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"A Tale of Two Plants"

Item Type	Editorial
Publisher	Commercial Appeal
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Download date	2026-03-16 15:09:04
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/28961

Editorial Climate!

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

A Scripps-Howard Newspaper

MICHAEL GREHL, Editor

Published by The Memphis Publishing Co.
495 Union Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38101

JOSEPH R. WILLIAMS, Business Manager

The Memphis Commercial Established 1889

The Appeal Established 1840

The Avalanche Established 1867

Consolidated July 1, 1894

Page 6

Thursday, October 16, 1980

A Tale Of Two Plants

HOW A COMMUNITY responds to opportunities for economic growth is an important measure of the quality of its leadership.

What do the reactions to two proposed industrial plants — one for Teletype Corp. and the other for SCA Chemical Services, Inc. — say about Memphis and Shelby County?

Teletype wanted property in southwest Shelby County rezoned for the possible construction of a light industrial and research plant employing 2,000 persons. Teletype indicated that, if it went ahead with the project, the plant would be surrounded by extensive landscaping, including ponds, trees and hedges, to make it blend in with nearby residential areas. The proposal sounded like a chamber of commerce model of what this city — or any city — should be looking for in a new industry.

But residents of the area, led by influential political leaders, objected that the plant would intrude on the residential character of the neighborhood. Their opposition carried the day against weak and belated resistance from local officials and business leaders, who said that Teletype's early secrecy about its plans reduced the support it otherwise might have received.

Then comes SCA knocking on the door to build a hazardous waste treatment plant with 80 employees in the northern part of the city. Residents in that area also object. They say they're worried about safety and pollution, not just appearances. Health depart-

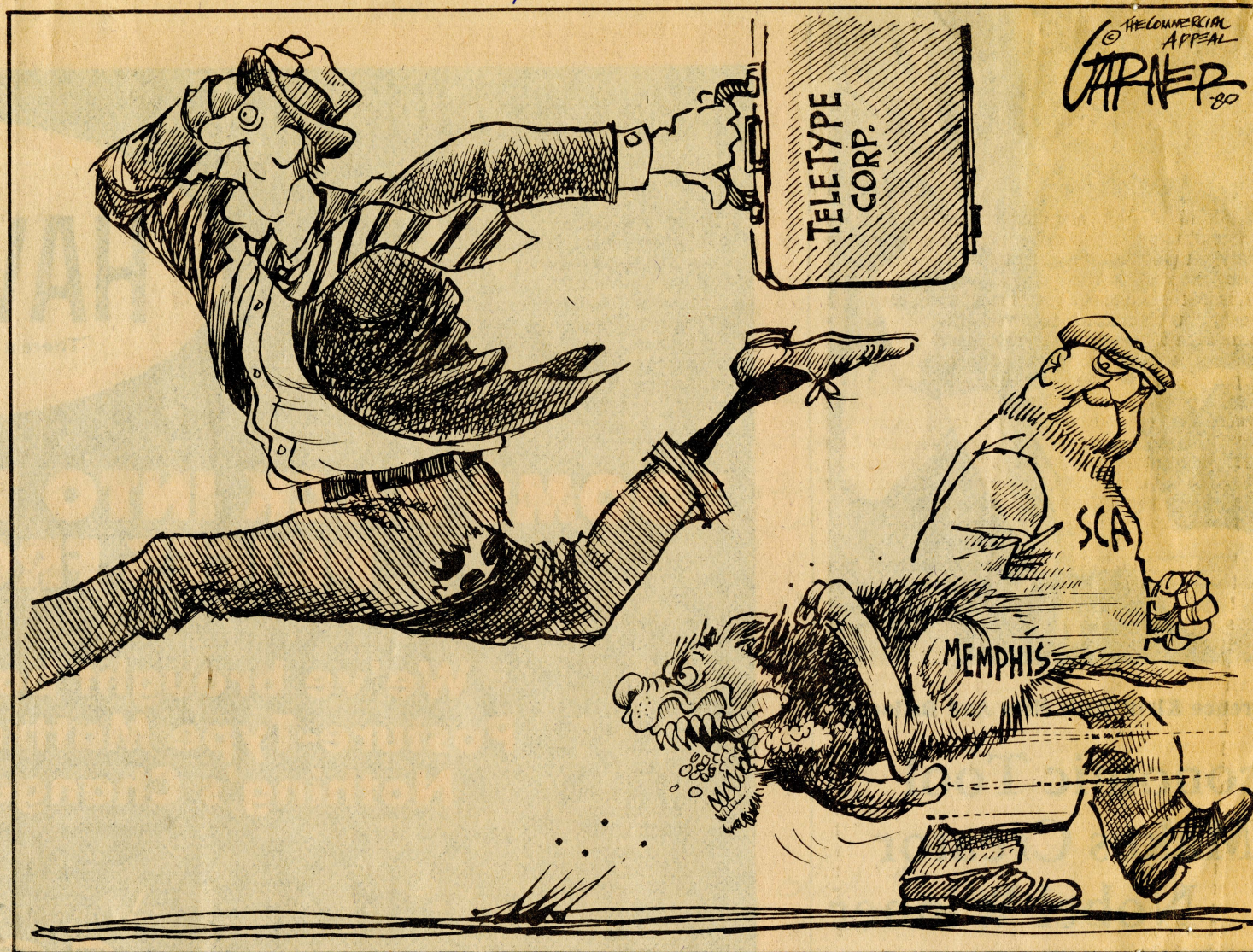
ment and public works spokesmen raise similar questions. The powers that be, however, welcome the company contingent on a "thorough review" of its proposals. The residents lack sufficient clout to lead their protests.

One plant gets short shrift, in spite of the prospect of adding 2,000 jobs to the local economy with no side effects of pollution or other environmental damage (unless the possible view of a loading dock from a distant backyard patio constitutes pollution). The other plant, which would provide work for 1,920 fewer employees while introducing a new factor of potential danger into the lives of many Memphians, is greeted with nothing more challenging than a standard review under local and state license regulations.

IS IT ONLY coincidental to the differing reactions that the proposed Teletype site backs up to a few \$200,000 homes, whereas the SCA site sits in an industrial park in a far less affluent section of the city?

Quite apart from whether SCA can pass muster in the review it faces and build a safe and pollution-free plant and quite apart from the need for effective treatment of hazardous wastes, the political and business leadership hasn't done "a far, far better thing..." in the tale of these two plants. The response to opportunity shows all too clearly where the levers of power lie and how they're pulled. That's also a dangerous form of pollution.

Spot cartoon, too - this time.



This item might have slipped into any of a number of categories: environment, race, planning. But its FIRST AMENDMENT function, per se, seems more important:

It is a pointed editorial statement about — and to — our political leadership, thus keeping the PEOPLE informed about THEIR GOVERNMENT.

GPE 03-03