

Rt. 4, Box 33
Santa Fe, New Mexico
January 20, 1967

Mr. George Marshall, President
Sierra Club
800 Bel-Air Road
Los Angeles, California

Dear George:

I find the criticism that is constantly being directed at the Executive Director by various members of the Board, including yourself, hard to understand unless it implies a calculated intent to restrict his activities, reduce his effectiveness, discredit him, or to force his resignation. In view of what David Brower has accomplished for the Sierra Club, what he stands for to the membership, to the general public, and to Congress, I think this would be a very unwise purpose. In the eyes of conservationists all over the country, of Congressmen, and even very largely in the eyes of the general public David Brower is the symbol of the Sierra Club, much more so than the Board of Directors or any of its members. This image is well deserved not because he has sought it or welcomed it - for it carries a heavy responsibility - but because he has earned a position of highest eminence in conservation by his indefatigable dedication to his beliefs, by his imagination, by his skill and persistence and persuasiveness in presenting the arguments that support causes he champions. He is feared by his enemies as Congressman Aspinall's outbursts against him prove. No member of the Board has the energy that Dave is able to sustain, or could possibly be as effective as he has been in fighting out tightest conservation battles.

Because he is so successful; because he is not to be dissuaded from his purpose; because he will not temporize his convictions, he alarms those of lesser determination and weaker convictions who see in him a threat to a comfortable middle of the road position. His dynamism forces those who must work with him to act, and many of them do not like to be driven to decisions and actions that they know should have been instigated by themselves had they been as energetic and clear-sighted as he. Their reaction, therefore, to hold him in leash, to hobble him even, is a self-protective one. It prevents their appearing in a bad light; gives them time, they feel, to do in a more considered manner after longer deliberation those things he does swiftly to meet immediate emergencies. But they fail to see that deliberation is often a cover for hesitancy and uncertainty, and that the time lost in debate and undecidedness may lose the battle.

The criticism of the Executive Director, and the restrictions that are being imposed on his freedom of action are rapidly assuming the proportions of a personal vendetta. If this policy is pursued it will lead to disaster for the Sierra Club. If the Executive Director is driven to resign the Club will shrink from its present

position of national, even international, eminence to become again a local California mountaineering society. Let us not have this happen.

The objections to the Executive Director's initiatives are usually formulated in terms of a doctrinaire approach to administrative and budgetary problems. For him to raise money to meet exceptional contingencies outside of the budget - not an entirely new device - is protested on bureaucratic grounds without adequate consideration for its need. In support of this conservative stand you insist that swift action - one of the reasons for the fund appeal - can be as effectively taken by the Board and Officers of the Club as by the Executive Director. Past experience, however, proved this not to be the case. Swift action has never been a characteristic of the Publications Committee or the Legal Advisory Committee. The Board itself has never been notably swift in its determinations, and even the Executive Committee too often has required more than one meeting to arrive at a decision.

On the other hand when the Executive Director has taken prompt action requiring the expenditure of funds the results have generally been salutary. Moreover, as far as I know he has not been accused of irresponsibility or wastefulness, and his discretionary expenditures when questioned have been supported both in principle and fact.

A cause of the policy difficulties the Club has found itself in in recent years has in my opinion arisen from the manner in which it has established policy by resolutions; which have been poorly drawn, which have been ambiguous, and which have attempted to encompass more than one and even conflicting purposes. This is certainly the case with Board Resolution 20, May 1966 and Board Resolution 10, Sept. 1966. The Executive Director and the Staff are put in very difficult positions when called on to support such an ambiguous policy. The question for decision by the membership is not clearly defined in the Board's rewording of the petition for a vote on the Nipomo Dunes - Diablo Canyon controversy. The fundamental alternatives are: 1) should the Sierra Club oppose nuclear power plants at both Nipomo Dunes and Diablo Canyon; or 2) should it accept a plant at Diablo Canyon as a substitute to one at Nipomo Dunes. Because this has never been clearly stated owing to the awkward resolutions passed by the Board last year the matter needs to be given as much publicity as possible so that those who are being called on to vote on the question will be able to do so intelligently. Therefore I support the Staff's publicising the matter, which they are at liberty to do since the Resolution attempting to muzzle publicity was tabled at the last Board meeting. Will Siri feels differently and misstates the understanding of the majority of the Board in his letter of January 11th.

Not long ago McGeorge Bundy, on assuming the Directorship of the Ford Foundation, was quoted as having said that an administrator of a foundation can be expected to make mistakes and should be allowed at least one bad mistake; that if he makes no mistakes he is not a forward looking, imaginative administrator. David Brower has these qualities, for which we should consider ourselves fortunate, but we are additionally fortunate in that he has not yet made a bad mistake.

Yours sincerely,

Eliot Porter

EP:jc