

A Further Response to Mark Dowie and Mark Hertsgaard

May 7, 2018

In its May 21, 2018 issue, *The Nation* published [my letter](#) challenging Mark Hertsgaard and Mark Dowie's portrayal of George Carlo as a hero whistleblower in their cover story, "[How Big Wireless Made Us Think That Cell Phones Are Safe](#)" (April 26). The authors, in turn, replied and stated that I got it all wrong. (The exchange is reprinted below.)

Dowie and Hertsgaard call my claim that Carlo led them down the garden path "preposterous." Let me try, once again, to set the record straight.

Dowie and Hertsgaard want their readers to believe that Carlo's project, known as Wireless Technology Research or WTR for short, sponsored 50 different studies. To back up this claim, they cite three pieces of evidence:

1) They write that the "50 scientific studies," are "referenced in a scientific paper" that Carlo co-authored for the online journal [Medscape](#) in 2000.

The *Medscape* article does not offer a list of the 50 studies or any clues as to what they might be about. Indeed, there is only a one-time, passing mention of them — and that's on the side issue of risk analysis.

Carlo was leaving a paper trail. (Carlo has a law degree.) The only thing that the *Medscape* paper establishes is that Carlo has been telling the same lie for 18 years.

2&3) Dowie and Hertsgaard cite a two-volume, 703-page "study" by Carlo, which, they say, "summarize" the 50 studies. Wrong again.

The two-volumes, both titled, *Wireless Phones and Health*, are collections of papers presented at two conferences, both organized by WTR.

The [first](#) was held in Rome, Italy, in November 1995. Not one of the 25 chapters deals with research sponsored by WTR. In 1995, the project was just getting started

and there were no results. The papers presented in Rome were reviews of the state of the science at the time, that is, prior to WTR. (Why Rome? Good question, see the May 6, 1996, quote from *RCR* below.)

The [second](#) volume is a collection of papers presented at a meeting held in Long Beach, California, in June 1999. I was there. Here's part of my write-up for *Microwave News*:

“WTR’s meeting was designed to showcase WTR results, but it had funded so few studies that Motorola researchers had to be brought in to fill out the program. At WTR’s own meeting, there was more science from Motorola than from WTR.” ([MWN. I/A99](#), p.5)

The meeting marked the end of WTR and should have been chock full of new research results paid for with its \$25 million budget. But many of the papers have nothing to do with WTR. Take, for example, Chapter 5: “Developing a Regulatory Compliance Arrangement for Electromagnetic Radiation Exposure from Radio Transmitters Based on Health and Safety Considerations in Australia.”

The papers were considered so marginal that the publisher, Springer, never bothered to print the second volume. It exists only as an e-publication. Most people have never heard of it.

Fifty studies should have generated many more than 50 peer reviewed scientific papers. (Researchers rarely publish only a single paper on a funded project.) All of the papers would have been indexed in the National Library of Medicine database, PubMed. It would take only a couple of hours to assemble a list of abstracts from the 50 studies. Dowie and Hertsgaard should have asked Carlo for such a list. Others have, and every one of them has come up empty-handed.

Dowie and Hertsgaard got one thing right. I was, and continue to be, a critic of George Carlo. But, they make it sound as if I am waging a one-man vendetta. Not so.

RCR Wireless News, an industry tabloid (no longer published), also covered the Carlo saga from beginning to end. Here are a few short excerpts of its coverage of WTR and Carlo:

- “Interestingly, the loudest protests about Carlo’s work and CTIA’s role in health issues are not coming from environmentalists with suspicion about potential health risks from mobile telephones. Rather, the sharpest criticism comes from manufacturers like Lucent Technologies Inc., Astronet, Fujitsu Cellular, Mitsubishi Corp., Oki telecom, Qualcomm Inc., Hughes Network Systems Inc. and Toshiba Corp. These companies believe their products are safe and welcome independent research. ...
“There is no laboratory research on animals or on cell cultures being done in the three years since the research program was announced,” said one researcher who asked that his name not be used.

“The picture of Carlo painted by disgruntled manufacturers is one of a jetsetter traveling to exotic resorts around the world to hold meetings and tout his research program.” ([RCR, May 6, 1996](#))

- “When confronted with the question of why there is no radiofrequency radiation effects research after four years and \$15 million, embattled [WTR] head George Carlo...” ([RCR, March 24, 1997](#))
- “As he winds down the cellular industry-funded cancer research project with little to show for the \$28 million that will have been spent... ([RCR, October 27, 1997](#))

In the summer of 1998 —five years into a five-year project— Q. Balzano, a senior Motorola VP, complained that Carlo had failed to produce any biological results. “We lost five critical years and money can’t buy those five years back,” he told me. ([MWN, J/A98](#), p.8).

What Carlo did and did not do is a matter of public record. The question here is why Dowie and Hertsgaard insist on glorifying an industry operative who sabotaged the cell phone research program.

The answer is, as the old saying goes, “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story.”

Louis Slesin
Editor, [Microwave News](#)

Our Exchange in the May 21, 2018 issue of *The Nation*

Mark Hertsgaard and Mark Dowie got much of the wireless story right. Unfortunately, they were seduced by George Carlo and bought into his world of alternative facts. Despite repeated warnings from me and others, they portrayed this industry huckster as a Jeffrey Wigand-type “insider.”

The real story is more interesting and, ironically, better fits their description of the industry playbook. Carlo and Tom Wheeler, the head of the industry lobby group CTIA, never planned to do any research. Carlo talks about commissioning 50 studies, but it was all pie in the sky. Twenty-five million dollars should have paid for a load of published scientific papers. They don’t exist. Carlo only changed sides when Wheeler later refused to give him more money.

Over the years that Carlo’s faux project was in operation, the number of cell-phone users grew from about 10 million to over 100 million. By then, everyone loved their phones and no one cared about possible health effects. Mission accomplished.

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Dowie and Hertsgaard Reply:

We thank all the readers who wrote letters about our article but will respond here only to the critics.

...We remain grateful to Louis Slesin for the interviews he gave us, and we quoted his negative opinion about George Carlo in the article, but his accusation that we were “seduced” by Carlo is preposterous. Slesin doesn’t mention it, but readers deserve to know that Slesin has been an unremitting critic of Carlo’s since he first started writing about the scientist in the 1990s. Readers should also know that this piece underwent extensive legal review and fact-checking before publishing. To wit, Slesin claims here that the 50 scientific studies Carlo commissioned for the industry “don’t exist.” That is not true. In fact, those studies are referenced in a scientific paper that Carlo co-authored for the peer-reviewed journal *Medscape* in 2000, and they are summarized in the 703 combined pages of a two-volume study that Carlo also co-authored, *Wireless Phones and Health: Scientific Progress*.

These facts—documented, not alternative—helped inform our portrayal of Carlo as a scientist who started out on industry’s side but later publicly revealed information that was decidedly unwelcome in the industry. These facts may not fit Slesin’s

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preferred narrative of Carlo as a one-dimensional villain, but that is Slesin's problem, not ours.

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