ACCESS TO ENERGY

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Appealing Nature's Verdict

In a perverted way, we felt a sense of glee when the Tellico Dam was sacrificed to the snail darter. A few more such ecofreakish victories, and the ecofreaks will have defeated themselves.

We hope that Congress will not sidestep the issue by passing a special Tellico law, but that it will repeal the 1973 Endangered Species Act, a monstrosity both discriminatory and anti-ecological.

"To wilfully allow the extinction of a species is not simply the ultimate cruelty," opines Sen. Gaylord Nelson, whose enthusiasms are not limited to phoney Arab sheiks (*AtE* Mar.78). "It is cruelty to all living things, including man."

Oh yeah?

We know of at least one species that is now extinct, and that could have been saved by Sen. Nelson and his colleagues, had they not been so cruel: the smallpox virus.

In what is surely one of the greatest triumphs in the history of science, a disease has been wiped off the face of the earth. There has not been a single case anywhere in the world since last October.

But if Sen. Nelson had abided by the law he calls "one of the wisest pieces of conservation legislation enacted by any government in the world," he would have had to withhold his vote in allocating funds to the National Institutes of Health and a thousand other institutions, for as the Supreme Court quite rightly pointed out in the Tellico case, "the law does not provide for exceptions."

Indeed it doesn't: This imbecile law allows for no difference between snail darter, smallpox virus or any other living creature; it forbids federal projects to destroy *any* species.

But Sen. Nelson is not only an inept lawyer; he is also ignorant of biology. "Whenever one member of the ecosystem is eliminated," he babbles on, "it upsets the balance of nature."

Quite the contrary, Senator, as they should have told you in Biology 101. Nature maintains her balance by letting the inferior and unviable species perish, and she does so with a grandiose system of trial and verdict. Hundreds of thousands of species have, with due process, been condemned to extinction by her superb and unfailing laws.

Nature's verdict against the snail darter is already in: The snail darter is a failure, a reject, a freak, an inferior species that couldn't make it — or it would not have perished from this continent just to linger on a little longer in a single hole amidst the backwood swamps of Tennessee.

Against this mighty force of Nature herself, the cosmic force that shatters galaxies, creates new stars, gives life to the worthy and extinguishes the failures as it guides the evolution of all organisms through the millenia, against this gigantic, majestic and timeless might, there stands the opposition — Gus Speth the Little, David Brower the Pitiful, and Gaylord Nelson the Embarrassing.

MEETING IN NEBRASKA

On June 21, this writer at last met Ralph Nader in person in a debate on nuclear power in Omaha, sponsored by the Professional Engineers of Nebraska.

Sebi Breci, *Omaha World-Herald*

The debate itself may be published later, though there is not much new in Nader's avalanche of sleazy halftruths. But there were a few details worth observing in Nader's personality.

The press, some of whose rabidly anti-nuclear members had predictably first grilled this writer at a news conference, oohed and aahed and all but prostrated themselves in the divine presence of The Master, when he arrived two hours late.

"Do you still live on $5,000 a year, Mr. Nader?" went a typical question.

"Yes," answered St. Ralph without blushing and without revealing that he had settled on a $3,500 fee for the evening, after his aides had first asked for $5,000, but had proved willing to haggle. (His opponent debated for reimbursement of his air fare.)

What did he think of Beckmann's book on nuclear power?

"A vicious personal attack... Totally misrepresents my statements..."

"Where did I misrepresent you?" asked the author.

"Right on page 1! Where it quotes me as saying *How many atomic explosions in our cities would you accept before deciding that nuclear power is not safe — no complexities, just a number!* I never said anything about atomic explosions!"