

Xs: PC, NFOs, DCs, Fred H., Annie, Paul M.

The Communist Party and the Anti-Nuclear Movement

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With the publication of this article we wish to initiate a discussion of the issue of nuclear energy. We urge readers to write in their views and comments. Additional contributions to the discussion will be published in future issues—Editors

The growth of a strong national movement against nuclear power during 1977 found many people on the Left initially skeptical, or even hostile. This was an understandable response, given the nature—or at least the media image—of the anti-nuclear movement. Its largely white middle class and counterculture orientation, “small-is-beautiful” and back-to-nature prejudices against technology, and an apparently elitist attitude toward working people and trade unions were bound to arouse the misgivings of a multinational working-class movement.

On the other hand, these same impressions, plus a certain defensiveness regarding nuclear power in socialist countries, may have caused hesitation in some quarters to take a firm stand on the nuclear issue. However, the dangers of continued nuclear power development, so persistently raised by the anti-nuclear movement, will not disappear if the question is ignored or side-stepped. The Communist Party, which shares the vital concerns of all working people over the health and environmental risks of nuclear power, must base its policy on two fundamental considerations:

First, nuclear power is a *mass* issue of importance to the entire population of the U.S. Even though the “No Nukes” movement has so far been dominated by middle class elements, the safety and environmental dangers of nuclear development are certainly not their exclusive concern. On the contrary, workers may face a double health hazard—on the job as well as at home in their communities. Recent reports of the high cancer rate among workers who serviced nuclear submarines at the Portsmouth, N.H., naval shipyard are a good illustration of this danger.

Second, whatever the long-term prospects of nuclear power under different social systems, each

nation has to make decisions about this technology based on its own particular circumstances. In the U.S., with abundant alternative sources of energy, the feasibility of much more efficient use of its existing generating capacity and, above all, with nuclear development in the hands of rapacious private monopolies, nuclear power can create more problems than it solves. As Gus Hall has written (*The Energy Rip-Off, Cause and Cure*, p. 36), profit-greedy companies which economize on safety precautions . . . do not worry about concealed long-term dangers in radioactive waste products, minimize sinister breakdowns in operating plants and threaten radioactive disaster.”

The commercial development of nuclear power in our country has been controlled by the same energy monopolies which regularly present us with petroleum spills, tanker disasters, oil-well blowouts and refinery accidents, and which consistently oppose any attempts at safety regulation as “government interference.” Can we trust the infinitely more complex and dangerous technology of nuclear energy in such hands? Merely to pose the question is to answer it. That is why the Communist Party has been against the construction of additional nuclear generating facilities in the U.S. so long as these plants would be under the control of private energy monopolies and run for profit.

But it is not enough to condemn the further development of nuclear power by monopoly capital, while remaining aloof from the very mass movement which has led the fight to expose this danger. Simply to characterize the anti-nuclear movement as “petit-bourgeois” and concentrate on its weaknesses alone is sectarian. Such an attitude retards the building of united action to curb the abuses of monopoly and advance the struggle for socialism. For despite the narrow focus of many

anti-nuclear activists, and their often confusing politics, the movement itself represents a part of the growing mass rebellion against monopoly control of our energy resources and policies.

In New England, the fight against the huge Seabrook nuclear power project, to be situated along New Hampshire's short 18-mile coast, has been organized by the Clamshell Alliance. The Alliance, a coalition of autonomous local and regional anti-nuclear groups, stated the central issue of the movement in its *Declaration of Nuclear Resistance* more than a year ago: "The supply of energy is a natural right and in all cases should be controlled by the people. Private monopoly must give way to public control." This assertion, despite its vagueness, goes to the heart of the struggle around nuclear power and all other questions of energy development. Unfortunately, the concept of public control has been largely suppressed in the movement's mass actions (presumably because it was considered politically "too advanced") and has been happily ignored by the corporate media in favor of the more "colorful" aspects of the anti-nuclear demonstrations. The same Clamshell document, moreover, proposed only the fuzzy notions of "decentralization," "local control," "alternative energy sources" and "conservation" as the cures for our monopoly-induced energy crisis. Still, growing numbers of anti-nuclear activists have begun to look beyond these catchwords toward a deeper understanding of the energy question and its relation to monopoly capitalism.

The 1977 Seabrook "occupation" and its aftermath were in themselves highly educational. Confronting the police power of the New England states assembled in defense of corporate rights, mass jailings for "criminal trespass" and harshly punitive court sentences could not fail to open many eyes to the nature of the struggle and the opposing forces involved. And in the national guard armories where the anti-nuclear demonstrators were held following their arrest, a certain number of radical and Marxist detainees helped the process along. Since then, the Clamshell Alliance has been trying to decide whether it should remain purely an environmental crusade or recognize that its aims can only be achieved through political means. The agreement to hold a "legal" rally at Seabrook on June 24, rather than the planned "occupation

restoration," was perhaps a turning point in the direction of politics.

Experience has also been teaching the movement that it must look for support beyond the narrow issue of nuclear power. During the past year the Alliance has taken tentative steps to unite with a broader constituency around the questions of electric rates, peace and disarmament, safe working conditions and support for trade unions.

Local struggles against electric rate increases and unfair rate structures have been actively supported, and sometimes led, by Clamshell Alliance members. In New Hampshire they were able to spark a vigorous mass campaign against a 23% rate hike proposed by the Public Service Co.—half of which is slated to finance construction of the Seabrook nuclear power station at consumer expense. One New Hampshire Clamshell affiliate has also helped to initiate the drive for a local publicly-owned electric utility in a series of towns adjoining a hydroelectric dam on the Connecticut River.

In other actions, the Clamshell Alliance Congress last November passed a series of resolutions designed to support the peace movement and strengthen its ties with working people. The Congress voted: —"To endorse the anti-war objectives of the Mobilization for Survival" (a loose-knit coalition which has increasingly taken the initiative in opposing nuclear weapons and also shown some willingness to cooperate with the Left); and —"Reconfirmed its commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament."

A "labor solidarity" motion, worth quoting in full, resolved:

1. To express active solidarity with the struggles of other working people in their fight for full employment, socially responsible jobs, decent health and safety conditions, democratic unionism, workplace organization, organizing the unorganized and for an end to sexism and racism in the workplace and the labor movement.
2. To acknowledge that, as working people, we are concerned about nuclear power and other environmental issues, and that we bear the brunt of environmental hazards, both in our communities and in our workplaces.
3. To actively seek to increase participation of labor movement people in the anti-nuclear movement.

4. To work to assure socially responsible jobs for those affected by the end of nuclear power.
5. To acknowledge that community-controlled development of renewable energy sources will create thousands more safe and permanent jobs than nuclear power ever could.
6. To work closely with labor unions and especially with rank and file workers to realize the high job-producing potential of alternate energy production.
7. To acknowledge that nukes mean rate hikes, and that working people are forced to unjustly bear the financial burden of nuclear power construction and operation.
8. To understand the necessity of combining with the working people of this country to win the fight against nuclear power.

Along with this resolution, the Clamshell Alliance has taken some concrete steps in the direction of labor solidarity. It endorsed the Labor Law Reform Act and urged the New England Congressional delegation to support the bill (S. 2467, since defeated by a corporate lobbying *blitzkrieg*); it has backed the J.P. Stevens Boycott and actively worked on it with ACTWU staff in some areas; and the bi-monthly *Clamshell Alliance News* has lately begun to include regular features on labor, including a warm message of support to the striking UMWA coal miners.

The Alliance has also co-sponsored a workshop on jobs, energy and the environment with several health and conservation organizations and the New Hampshire State Labor Council (AFL-CIO). Most recently, the Labor Committee of the Boston Clamshell affiliate has worked closely with the Massachusetts Coalition for Full Employment and the Eastern Massachusetts Building Trades Council around energy-related job issues. Plans have been laid for a major conference on the economic and health aspects of energy development with the participation of construction, auto and sheet metal workers unions. The activity of a Washington-based group called "Environmentalists for Full Employment," which is closely associated with the anti-nuclear movement, illustrates the same trend.

For their part, many workers and rank-and-file trade union members, especially in New England where nuclear power is a strong local issue, have

begun to respond to the questions of safety, health and economics raised by the opponents of nuclear power. Some national labor leaders such as Douglas Fraser of the UAW and William Winpisinger of the IAM and others have also shown an interest in dialogue with the anti-nuclear and alternative energy movements.

These developments were underlined by the important labor participation at the June 24 Seabrook anti-nuclear rally. There, many of the estimated 20,000 demonstrators heard a Chicago steelworker report that the USWA District 31 convention had voted to oppose the construction of a nuclear power station at Bailly, Indiana; a staff member of the *United Mine Workers Journal* explained why his union believed that nuclear power meant *fewer* jobs; and a representative of the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcherworkers Union called for an alliance between labor and the anti-nuclear movement for safe power *and* jobs, and "for human rights over property rights."

Meanwhile, the dynamics of the nuclear power industry itself are helping this kind of unity to grow. Like other sectors of monopoly capital, it strives to place the financial as well as environmental burden of new construction on the working people, while it continues to derive the profits from existing generating facilities. In New Hampshire this led to a recent 23 per cent increase in electric rates, with an additional 8-10 per cent predicted for each year until the Seabrook project is completed. The public outcry over this prospect moved the normally conservative state legislature this year to ban utilities from charging for so-called "construction work in progress" (CWIP), although it was unable to override the Right-wing governor's veto of the measure.

Everywhere, private utilities have actively campaigned and lobbied to frustrate the people's demand for fair electric rates. Besides costly public relations efforts at the expense of the rate payer, it is known that utilities have routinely kept files on their "enemies" and engaged in Watergate-style dirty tricks. These have frequently involved the services of Right-wing detective agencies or consultants. In New Hampshire the Clamshell Alliance has recently charged the Public Service Co. with tapping its phones and other illegal forms of sur-

veillance. It should be remembered here that the source for the hysterical newspaper accounts predicting violence and terrorism at last year's Seabrook demonstration turned out to be the fascist NCLC/"U.S. Labor Party." This year the offer of a counter-demonstration from a paramilitary Right-wing New Hampshire group called "The Continental Line" was politely turned down by the Public Service Co., but only because it was planned for the same day as the Clamshell action.

As Watergate showed, the public is sensitive to such corporate attempts to undermine democracy. This should also be an issue of special concern to the Left, both in itself and as a means of exposing the hollowness of "human rights" under monopoly capitalism.

The effects these developments will have on mass consciousness could be decisive. Sky-rocketing electric rates can now be closely associated in the public mind not only with nuclear power, but also with the present organization and private ownership of the power industry; the political alliance of big business and the Right is being demonstrated; and for the first time people are being told *by the utilities themselves* that the public must always pay for the cost of building power plants—either during construction through CWIP, or afterwards with even larger rate increases. It is only natural for people to ask: "If we pay for it, why do they still own it?" In partial answer, it may be pointed out that *existing* publicly-owned utilities charge about one-third less for electricity even now.

The emerging links between the anti-nuclear activists, the peace movement and the trade unions point the way toward a viable coalition for unity against a common enemy—the monopolies which threaten us all with nuclear disaster. But for such an alliance to succeed, it will be necessary to oppose nuclear power as a part of the broad system of monopoly control which dominates our country. For the nuclear industry, though highly "visible" in itself, is only one arm of an energy network controlled by the giant monopolies in oil, gas and coal, together with the centers of finance capital that lie behind them.

In this light, the movement against nuclear power deserves the active support and participation of the Left, including the Communist Party. We should

make every effort to encourage the growing trend toward unity of the anti-nuclear activists with the broader people's movement for peace, jobs and against racism. Here are some points of a program that can achieve this unity:

1) The curtailment of current and projected nuclear power projects would be a severe blow to construction workers who are already hard-pressed by a slack industry. Jobs are the prime concern, not only of the building trades, but of workers in general, both organized and unorganized. Jobs will not be created by gestures, however well intended, to the interests of working people. A coalition that includes the Left, trade unions, peace and anti-nuclear forces could launch the fight for a vast program of new housing construction and renovation with an emphasis on up-grading energy efficiency. Mass transit and a long overdue rebuilding of the nation's deteriorated rail network should also be key elements of a plan to provide jobs at union scale, while contributing to the reduction of energy waste. Displaced construction workers and minority workers, especially youth, must have first access to the new jobs through a program of affirmative action. The Harrington Youth Employment Act (H.R. 927)—long bottled up in Congressional committee—has specific provision for projects in housing, public transportation and environmental improvement which could be the first step toward a more comprehensive program.

2) The connections between the "private" nuclear industry and the military aspects of nuclear arms development are clear. The neutron bomb, the dangers of nuclear weapons stockpiling, and radioactive waste from weapons manufacture, all derive from the same military-industrial complex which is backing nuclear power. In fact, radioactive wastes from military sources account for over 90 per cent of all such dangerous materials in the U.S. The struggle for peace and disarmament needs to be pressed much more vigorously by the anti-nuclear movement and its allies. And this does not have to be disarmament in the abstract, or as the unilateral moves of any one country. Negotiation of a new strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II), which is being fiercely resisted by the most militaristic and Right-wing forces in the U.S., would provide a concrete basis for slowing down and then reversing the

arms race. A broad people's movement is the only way to guarantee such a treaty and to win the transfer of billions of dollars from the Pentagon to the kind of socially useful projects that can improve our lives, provide jobs and conserve energy resources.

3) The proposed non-nuclear alternative energy programs advocated by the Clamshell Alliance stress small-scale solar and wind power most suitable to rural needs. They relate only marginally to the problems of urban decay and poverty experienced most particularly by Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano and other minorities. This is certainly a factor in the lack of minority participation in the anti-nuclear movement. Furthermore, the availability of renewable energy sources on a large scale is a long way off. What is needed *now* is democratic control of the federal and state utility commissions, the establishment of an inexpensive "lifeline" rate for a basic monthly amount of electricity, a freeze on electric rates for consumers and small businesses and a corresponding increase in the rates charged the largest industrial and commercial users, who benefit from the current "promotional" rate structures. Such reforms would lighten the burden of increased energy costs on working people, the poor and the elderly, while encouraging conservation by the only sectors of the economy able to afford it—big business and the military.

4) The conversion of a significant portion of our energy use to renewable sources will be a long and difficult project. Decentralization and local control

of energy resources, though attractive and plausible in some circumstances (in the short run), can not answer these problems. Only public takeover and nationalization of the entire energy complex can begin to make possible the balanced development and centralized planning which are needed. There is no way to bring solar energy into being on a large scale as part of "the free enterprise system." Private interests, as usual, will develop only those technologies which are most profitable, not those which make the most sense. Nationalization of the energy industry under democratic control is an idea whose time has come. The public is ready to take the prospect seriously and the coalition of forces needed to press for a publicly-owned national energy industry can be built now.

These are some of the reforms which can be fought for immediately by a people's coalition. Each would help to ease somewhat the current energy crisis of our system and take some of its burden off the backs of our people, without the need for increased nuclear power. But it would be an illusion to suggest that these reforms can solve the problems, or that the irrationality of the nuclear industry, or even the whole energy complex, can be cured apart from the overall anarchy of capitalist production. For this, much deeper structural changes will be required. But the struggle for shorter term gains, well worth achieving in themselves, can also help to galvanize the kind of movement necessary for the advance toward socialism.

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The point is, however, that an intelligence system mirrors the state which created it and which it serves; and that state is a manifestation of the social system which, in turn, created it and which it sustains.

The absolutely amoral quality of intelligence operations conducted by the government of the United States for the past thirty years reflects the fact that that government is the bastion of what remains of imperialism; that that government has sought and seeks to prevent the disintegration of colonialism, the extirpation of racism. That government seeks to undermine and destroy social-

ist states and to thwart all adherents of socialism. In this era that means opposition not only to Communists but to all who stand opposed to colonialism, racism, the grave threat of general war and to systematic impoverishment of much of humanity.

The ferocious activities of the CIA and the FBI reflect the anti-human essence of the imperialism both serve. Only a politics in the United States which favors people's welfare rather than Pentagon prosperity will ever cleanse Washington's intelligence apparatus. Imperialism seeks to "finish Hitler's work"; the need is to finish with Hitlerism once and for all.