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Antinuclear Power Protests in the United States

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ANTINUCLEAR POWER PROTESTS IN THE UNITED STATES.

The history of nuclear power in the United States began with the top-secret Manhattan Project (1942–1946), in which the first atomic bomb was produced and used in 1945 against Japan in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to the American Nuclear Society, a nuclear power industry association, the first U.S. city to use nuclear power for electricity was Arco, Idaho, in 1955. As of 2007, the United States had 104 operational nuclear power reactors, one nuclear power reactor under construction, and twenty-eight closed nuclear power reactors. Between 1945, when the world became aware of the destructive power of atomic energy, and today, many people have associated nuclear power with nuclear weapons and consider the abolition of nuclear power a part of the larger project of ending nuclear proliferation and disassembling the current stores of nuclear weapons. Those who are against nuclear power cite two major reasons for their opposition: expense, and danger for humans and the larger environment. Proponents of nuclear power argue that nuclear power is more economical than traditional methods

of producing electricity; opponents point out that the cost of nuclear power has to be figured by considering the expense of building the plant, storing waste, and decommissioning nuclear reactors, and their proponents only state the initial construction cost. Opponents also argue that the cost of building renewable energy sources (such as a windmill farm) is significantly lower than building a nuclear reactor.

The Debate between Proponents and Opponents of Nuclear Power

The arguments in favor of using nuclear power to produce electricity are that it is less expensive than other means of producing electricity and, because the technology is clean and sustainable, it is good for the environment. According to the American Nuclear Society, the current cost to operate nuclear power plants is about the same as operating fossil-fuel plants to produce electricity. Further, they argue that if they were allowed to reuse the byproducts from nuclear power plants, operation of these plants would be so cost-effective that uranium could be mined from the oceans. The industry's arguments for the environmental advantages of nuclear power are that the amount of damage caused by mining uranium is offset by the electricity produced (once again, the comparison is to producing fossil fuel), nuclear power plants do not produce any sulfur or carbon-dioxide emissions, and nuclear power plants are self-contained and have minimal impact on the local environment (as compared to hydroelectric power). One of the most surprising advocates of nuclear power is Patrick Moore, a founder of Greenpeace. Moore argues that nuclear power is the key to providing sufficient electricity, minimizing environmental harm, and stopping global warming.

Opponents of nuclear power challenge each of the arguments offered in favor of it. First, the cost of producing nuclear fuel has to consider the entire life cycle of a nuclear power plant (building, operating, and decommissioning). The cost comparison used by proponents is to fossil fuel, which is also problematic for opponents since they advocate alternatives to both fossil fuel and nuclear power, such as solar or wind power. A nuclear power plant may not produce greenhouse emissions, but that does not take into account emissions produced in mining uranium, transporting uranium, building, servicing, and decommissioning nuclear power plants. The safety of nuclear power plants is highly contested since the potential for contamination

begins when the uranium is mined, continues during the production of electricity, and further continues when waste from the process must be stored. The American Nuclear Society admits on its Web site that nuclear power plants produce a measurable increase in radiation around the power plant, but they argue that evidence of adverse health effects for exposure to low-level radiation does not exist. (American Nuclear Society 2001). Opponents of nuclear power assert that when human and environmental health is at stake, the burden of proof ought to be on the nuclear industry rather than on those exposed to radiation. The danger of radiation comes from the planned lifecycle of a power plant, but also from accidents within the plant and the possibility of deliberate targeting by enemies. Directly linked to opponents' concerns about the dangers of radiation, they point out the close link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons. Once a country or group has the technology to produce nuclear energy, the technology to produce nuclear weapons is a short step, and indeed this step has sometimes been taken.

Antinuclear Protests

The concerns about nuclear power date back to the first use of nuclear weapons in 1945. The anti-nuclear movement gained prominence in the 1970s and helped to close nuclear power plants as well as to curtail new nuclear power plant construction from the 1970s into the early twenty-first century. The most influential anti-nuclear protest happened in Seabrook, New Hampshire in April 1977. In 1976, the small town of Seabrook, New Hampshire was the proposed site of a nuclear power facility. The people of the town voted against this facility on three separate occasions to no avail. In order to protect their town against this power plant, the people formed the Clamshell Alliance, which proceeded to train people in nonviolent tactics in order to protest against the construction of a nuclear power plant. On April 30, 1977 the Clamshell Alliance held a protest to shut down construction of the Seabrook power plant. Approximately 2,000 people took part in the protest, and 1,414 were arrested and held in five National Guard armories. Governor Meldrim Thomson and New Hampshire Attorney General David Souter decided to send a message to the protestors by demanding that the out-of-state protestors post bail in order to be released. Both in-state and out-of-state protestors refused to do so. During all of the negotiations between protestors and the governor, media from around the world covered the

protest, the legal battles, and the debates about nuclear power. On 13 May 1977, the 550 protestors still being detained were released without bail. The entire protest happened without violence and succeeded in raising international awareness about the dangers of nuclear power plants.

The other highly influential antinuclear power organization was the Abalone Alliance, which organized against the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant near San Luis Obispo, California. The group formed in May 1977, and they used nonviolent civil disobedience to draw attention to flaws in the design and operation of the nuclear power plant, particularly the danger of building a plant near a fault line that could generate a powerful earthquake. The group's most successful protest occurred during a two-week period beginning on September 10, 1981. During the two weeks of nonviolent civil disobedience, 1,960 protestors were arrested as they blocked plant employees from going to work. The protest ended when the Nuclear Regulatory Commission revoked Pacific Gas and Electric's operating license for Diablo Canyon when they discovered that part of the reactor was improperly installed. Although Diablo Canyon received its operating license in 1984, public sentiment against nuclear power plants was strong enough that PG&E announced that they would not attempt to build any new nuclear power plants.

The success of the antinuclear power movement has two primary sources: nonviolent civil disobedience and nuclear power plant accidents. First, the anti-nuclear power movement succeeded in garnering national and international attention through protests, arrests, and literature. They raised people's awareness of the dangers of nuclear power from the moment it is mined through the decommissioning of nuclear power plants. Second, an accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania verified that the dangers of nuclear power plants had not been exaggerated by the anti-nuclear power movement. On March 28, 1979, an accident at Three Mile Island released radiation into the environment and brought with it fears of a complete meltdown at the plant. The accident happened at a crucial time during the debates about the safety and effectiveness of nuclear power. Two years before the Three Mile Island accident the Clamshell Alliance succeeded in halting construction at Seabrook, and two years after the accident the Abalone Alliance refocused the attention of the American people on the dangers of nuclear power. The combination of raising awareness, an actual disaster, and renewed focus

succeeded in halting new construction of nuclear power plants in the United States.

[See also Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; Ecology and Environment; Greenpeace; International Atomic Energy Agency; Nonviolence, Theory and Practice of; and Sustainable Environmental Behavior.]

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ANTIWAR STRIKES, HISTORY OF. Much contemporary antiwar sentiment can be traced to the nineteenth-century anti-imperialist struggles and involves the labor movements, out of which the use of "strikes" as a weapon emerged from the armory of peace and antimilitarist movements, becoming an often effective mode of activism. While it is not always possible to disentangle antiwar strikes from other types of strikes; for many participants, opposition to war is fundamentally related to class struggles, revolutionary protests, women's suffrage, and racial justice.

During the U.S. Civil War, there were several draft riots in the northern states, where the wealthy could afford exemption, and the poor and working classes, with mixed loyalties, were the majority of those drafted to fight America's costliest war. On 13 July 1863, draft resisters set off four days of violence in New York City. Before the Civil War ended, soldiers and women again rioted and protested the increasing fiscal and social