gooders? Those who know them best don't think so. Federal Trade Commissioner Paul Rand Dixon, for example. Not long ago, he said of Mr. Nader—and I quote—"He's preaching revolution, and I'm scared."

So let's start fighting back! It's not an impossible task because the Disaster Lobby is, by and large, not too bright and far too preposterous. All we have to do to win over the American people is acquaint them with the facts.

We must show them that the consumerists are for the most part devout snobs who believe that the average man is too stupid to make his own selections in a free marketplace.

Mixed-Up Extremists

Our Disaster group opponents also have the most cockeyed set of priorities I have ever encountered. To save a few trees, they would prevent construction of a power plant that could provide essential electricity to scores of hospitals and schools.

To protect some birds, they would deprive mankind of food. To keep fish healthy, they would allow human beings to become sick.

One curious feature of the Disaster Lobby is an almost total lack of ethics. I say "curious" because these are the people who demand the maximum in ethics from private industry.

Not long ago, an organization favoring clean air ran an ad soliciting funds from New Yorkers. It was full of half-truths and non-truths, including this sentence: "The longer you live with New York's polluted air and the worse it gets, the better your chances of dying from it." But we know that New York's air is *not* getting worse. Just let some private company run that ad and see how fast the consumerism boys would have a complaint on file with the FTC.

Immaturity is also a characteristic of the Disaster man. His favorite question is, Why can't we have everything? Why can't we have simon-pure air *and* plentiful electricity *and* low utility rates, all at the same time? Why can't we have ample food *and* a ban on pesticides? I recommend the same answer you would give a not-too-intelligent five-year-old who asks, "Why can't I eat that cookie and still have it?" You explain that you just *can't* under our present technology.

Just recently the Coca-Cola Co. felt it necessary to reply to environmentalists who demand immediate replacement of glass and metal soft drink containers with something that will self-destruct. "A degradable soft drink container sounds like a fine idea," said Coca-Cola, "but it doesn't exist. And the chances are that one can't be made."

And Edward Cole, president of General Motors, responding to a government mandate for drastic reductions in exhaust emissions within the next four years, stated: "The technology does not exist at this time—inside or outside the automobile industry—to meet these stringent emission levels in the specified time."

This inability of the Disaster people to accept reality is reflected in their frequent complaint that mankind interferes with nature. Such a thing is patently impossible. Man is *part* of nature. We didn't come here from some other planet. Anything we do, we do as card-carrying instruments of nature.

You don't accuse a beaver of interfering with nature when it chops down a tree to build a dam. Then why condemn human beings for chopping down a lot of trees to build a lot of dams—or to do anything else that will make their lives safer or longer or more enjoyable?

When it comes to a choice between saving human lives and saving some fish, I will sacrifice the fish without a whimper. It's not that I'm anti-fish; it's just that I am pro-people.

The Disaster Lobbyist's immaturity shows up again and again in his unwillingness to compromise, to understand that

The Good Old Days

For one thing, it was very brief. Life expectancy was 38 years for males. And it was a grueling 38 years. The work week was 72 hours. The average pay was \$300. Per year, that is.

The women had it worse. Housewives worked 98 hours a week, and there wasn't a dishwasher or vacuum cleaner to be had. The food was monotonous and scarce. The clothes were rags. In the winter you froze and in summer you sweltered and when an epidemic came—and they came almost every year—it would probably carry off someone in your family. Chances are that in your entire lifetime you would never hear the sound of an orchestra or own a book or travel more than 20 miles from the place you were born.

Ladies and gentlemen, whatever American businessmen have done to bring us out of that paradise of 150 years ago, I say let's give them a grateful pat on the back—not a knife in it.

Now I'm not a Pollyanna. I am aware of the problems we face and of the need to find solutions and put them into effect. And I have nothing but praise for the many dedicated Americans who are devoting their lives to making this a better nation in a better world.

Conditions Improving

The point I am trying to make is that we are solving most of our problems, that conditions are getting better, not worse, that American industry is spending over \$3 billion a year to clean up the environment and additional billions to develop products that will keep it clean, and that the real danger today is not from the free enterprise establishment that has made ours the most prosperous, most powerful and most charitable nation on earth.

No, the danger today resides in the Disaster Lobby—those crepe-hangers who, for personal gain or out of sheer ignorance, are undermining the American system and threatening the lives and fortunes of the American people.

When I speak of a threat to lives, I mean it literally. A classic example of the dire things that can happen when the Disaster Lobby gets busy is the DDT story.

DDT Alternatives

It begins during World War II when a safe, cheap and potent new insecticide made its debut. Known as DDT, it proved its value almost overnight. Grain fields once ravaged by insects began producing bumper crops. Marshland became habitable. And the death rate in many countries fell sharply.

According to the World Health Organization, malaria fatalities dropped from four million a year in the 1930s to less than a million by 1968. Other insect-borne diseases also loosened their grip. Encephalitis. Yellow fever. Typhus.

Wherever DDT was used, the ailment abated. It has been estimated that a hundred million human beings who would have died of one of these afflictions are alive today because of DDT.

But that's not the whole story. In many countries famine was once a periodic visitor. Then, largely because of food surpluses made possible by DDT, famines became relatively rare. So you can credit this insecticide with saving additional hundreds of millions of lives.

Then in 1962 a lady named Rachel Carson wrote a book called *Silent Spring* in which she charged that DDT had killed some fish and some birds. That's all the Disaster Lobby needed.

It pounced on the book, embraced its claims—many of them still unsubstantiated—and ran off to Washington to demand a ban on DDT. And Washington meekly gave them their ban, in the form of a gradual DDT phase-out. Other countries followed the U.S. lead.

The effects were not long in coming. Malaria, virtually conquered throughout the world, is having a resurgence. Food production is down in many areas. And such pests as the gypsy moth, in hiding since the 1940s, are now munching away at American forests.

In some countries—among them Ceylon, Venezuela and Sweden—the renaissance of insects has been so devastating that laws against DDT have been repealed or amended. But in our country the use of DDT, down to 10 per cent of its former level, may soon be prohibited entirely.

The tragedy is that DDT, while it probably did kill a few birds and fish, never harmed a single human being except by accidental misuse. When the ultimate report is written, it may show that the opponents of DDT—despite the best of intentions—contributed to the deaths of more human beings than did all of the natural disasters in history.

In addition to endangering human life, the Disaster Lobbyists are making things as difficult as possible for us survivors. By preventing electric companies from building new power plants, they have caused most of those blackouts we've been experiencing.

Consumerism

By winning the fight for compulsory seat belts in automobiles, they have forced the 67 per cent of all Americans who do not use seat belts to waste \$250 million a year buying them anyway.

By demanding fewer sizes in package goods on the ground that this will make shopping easier for the handful of dumbbells in our society, they are preventing the intelligent majority of housewives from buying merchandise in the quantities most convenient and most efficient for their needs.

sumerists—in the hope, I suppose, that if we are accommodating enough the danger will go away.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, it *won't* go away. If I accomplish nothing else today, I hope I can make that fact transparently plain.

Nader's Interests

Take the Nader group, for example. I have heard many businessmen dismiss Ralph Nader and his associates as well-meaning fellows who sincerely want to help the consumer by improving business methods.

Forget it. Mr. Nader isn't interested in seeing American industry clean house. What he wants is the *house*—from cellar to attic. His goal is a top-to-bottom takeover of industry by the government, with Mr. Nader, himself, I would guess, in charge of the appropriate commission.

Find it hard to believe? Then listen to this Associated Press report of a speech he made last September:

"Consumer advocate Ralph Nader has proposed that corporations that abuse the public interest should be transferred to public trusteeship and their officers sent to jail."

Well, we all know which corporations abuse the public interest in the eyes of Mr. Nader, don't we. *All* of them. The automobile companies. The tire companies. The appliance companies. The drug companies. The food companies. And yes, indeed, the soap and detergent companies.

What Mr. Nader really desires, ladies and gentlemen, is for the government to take over *your* companies and to toss all of you into the calaboose, presumably without a trial. At least he never said anything about a trial.

Does anyone still think Mr. Nader and the rest of the Disaster Lobby are just some harmless do-gooders? Those who know them best don't think so. Federal Trade Commissioner Paul Rand Dixon, for example. Not long ago, he said of Mr. Nader—and I quote—"He's preaching revolution, and I'm scared."

So let's start fighting back! It's not an impossible task because the Disaster Lobby is, by and large, not too bright and far too preposterous. All we have to do to win over the American people is acquaint them with the facts.

We must show them that the consumerists are for the most part devout snobs who believe that the average man is too stupid to make his own selections in a free marketplace.

Mixed-Up Extremists

Our Disaster group opponents also have the most cockeyed set of priorities I have ever encountered. To save a few trees, they would prevent construction of a power plant that could provide essential electricity to scores of hospitals and schools.

To protect some birds, they would deprive mankind of food. To keep fish healthy, they would allow human beings to become sick.

One curious feature of the Disaster Lobby is an almost total lack of ethics. I say "curious" because these are the people who demand the maximum in ethics from private industry.

Not long ago, an organization favoring clean air ran an ad soliciting funds from New Yorkers. It was full of half-truths and non-truths, including this sentence: "The longer you live with New York's polluted air and the worse it gets, the better your chances of dying from it." But we know that New York's air is *not* getting worse. Just let some private company run that ad and see how fast the consumerism boys would have a complaint on file with the FTC.

Immaturity is also a characteristic of the Disaster man. His favorite question is, Why can't we have everything? Why can't we have simon-pure air *and* plentiful electricity *and* low utility rates, all at the same time? Why can't we have ample food *and* a ban on pesticides? I recommend the same answer you would give a not-too-intelligent five-year-old who asks, "Why can't I eat that cookie and still have it?" You explain that you just *can't* under our present technology.

Just recently the Coca-Cola Co. felt it necessary to reply to environmentalists who demand immediate replacement of glass and metal soft drink containers with something that will self-destruct. "A degradable soft drink container sounds like a fine idea," said Coca-Cola, "but it doesn't exist. And the chances are that one can't be made."

And Edward Cole, president of General Motors, responding to a government mandate for drastic reductions in exhaust emissions within the next four years, stated: "The technology does not exist at this time—inside or outside the automobile industry—to meet these stringent emission levels in the specified time."

This inability of the Disaster people to accept reality is reflected in their frequent complaint that mankind interferes with nature. Such a thing is patently impossible. Man is *part* of nature. We didn't come here from some other planet. Anything we do, we do as card-carrying instruments of nature.

You don't accuse a beaver of interfering with nature when it chops down a tree to build a dam. Then why condemn human beings for chopping down a lot of trees to build a lot of dams—or to do anything else that will make their lives safer or longer or more enjoyable?

When it comes to a choice between saving human lives and saving some fish, I will sacrifice the fish without a whimper. It's not that I'm anti-fish; it's just that I am pro-people.

The Disaster Lobbyist's immaturity shows up again and again in his unwillingness to compromise, to understand that

man must settle for less than perfection, for less than zero risk, if he is to flourish. Failing to understand, they demand what they call "adequate testing" before any new product is released to the public. But what they mean by adequate testing would, if carried out, destroy all progress.

If penicillin had been tested the way the Disaster Lobby wants all products tested—not only on the current generation but on future generations, to determine hereditary effects—this wonder drug would not be in use today. And millions of people whose lives have been saved by penicillin would be dead.

We simply cannot test every aspect of human endeavor, generation after generation, to make *absolutely* certain that *everything* we do is *totally* guaranteed not to harm *anybody* to *any* degree whatsoever. We must take an occasional risk to do the greater good for the greater number. But that is a rational, mature evaluation—something of which the Disaster Lobby seems utterly incapable.

So this is the face of the enemy. Not a very impressive face. Not even a pleasant face. We have nothing to lose, therefore, by exposing it to the American people for what it is.

Action Needed

The time for surrender and accommodation is past. We must let the American public know that, once free enterprise succumbs to the attacks of the consumerists and the ecologists and the rest of the Disaster Lobby, the freedom of the consumer goes with it. His freedom to live the way he wants and to buy the things he wants without some Big Brother in Washington telling him he can't.

Truth and justice and common sense are on our side. And Americans have a history of responding to these arguments. All we have to do is get the story out—as often as possible, in as many forms as possible. And let's not vitiate our efforts by talking to each other—one businessman to a fellow businessman.

The people we must reach are the *consumers* of America, and they're out there right now listening to propaganda from the other side and, as often as not, agreeing with it. But why shouldn't they? They have yet to hear the truth.

It's a bit late to make a New Year's resolution, but I suggest this one for anyone willing to chip in with a tardy entry. Let us resolve that 1971 will be the year we help convince the people of America that our nation is a great one, that our future is a bright one and that the Disaster Lobby is precisely what the name implies. A disaster.