

BOOK REVIEWS

As a service to members, the Society welcomes all books pertaining to entomology and related sciences and will seek competent, balanced reviews. The books themselves, and the reviews, carry the opinions and statements of the authors and are not in any way official statements of the Society.

THE PESTICIDE CONSPIRACY, Robert van den Bosch with preface by Paul Ehrlich. Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York 1978. 208 pp.

"Do not go gentle to that good night
Rage, rage, against the dying of the light."

Dylan Thomas

The Pesticide Conspiracy is an angry book by an angry man. "It is a tale of personal outrage that I hope proves highly infectious." It is also Dr. van den Bosch's last tale. On the eve of publication, he died.

As its title connotes it is a documented story of villainy, of sound technology repressed and hampered by powerful vested interests—public and private. Although a sound treatise on integrated control and pest management, the substance of the book is politics, deceit, corruption and treachery. It is written in the language of the street—passionate and often vulgar. Chapter titles are designed to excite curiosity and imagination for the author wanted his outburst read by all. "The Pesticide Treadmill; The Melancholy Addiction of Ol' King Cotton; The Making of an Eco-radical or Pardon my Paranoia; The Politics of Pest Control; Sticking it to Caesar—The Sociology of Pest Control; The Terrible Tussock Tussle; The Instant Professionals; Of Aphids' Knees and Bloody Marys; The Rape of EPA (Environmental Protection Agency); Science for Sale; Freedom of the Press, Well, Sort of; The Sorriest Loser; Bomb Disposal."

The choice of purple prose was deliberate, for van den Bosch chose to address his opponents and their oft-reluctant followers in their language and mentality—a mentality which called him in their captive trade publications "a liar, a scientific fraud, a disgrace to the university, a sensation-seeking intellectual prostitute, a charlatan." Thoughtful scientists know he was none of these. His scientific contributions to biological and integrated control have earned him a place among the greats and, ironically, enabled him to pursue his lonely crusade within the free environment of the University of California at Berkeley, with only minor harassment from within.

Embedded among the polemics is an excellent treatment of integrated control and pest management and of successful implemented programs—the most complete I have seen. They are there to show the reader the alternatives now available to the "pesticide treadmill." The main theme, however, is an exposé of the powerful forces which actively oppose such innovative technology and the factors which lead educators, scientists, politicians, bureaucrats and administrators to go along with the opposition—fear, greed, corruption and ignorance. It is exciting and titillating reading because van den Bosch does not hesitate to name names where adequate documentation exists.

It is a constructive book aside from its scientific merits for the author appeals to integrity and conscience of

which the scientific community is a bastion—only slightly breached. In his final chapter "To Turn the Worm" he proposes reasoned and reasonable, if somewhat naive, solutions to remove the barriers to effective technological implementation. These include: elimination of the pesticide salesman from pest control *advisement*, constraints in private use of biocides, upgrading of university pest-control research, teaching and extension, including training of qualified pest management specialists, allocation of federal support funds for pest-control research only to those institutions of demonstrated quality and commitment, creation of medium-term fellowships by private and public granting agencies, again only to institutions demonstrated proficient in pest management, reorganization within the USDA, specifically removal of most pest control policy making and research to a National Institute level, the establishment and enforcement of a "no strings attached" policy at universities for grants received, establishment of a scientific, non-partisan mechanism through the National Academy of Sciences to oversee the conception and operation of national pest eradication/control programs, legislation to ensure production and use of only environmentally safe, selective pesticides.

Although based on entomological experiences, the arguments apply to all fields where biocides are used. And although the problems described are largely American, I am sure they are not unique to that country. The tone and style of the book will offend many scientists. It will undoubtedly be labeled non-scientific. But I assure you it is based on sound science and personal experience of an outstanding scientist. More important, it is a shocking and startling social commentary. It should be read by all followed by a period of solitary contemplation and soul-searching.

"Nature is emitting signals warning us that under the existing format the future is ominous . . . She has many voices . . . one of the clearest is that of insects . . . (but) the rumble of a mud slide (on) a denuded mountain-side . . . the crunch of alkali (on over-irrigated) land, the voice of (dust-laden) wind." Will we listen? Can we overcome corruption, greed, deceit, and ignorance and *collaborate* with Nature? These are Dr. Robert van den Bosch's final questions to the scientific community and the public he served so well.

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