Being right is not enough....

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Seven nuclear safeguards initiatives have been defeated - in California last June, and in Montana, Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, Washington and Ohio this November (i.e. 1976 - ALR).

Opposition to nuclear power exclusively, and exclusive opposition to nuclear power, has led to these defeats.

Organised and unorganised working people, minorities, the elderly, the poor, those in low population zones and crumbling urban communities - these people (along with the increasingly beleaguered middle class, which is learning) know first-hand American industry's record on health and safety. They know industry's low regard for the worth of an individual. Yet the majority is supporting industry's pitch for nuclear power. I suggest they are driven primarily by distrust of those who are opposing nuclear power. I suggest that they consider the anti-nuclear movement to be a threat to their jobs and families, that they are convinced anti-nuclear zealots would take the future into their own arrogant, elitist and moralistic hands.

If nuclear opponents want more than moral victories, they need to build locally based coalitions directed towards development of safe, affordable energy and the creation of an ecologically-attuned, full-employment economy.

It was more than three years ago that discussions about a nuclear safeguards initiative began in California. The objective was a document which could be supported by Californians with diverse views on nuclear energy and the political process. It should be noted that in 1973 the public generally was unaware of the nuclear danger issue, and that consequently it was believed that an initiative which sought a direct, simple ban of nuclear energy would not be able to attract the 200,000-plus signatures needed to place it on the state ballot. Election victory was considered a long shot - but it was hoped that once an initiative had qualified, the campaign around it would help raise the issue before Californians and the rest of the nation.

The final product, the result of several series of state-wide meetings and extensive revisions, was a complex and verbose document. But this version did receive sufficient support to qualify for the ballot in the spring of 1975.

To the surprise of Proposition 15 sponsors, nuclear power dangers began to receive more attention than had been anticipated. Events such as Nixon's decision to sell nuclear reactors to the volatile Middle East, the fire at the Brown's Ferry reactors, the shutting down of operating reactors because of real and suspected pipe cracks, and the publicised resignations of industry and regulatory personnel helped keep nuclear energy in the news. But as the campaign attracted
attention, the initiative, under attack by the nuclear industry, turned into a public relations nightmare. Many of its supporters began to realise that the very qualities which made it acceptable to a broad coalition of supporters rendered it vulnerable to industry’s claims of fraud and deception. And as the election approached, it became obvious that the jobs and energy availability issues were going to be extremely difficult ones to handle. To combat industry’s lavish propaganda about threatened job losses and “freezing and starving in the dark”, pro-initiative forces found they had to offer convincing alternatives for energy supply and employment - alternatives they simply did not have.

Following the defeat of Proposition 15, anti-nuclear pioneers John Gofman and Egan O’Connor urged initiative proponents to deal directly with what a reactor ban would mean in terms of jobs and energy. They emphasised the needs for facts and data to combat industry’s (and the US government’s) predictions of economic chaos in a non-nuclear future. They were correct, as far as they went. But “facts and data” from strangers, especially strangers portrayed as “the enemy”, don’t go very far. Necessary were trusting, working relationships with people from many spheres and diverse economic and social levels.

It was unfortunate, then, that last winter people in six states rushed out to qualify similar initiatives, even before the vote on Proposition 15. They did not allow themselves time to assess the California experience, or put together authoritative responses to the nuclear industry’s predictions of economic disaster. Nor did they give themselves time to establish a record of co-operation with a wide range of urban and rural people, with labor union locals and others. And by locking themselves into what was essentially the California model, they missed the opportunity to strengthen their initiatives by simplifying them and adding provisions for job protection and job retraining.

Concerned citizens, splinters of the labor movement, a minority of scientists, those isolated as “environmentalists”: no one of these groups can by itself provide the jobs and resources needed by this nation. The money, talent and means for safe energy and full employment will become available only after the nuclear venture is over. Similarly, the concept that citizens can provide for more and more of their own needs - including energy needs - by themselves, in their own communities, will not achieve popular acceptance until government-assisted and government-directed highly centralised fission (and fusion) nonsense is over. And efforts to ensure that new enterprises are kept sane and honest - such as keeping multinational corporations from controlling the use of solar energy and building huge, money-hungry, central stations on earth (or in space with potential for warfare), clearly will be necessary. By sharing accurate information on the high costs and disastrous consequences of a nuclear economy with
diverse groups approached as equals; by helping to encourage a groundswell for safer, cheaper energy sources which are locally controlled and efficient and provide more jobs; by assuring that no one group or class of people will bear the burden of discarding the nuclear technology; and by assisting diverse people with their economic, health and safety battles, nuclear opponents can mercifully finish off the nuclear experiment and help provide alternatives this country can afford.

Industry’s divisive portrayal of anti-nuclear forces was to some extent distasteful and hypocritical. But it worked. It worked not only because industry had a lot of money to throw around, but also because many pro-initiative people believed and acted as if their issue were the most terrible, the most crucial, the most significant of this or any age, one before which people active in other realms must bow.

Such arrogance obscures the interrelationships of important social, economic and political issues. And it is certainly not conducive to coalition building among people who daily face a range of non-radioactive health threats, accompanied by fear of losing their jobs.

Many people have become politically active and environmentally aware through involvement in anti-nuclear struggles. Many of these people believe that nuclear energy is somehow a terrible aberration, that it does not fit into the American industrial tradition. These people need to look more closely at the history of government and science in service to industry. They need to look at who the nuclear industry is: the oil and chemical companies, large manufacturers of electrical generating equipment and appliances, the utilities along with interlocked politicians, science and engineering establishments, universities, federal and state agencies, banks and investment houses. Nuclear opponents need to know that these conglomerations are responsible for a terrible record of health and safety created by their use of asbestos, beryllium, coal gas, mercury, lead, pesticides, arsenic, food additives, drugs, PVCs, PBBs, PCBs, Kepone, taconite, and on and on. They are the ones who have been fighting workplace and natural environment protection, who have suppressed toxicity and disease data, and who have used environmental blackmail tactics to avoid cleaning up. They are the ones responsible for the nearly half million workers disabled yearly by occupational diseases.

Radiation is not the only substance which causes genetic damage. And neither is it the only industrial by-product difficult to prove responsible for specific ill-effects. The same “show us the bodies” arguments which industry uses to defend its record with radiation are used in many non-radioactive areas.

It is also important to be aware that industry propaganda used to defeat nuclear safeguards initiatives has been and is being used to fight air and water pollution control, coastal zone management, energy conservation, waste recycling, decreases in defense spending and the development of cheaper, more controllable industrial complexes. These arguments consist of threats of job losses, economic “dislocation”, and dependence upon foreign powers. And as United Auto Workers president Leonard Woodcock has pointed out, these were the same arguments used to fight child labor laws, workman’s compensation, unemployment insurance and the minimum wage. Yet few people today blame our nation’s economic ills on the existence of these laws. “Data and facts”, furthermore, indicate that pollution control makes economic sense, creates jobs, increases overall productivity, and saves energy, resources and lives. It is clear that those resurrected “economic chaos” arguments are no more valid today for the nuclear realm.

Anti-nuclear activists therefore need to join the efforts - on the local and national levels - to control all toxic substances and processes, not just radiation and nuclear reactors .... and not only in the natural environment but in the workplace as well. Indeed, some dangerous substances and processes will have to be banned altogether. Methods will have to be developed by which the public can review the various “danger-benefit tradeoffs” for a long list of menaces this country is being told it needs.

For all this to be possible, workable full employment guarantees which consider the kinds of jobs, their products, the processes they use, and the costs in energy, health and dollars, will have to be created. The next round on a national full employment bill will begin early in the spring. Nuclear power foes can help make sure the legislation is responsive to the above requirements; and
they can also lend considerable support to its enactment. Finally, it will be necessary to establish job training and retraining guarantees, along with relocation assistance and employee protection from employer harassment and retaliation.

The anti-nuclear movement has been built by hard-working volunteers. Admittedly, there is only so much that volunteers can do. Involvement in health, safety, employment and alternative energy issues may be attacked as diluting the resources of the movement. But without effort in these realms, anti-nuclear people will be forced to continue battling fellow citizens who may be just as terrified of nuclear power, but who have been convinced they have no other choice if they are to preserve their jobs and families.

It is dumb to allow industry to split one group off against another in such fashion. It is dumb to allow industry to spend its money to create ill-will and then sit back and watch the people knock each other off.

A lesson can be learned from the Clamshell Alliance, the coalition which is organising non-violent occupation of the Seabrook, NH, nuclear reactors construction site. The Clamshell people do not believe in a “we-
they” division of the public. They have no animosity toward the police who arrest them or the Vermont Public Service Company employees who are trying to build the reactors. All are considered neighbors, individuals who might one day be fellow-sufferers - or allies. Clamshell is working with the local fishing community and other interests, and is directly addressing the need for safe, satisfying jobs. Clamshell members are for people and for jobs; therefore, they must oppose nuclear power, which clearly provides limited jobs while offering potential for great destruction.

In a variety of realms, new working relationships are proving to be possible and formidable. The co-operation between the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union and the National Organisation for Women over the Karen Silkwood case has led to an effective coalition and a broadening of both groups. In several states, labor union locals are joining with community groups to fight utility rate increases and work toward municipal takeover of investor-owned utilities. On the national level, coalitions of labor and environmental groups helped win passage of the new Toxic Substances Control Act.

It is critical that people throughout the country trust their own intuition, their knowledge of local and regional conditions, personalities and traditions. Pressures for national legislation, along with litigation and participation in administrative hearings, are necessary. But on the local level, activists should be wary of national panaceas which do not have popular support, which do not have participation from diverse people and regions. They should be leery as well of outside advocates promoting sweeping solutions. It should be noted, for example, that strong impetus to take the California nuclear initiative model into other states came from Los Angeles and Washington DC-based groups. These groups, without consulting those who had direct experience with the California initiative campaign, set out to do major but premature selling jobs. In their zeal to qualify California-type initiatives in as many states as possible (their original goal was not just six state ballots but almost a score), they may have overwhelmed local people, leading them to rely on the “experts” who seemed so experienced, so certain. The initiative sales team came and went, leaving shaky anti-nuclear coalitions which did not have enough time, resources and experience - and perhaps confidence - to give the campaigns appropriate focus and scope. Several organising groups needed assistance from out of state even to qualify their initiatives. This should have provided a warning that they were not prepared to undertake the difficult campaigns to come. After the defeat of Proposition 15, victories were necessary, not just a little more publicity.

In Missouri, a diverse group of people chose to use the initiative process to prohibit power plant construction costs from being included in the utility rate base (for both fossil and nuclear plants). The organisers decided to keep outsiders out. They specifically requested Californians for Nuclear Safeguards, which had been supplying some funds and assistance to the other six initiative states, to keep away. They also did not encourage Ralph Nader, who has become a symbol of national anti-nuclear passion, to come to Missouri. In short, they controlled the selection of the issue, the strategy and the campaign tactics. They won.

Industry must be prevented from dividing and conquering over the issue of nuclear power danger. Therefore, it must be prevented from dividing and conquering over other dangers people are fighting. And so today, a variety of health and economic issues must be addressed and complementary efforts launched on local and national levels for safe energy and full employment.

Failure to assemble the broad coalitions today will make it much more difficult to organise tomorrow for jobs and against recombinant DNA, laser and other sophisticated weaponry, behavior modification, complex industrial chemistry, and future solutions proposed by science and government laboring in the service of American business and industry.
