

F.O. Box 471 Cooper Station  
New York, N.Y. 10003  
December 8, 1979

TO ORGANIZERS, AND ANTINUCLEAR WORK DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed for your information is an exchange of correspondence sent out to branches by the party N.O. on the relationship between the antinuclear power and antinuclear weapons issues. Comrades in the YSA may find this useful for our discussion on antinuke work.

Comradely,

*Agnes Chapa*

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YSA National Office

14 Charles Lane  
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November 6, 1979

Robbie Scherr  
Los Angeles

Dear Robbie,

Your letter to the Militant regarding the relationship between the antinuclear energy and antinuclear weapons issues was referred to me to answer.

Before dealing with the specific tactical question you raise about the workshop at the NOW convention, it would be helpful to summarize the party's general view of this question.

There is no question that there is a big connection between the military and "peaceful" uses of nuclear energy. In the report to the antinuclear workshop at the convention in August (Party Organizer, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 1979) that you refer to, Paul Mailhot points out:

"Atomic energy was developed in order to build a more destructive bomb. Its first use on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 demonstrated to the entire world its horrible power. U.S. imperialism's nuclear arsenal threatens the world with the specter of a holocaust.

"The 'Atoms for Peace' program grew out of the military development of nuclear energy. The government urged giant corporations such as General Electric and Westinghouse to apply the technology already developed for weapons to atomic power for 'peaceful' purposes. The billions of dollars saved from not having to develop this technology plus additional government assistance has made this new industry a highly profitable venture for private enterprise. And it continues to be so today, as the electric utilities make profits on the high costs of nuclear power.

"Of course, the production of nuclear weapons involves the same dangers--on the job and in the environment--as the creation of nuclear energy. You need the mines and the mills, reactors, and waste disposal site in the country is at the Hanford military reservation in Washington state."

We've also observed before that many of the first activists who warned and fought against the dangers of nuclear power came from the "Ban-the-bomb" movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The dangers of radiation from atmospheric testing were widely publicized as this movement grew and expanded its influence. The "Ban-the-bomb" movement subsided in 1963 with the end of atmospheric testing by the U.S. and the USSR; but much of the research and knowledge about the hazards of radiation was utilized by the pioneer activists against nuclear power.

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Today the massive opposition to the hazards of nuclear-fueled electric power plants cannot help but alert growing numbers of people to the dangers of producing, testing, storing, and ultimately using nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons and the plants which manufacture them have been the targets of protests in many areas. For example, people who live downwind from the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons facility near Denver, where all the plutonium triggers for nuclear bombs are made, have recently discovered that they are likely to get cancer in far greater numbers than the rest of the population. This startling fact is having a radicalizing impact. Several large demonstrations at Rocky Flats have been organized in the past couple of years.

The production of nuclear-powered submarines has also generated significant protests as in Seattle against the Trident submarine.

The combination of very deep antiwar sentiment among the American people and the growing knowledge about the lethal dangers of radioactivity and the insurmountable problems of storing nuclear wastes, is generating more and more antinuclear weapons feeling.

We think that when antinuclear activists, unionists, women's rights fighters, etc., link up the energy and weapons issue that it is positive. It is a further step in their radicalization, in developing their anticapitalist consciousness. That's why in the party's propaganda--in the Militant and our election campaigns--we should point to and explain the interrelationship between the two questions.

But as we observed in Paul's report, "while the issues of nuclear power and weapons are linked in many ways, they are also different and distinct." The use of nuclear power to generate electricity poses a whole set of questions related to the energy needs of our society. If we don't use nuclear energy, what is the alternative? This is a key political question posed by shutting down nukes.

Eliminating nuclear weapons, in the minds of the majority of people poses another set of political questions, key among them being, "How will we defend ourselves from foreign aggression?"

There is no question that today there is far greater opposition and willingness to protest nuclear power than nuclear weapons. Demanding "ban the bomb" poses broader questions of imperialist war policy and the nature of workers states. The working class is still at a less developed stage of consciousness around these questions. This unevenness in consciousness, then, should be taken into consideration as we develop our tactics in this movement.

We must also take into account our overall approach.

Our starting point is for the need of the labor movement to throw its force into the antinuclear fight. Winning the most powerful sector of the American working class--the industrial unions--to this fight must continue to be our central goal. The working class has no stake in a nuclear future and it has the power to prevent that future.

We recognize that up to this point the antinuclear movement, for the most part, has developed and organized itself outside the labor movement. But we also know that the big changes taking place in the working class under the combined impact of the ruling class offensive and the radicalization of the late 1960s and 1970s is creating widespread openness to antinuclear views. Especially since the near-disaster at Three Mile Island, there have been increasing signs of this opposition. The big challenge for the antinuclear movement now is to organize an educational campaign in the unions and to involve the labor movement. This is the road to building a really massive and powerful movement that millions will participate in.

It is from this standpoint then that we should consider the gap in consciousness on the antinuclear weapons and power issues.

Our experience has shown us that many unions, including the UMWA, are willing to participate in the antinuclear power struggle, but are not yet ready to take a stand on banning the bomb. And in fact many will not participate if the weapons demand is part of an action. It is sectarian then to make this a dominant part of or a condition to participate in the antinuclear power struggle and cut off excellent opportunities to draw labor into it.

On the local and regional level this has generally not been a tactical problem because most actions have been directed at specific targets--the nearest nuclear power plant, storage dump, re-processing plant, etc. Those protests directed at facilities producing nuclear military material such as the Rocky Flats plant or the Trident nuclear submarine, have, of course, raised the question of nuclear weapons. But even in these instances the threat of the actions have been against the hazards these installations create for the health and safety of people who work there or live nearby.

Then there have been the traditional actions around the August 6-9 period marking the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These actions are usually centered against nuclear weapons. Generally we endorse them and participate in them.

Where this question has been posed most concretely is in plans for the April 26 March on Washington initiated by a coalition of antinuclear organizations and the Mobilization for Survival. We are also actively part of this coalition.

At a coalition meeting in June it was decided that the central theme of the action would be "For a non-nuclear future" and that the demand "Zero nuclear weapons" would be one of the central demands. Our view is that this demand coupled with the narrow approach of many forces in the coalition may be a serious obstacle to organizing an effective action. That's why in Paul's report to the workshop at Oberlin, he observed that, "we don't know what will happen with this action. A lot depends on what happens in the country around the issue of nuclear power between now and April '80." We further stated that, "At this point the April 26 action is not a focus of the party's antinuclear activity."

Since August several important developments have taken place which have an important bearing on our view of April 26.

One is the size, breadth, and militancy of the anti-nuclear protests this fall, most especially the September 23 action of 200,000 in New York City. This was larger than the May 6 march on Washington and more militant.

Another is the increased signs of antinuclear sentiment in the unions. Among these are the appearance of the UAW N.Y.-New Jersey regional head as a speaker at the September 23 action, the call for an educational conference on nukes and energy by District 31 in Chicago, and the resolution adopted by the Region 4 Convention of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union endorsing the April 26 action. They did this in spite of, but knowing about the demand on nuclear weapons.

A third factor is that some important forces in the coalition have indicated that they want to seriously reach out and involve labor in the action.

All of these considerations have led us to take a more aggressive approach towards involving labor and helping to transform the action. How successful we'll be remains to be seen. While it is still our estimation that the antiweapons demand is an obstacle to broadening the April 26 action, we also recognize that only in trying to broaden the action will this be tested and will we be able to challenge the use of the demand on this occasion in so far as it is an obstacle to involving labor. Whether we will formally attempt to remove it or let it recede in importance will be determined in the course of building the action.

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Now, on the tactical question you raise in regard to the workshop at the NOW convention. It's difficult without having been there to know what the best approach would have been.

As I understand it the resolution under discussion involved NOW's policy on the antinuclear question, not as in the case of the April 26 coalition, a demand for a specific, united-front type action.

Bearing this in mind, then, a resolution from the largest women's liberation organization in the country, that linked the antinuclear power and weapons issues together would represent a more powerful political statement.

However, whether it would be advisable to press for that position depends on several considerations including:

- 1) whether or not such a statement would generally reflect accurately a substantial body of opinion in NOW or would simply be the position of a rump group of radicals;

2) whether or not fighting for such a statement would jeopardize any resolution on antinuclear power altogether.

Whatever the discussions in the workshop the resolution that was approved will give a boost to the antinuclear movement.

Comradely,

*Doug Jenness*

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