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TO ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The attached report by Arnold Weissberg on the Critical Mass conference should be shared with comrades involved in antinuclear work.

Information about activities around the Karen Silkwood week in November should be sent to The Militant.

Comradely,


Doug Jenness
National Office

REPORT ON CRITICAL MASS CONFERENCE

by Arnold Weissberg, October 16, 1978

About 750 people turned out for the Critical Mass 78 conference in Washington D.C., October 6-8. Critical Mass is a Ralph Nader organization, started a couple of years ago, and it publishes a monthly newsletter called, Critical Mass. The head of Critical Mass, Richard Pollack, is an authoritative figure in the anti-nuclear movement. Pollack was a guest speaker at last spring's regional no-nukes conference in Tallahassee, Florida, and was a "resource person" at the Louisville conference in August.

This was the moderate wing of the movement. The conference was dominated by environmental lawyers, lobbyists, would-be congressional aides, past congressional aides, scientists, and "courtroom activists" from the kinds of groups that spend years litigating against nuclear plants. Most of them are foundation funded. There was almost no overlap that I noticed from the Mobilization for Survival conference in Des Moines, but there was a significant representation from the various alliances that met at Louisville. The registration fee was \$15.

It was an educational gathering rather than an action conference. There were several events of interest to us.

We went assuming most of the conference would be one or another form of drumbeating for Jerry Brown for president. While there was a good deal of that, a surprise speaker was Senator Edward Kennedy. Kennedy was warmly received. Most of what he said was obscure, but seemed to deal with the relation of jobs and energy. He's on some committee that held hearings on alternative energy sources and employment.

Tom Hayden spoke during the last session, on Sunday afternoon, as part of a panel called "How Bright is Your Solar Future?" Hayden has been appointed by Brown to represent him on various solar energy boards, one in California and one for the western states. Hayden, of course, has endorsed Brown's reelection bid.

Hayden gave his warm approval to Brown's solar energy policies, and took Carter to task for the inadequacies of his solar policies. He concluded by declaring that his choice in the 1980 presidential race would hinge on the solar question. No one in the room missed his meaning--i.e., he would back Brown--and he got a very big hand.

While Brown is apparently the present favorite among antinuke activists who relate to the Democratic Party, Kennedy's presence suggests that the question is far from settled, and that Kennedy is contending for support from this milieu. I think it was of some significance that Nader opened every session. Nader, who has never endorsed a candidate, apparently is the peacemaker among the various Democratic Party factions, and the one they all appear to trust.

Also very interesting was the brief workshop called "Organizing Demonstrations." The panelists were Sam Lovejoy, Clamshell Alliance; Brett Bursey, Palmetto Alliance; Cathy Wolff, Clamshell Alliance; and Pam Solo, Rocky Flats Action Group.

Lovejoy argued that direct action--i.e., civil disobedience--could "resolve" the nuclear question. He said the movement should first demand that the government or corporations stop nuclear power, and if they won't, "we" can solve it. The clear implication was that occupying the site of a nuke is the way to stop nukes. Lovejoy has said this before, and it was consistent with what I know of his ideas.

Bursey, who spoke next, has been one of the people for whom civil disobedience was not merely a tactic or strategy, but a way of life. But he's changed his view. Bursey now says that CD has to be used like a scalpel, and that it "may not work as a military tactic" in stopping a particular facility--by which he meant precisely the opposite of Lovejoy. He added that the movement needed a "long-term vision" and that every action shouldn't be seen as a last-ditch attempt to shut a nuke down.

Wolff echoed this position. She expressed amazement at the views of many antinuke activists, who, she said, actually thought that by participating in some kind of protest on the site of a nuke, they were actually stopping construction. CD, she said, was not the "primary way of organizing or changing things." She didn't offer any alternative.

Also of interest was Pam Solo's comment that "over attention to process" (by which she meant the consensus method of conducting meetings) too often gets in the way of accomplishing tasks.

In the question period, I asked Lovejoy, Bursey and Wolff to clarify what I perceived as a difference in their views on the role and power of CD. Lovejoy immediately backed off from the position he's taken before--that a site occupation can shut down a nuke, that it's the only way to shut down a nuke. He said he had no differences with Bursey and Wolff. Solo, incidentally, took the best view of CD, asserting that it was just one of many tactics.

This discussion is an important advance. The main catalyst was last June's Seabrook protest, which attracted 20,000 people, and established that a genuinely massive movement can be built. Since Seabrook, many groups have engaged in both legal and illegal actions.

A final brief note: Several speakers during the course of the conference went out of their way to point to the dangers of nuclear weapons. All of these detours were unexpected by me. They did not come from pacifists or political types. For example, Henry Kendall, head of the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), which, as far as I know, has said little or nothing about nuclear weapons, made a point of prefacing his remarks on nuclear power by explaining how dangerous to the future of humanity nuclear weapons were, adding that UCS was going to begin a campaign against them. This announcement was greeted by warm applause. It was not an isolated case.

We had minimal participation, smaller than we should have. In addition to myself, Jean Savage, New York and Jana Pellusch, Houston attended. We sold eleven Militants.

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