

Letters

Breeder Reactor Debate

The readers of *Science* would have been better served by Robert Gillette's article (News and Comment, 10 May, p. 650) on the response of the Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI) to the AEC's breeder environmental impact statement if he had paid more attention to the facts and less to his own guesses about SIPI's motivation. The facts are fairly simple. As a result of a successful suit by SIPI the AEC was ordered to produce, under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental statement relative to the entire breeder program. According to the AEC, the breeder program is designed to meet a substantial portion of the nation's future demand for electricity—about 23 percent of the demand by the year 2000. According to Section 102(C) and (D) of NEPA the AEC was required to describe the environmental effects of the breeder program and to compare its costs and benefits with those of alternative means of meeting this need that have lesser effects on the environment.

SIPI's purpose in responding to the impact statement was to comment on the degree to which it met these requirements of NEPA. Since it is widely acknowledged (even in the AEC statement) that the environmental impact of solar energy is considerably smaller than that of the breeder program, and that conservation reduces the environmental impact of the power saved to zero, it was necessary for the breeder environmental statement to consider the degree to which such alternatives might provide for the electricity that the breeder program is intended to supply. The SIPI statement pointed out in some detail that the AEC statement was wholly inadequate in this regard, that it failed to disclose that the breeder's purpose could readily be met by adopting energy conservation measures and by potential means of producing power from solar energy, as described in several government reports. SIPI discussed the issue of whether or not the breeder is needed

and pointed out that the combined effects of energy conservation and solar and other alternative sources of energy could supplant some, and ultimately all, existing fossil and nuclear plants by 2000. This was the appropriate response to procedures established by NEPA.

These considerations explain why the SIPI statement paid so much attention to the capability of alternative sources—such as solar energy—to replace the breeder program in a national energy system. It is unfortunate that Gillette chose to ignore these fairly obvious facts about the NEPA process and instead, in order to explain why we compared the breeder program with other power sources, constructed an imaginary reluctance on my part to take "a risky position . . . open to accusations of blind opposition to progress in the manner of latter-day Luddites."

Gillette's discussion of my views on the public availability of the Subpanel IX report is also rather deficient in newsworthy fact. It is true that the AEC claimed that the report has been in its public documents room, and it is also true that shortly thereafter I repeated my claim that the report was not accessible to the public (in an address before the American Chemical Society's meeting on 3 April). Again, Gillette might have informed the readers of *Science* why I repeated that statement. The reason was, as I said in that address, that "Thus, all three attempts known to me of serious efforts to obtain a copy of the Subpanel report, after the date at which, according to the AEC, the report was available to the public, December 1, 1973—by Senator Abourezk, Senator Jackson and Mr. Flanagan, the President's Assistant—failed."

I am aware that the full disclosure of the facts is more difficult and perhaps less entertaining than commenting on certain selected ones. Nevertheless, I think that more emphasis should have been given to the news and less to comments on some of it.

BARRY COMMONER
*Scientists' Institute for Public
Information, 30 East 68 Street,
New York 10021*

The information Commoner contends was ignored in the 10 May article is reported explicitly there and, in varying extent, in *Science* news reports of 29 March 1974 and 29 June 1973. Commoner neglects to credit the Natural Resources Defense Council for its pivotal role in the breeder case.

ROBERT GILLETTE

Unfettered Mother

As a scientist who returned to work when my baby was 1 month old, I can assure Daniel Roth (Letters, 31 May, p. 937) that breast-feeding does not mean one is "fettered to a squalling infant 24 hours a day." Both my son and my milk supply adapted quite happily to a somewhat erratic schedule whereby I fed him around the clock over weekends, his baby-sitter gave him one bottle at midday during the week, and he had bottles all day when I was out of town. He slept for 12 hours at night from the age of 6 weeks which, in my experience, is common among breast-fed babies and vanishingly rare among the bottle-fed. Breast-feeding is healthier for the baby and cheaper, sexier, and more convenient for the mother. And if anyone doubts that pediatricians are influential in controlling fashions in feeding, let him question any mother on the extent of her pediatrician's gratuitous advice on the subject and her reactions to that advice.

KAREN ARMS
*Section of Neurobiology and
Behavior, Langmuir Laboratory,
Cornell University, Ithaca,
New York 14850*

Medical School Recommendations

Each year I write dozens of letters of reference for students applying to medical school. Many of these recommendations are to be typed on printed forms from the schools which declare that the information about to be given will be kept confidential. Unfortunately, I have found that this promise is not kept. Frequently, students drop by to say they have been accepted into medical school, and they thank me specifically for the nice letter I have written in their behalf. When I ask if they have seen the letter, they reply, Yes. Further