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An Appeal to the Reason of the American People

1954

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Published as an anonymous leaflet by *Contemporary Issues*, Bookchin claims credit for it in an interview published in *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left* (AK Press, 1999): "I was working with this group, helping it produce *Contemporary Issues* after 1948. And in 1954, when the hydrogen bomb was tested somewhere out on the Bikini atoll, it produced worldwide concern, in part because two Japanese fishermen who were dusted by fallout died, and others became ill. I wrote a fiery leaflet called 'Stop the Bomb,' and our group gave out about 20,000 copies in New York. We also sent copies to Japan, where the largest Japanese daily, with a circulation of nine million readers, translated the leaflet and published it on page three."

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# Stop the Bomb

An Appeal to the Reason of the American People

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THE RECENT HYDROGEN BOMB EXPLOSIONS in the Marshall Islands' area comprise a decisive juncture in human history: Either the explosions must be stopped at once or mankind faces nearly certain doom. This last danger does not come from a distant atomic war between the shaky Russian Slave Empire and the United States. By far a more immediate threat is the fact that explosions in the Marshall Islands' area are rendering large parts of our marine food supply radioactive and unhealthful, sending radioactive particles by air and ocean currents to all parts of the world, polluting the Pacific Ocean, and thereby producing incalculable effects on delicate natural balances indispensable to life itself. While a war in the long unforeseeable future may result in the destruction of cities and whole populations, the poisoning of the land, ocean and atmosphere *is occurring here and now*. Long before nations meet in battle with all the horrors of modern weapons, the air and soil, the water and food supply of the world, indeed, the health of mankind and all living things may be undermined irreparably by "mere" experiments. The gravity of this threat can hardly be overestimated. If the present explosions in the

Pacific Ocean are continued or graduated further in intensity, they may simply make the earth uninhabitable for life.

Admiral Strauss and the Atomic Energy Commission deny this—but what are the known facts? Although the Strauss Report of March 31<sup>st</sup> tells us nothing about the contemplated and actual “hazard area” of the March 1<sup>st</sup> bomb, it claims that the 23 Japanese fishermen on the Fortunate Dragon “must have been well within the danger area,” and the 264 American observers and natives subjected to radiation were “well within the area of the fallout.” If we judge solely by the criteria employed by Strauss, this means that the bomb could produce severe radiation effects at least 80 miles away from the center of the explosion, that the “hazard area” was over 20,000 square miles—a region about four times the size of Connecticut. That the area was even larger is proved by American and native casualties who were more than 100 miles away, making the “fallout area” about the size of a huge state like Maine. For its April explosion, the Atomic Energy Commission appears to have decided to fix the hazard area at 445,000 square miles. It is enough of a commentary on the size of the April bomb that *this zone will comprise the number of square miles that enter into all the Atlantic seaboard states of the United States—from New England to Florida!*

In fact *none* of the laconic accounts, plans, estimates and reports supplied for public consumption by the Atomic Energy Commission and Admiral Strauss are trustworthy. This agency lavishly spends the money of American taxpayers and juggles their lives behind a veil of super-secrecy. It even refuses to supply the people of the United States with facts that are admittedly possessed by the Russians and that are readily given to the English people by the British government. There is no way of directly checking the veracity of AEC statements and no clear means of determining whether secrecy laws are used in the interests of “national security” or for promoting lies—except by apparent contradictions between AEC reports

and those of outspoken observers. If these contradictions are considered, absolutely no doubt remains that the Commission treats the people of the United States as though they were a bunch of gibbering idiots. The most obvious, common sense facts have a way of becoming transformed by AEC spokesmen into the most arrant nonsense.

*Time Magazine*, for instance, notes that American casualties in the March 1<sup>st</sup> explosion were exposed to “radiation ... ten times greater than scientists deem safe ...” Without denying the *Time* report, Admiral Strauss has the unabashed temerity to inform the American people that the victims “could be returned to duty, but [!] are still being kept on Kwajalein for the benefit of further observation.” This is an attempt to convey the impression that the casualties are unharmed and their lives are perfectly safe. A Marine corporal on Kwajalein, writing to his mother about the explosion, says that casualties of the March 1<sup>st</sup> blast “were suffering form various burns.” The AEC say: “There were no burns.” Admiral Strauss later confines his statement to: “None of the twenty-eight weather personnel [Americans] have burns.” *If* this is true, what about the natives involved? “The 236 natives also appeared [!] to me [!] to be well and happy,” says Strauss. The studied omissions and contradictions cry out for clarification. Who lied in the matter of burns—the corporal or the Commissioner? And how can radiation “ten times greater than scientists deem safe” be reconciled with Strauss’ claims and an earlier AEC statement that “all are reported [by whom?] well”? If it took modern science years of experimentation to determine a hazardous dosage of atomic radiation, it seems to require the subtle brain of Strauss a few minutes to establish entirely new standards for the American people.

Similarly, nearly every report on the condition of the Japanese fishermen of the Fortunate Dragon contradicts the medical prognoses of United States spokesmen. On the one hand, Dr. John J. Morton, director of the U.S. Atom Bomb

Casualty Commission, visited the injured fishermen and declared that the victims “will recover completely in about a month.” On the other hand, the chief doctor treating the fishermen is reported by the press to have declared that the victims will suffer from radiation for twenty years, and two or three of the men will probably die. Even this conclusion reads like a gross underestimation of the facts. As early as March 17<sup>th</sup>, the *New York Times* reported that the radioactive count of fish on the Fortunate Dragon was “sufficient to be fatal to any person who remained for eight hours within thirty yards of the contaminated fish.” In the course of his report, Strauss did not try to cudgel with the problem of how fishermen who lived on a small trawler for about fourteen days with radioactive fish could avoid remaining within the prescribed eight hours and thirty yards of a fatal dosage.

In fact, Strauss conveniently “forgets” to tell us many things. He “forgets” to tell us, for example, that although another fishing vessel, the Myojin Maru, was 780 miles away from the blast site, it registered Geiger count readings described as “above the danger point” by an *Associated Press* dispatch of March 27<sup>th</sup>. As if to anticipate this fact, the worthy Admiral hints at a possible change in wind direction. Could it be that the bomb creates its own atmospheric conditions, rendering weather and fallout predictions nearly meaningless? The *New York Times* prints a report from one American observer of the explosion to the effect that the bomb “set off a local wind storm that might have upset weather forecasts that had been correct earlier,” and the Marine corporal, cited above, writes that the explosion “was followed by a very high wind.”

Finally, Strauss tells us that there has only been a “small increase” of radioactivity in “some localities within the continental United States.” He insists that “this is far below the levels which could be harmful in any way to human beings, animals or crops.” He does not tell us that this increase in radiation reached as far eastward as New York City, and that the

ster has become ... Let every one of us be heard. The time is now.”

Indeed, the time is now! Every human being in the United States owes it to himself once and for all to pause in the bustle of daily life, look clearly at the danger ahead, and act within his legal means to prevent this H-bomb insanity from bringing all his plans, efforts and aspirations to a catastrophic end. A widespread public protest must be heard against any further explosions, against horrible poison gases that can kill millions of people in a few minutes, against ever more devastating means of destruction. The American people must write to men like Mumford and Kirk, and all individuals who have taken a stand against the “testing” and development of the bomb. They must solidarize themselves with every voice that speaks out for sanity and urge these voices forward. All socially-responsible people must write to their legislators (who are dozing, as usual, in their comfortable seats on Capitol Hill) and let them know that no more bombs should be exploded and no more genocidal weapons should be developed. Public meetings must be held to this effect, in which men and women of good will, irrespective of political beliefs and affiliations, should participate. Whoever receives this leaflet should show it to his friends and neighbors, and help distribute it as widely as possible. *Contemporary Issues* is willing to participate in this protest and do whatever it can to coordinate the efforts of individuals who communicate with it.

humanity to ashes. There is no law, no police agency and no sanctimonious institution higher than the law of life itself.

The denunciations of the experiments have already reached the level of open demonstrations in many parts of the world. In Japan, a stormy sentiment for immediate cessation of the tests has unified both press and public; in India, Nehru has personally demanded an end to the explosions; in Britain, if not all of Europe, the newspapers and population are virtually of one opinion that the experiments be stopped at once. The French Foreign Minister has been compelled by popular feeling to describe the experimenters as “sorcerer’s apprentices, who often unloose forces over which they have no control.” These nations and people rightly emphasize that by exploding the bomb over vast areas of the Pacific Ocean we are impinging on their simple right to the freedom of the seas—a liberty which American historians insist was the cause that brought the United States into two major wars. Finally, many Americans have begun to speak out against further experiments. According to one newspaper editor on the West Coast, “the general trend of letters his paper was receiving favored calling off future hydrogen bomb tests in the Pacific” (*New York Times*, April 4<sup>th</sup>). Lewis Mumford, in a letter to the *Times*, warns that “retaliation is not protection; that total extermination of both sides is not victory; that a constant state of morbid fear, suspicion and hatred is not security; that, in short, what seems like unlimited power has become impotence.” And in a letter to the same paper, Professor H. David Kirk strongly criticizes the attitude of the *Times* on the test and urges the American people to speak up against the explosions. “At Nuremberg we judged war criminals on the basis of personal responsibility for acts of brutality committed while under higher orders,” observes Mr. Kirk. “What about our own political leaders who in the face of international questioning and protests pay no heed but insist that the experimentation must go on? ... The time has clearly come for ordinary citizens to see how big this [H.-bomb] mon-

Japanese fishermen on the Fortunate Dragon were exposed to radioactive strontium isotopes which have a half-life of twenty-five years! Will these isotopes, Mr. Commissioner, “decrease rapidly after the tests”? Or have they been scattered throughout the world by air and ocean currents? *How, amidst all these qualifications, contradictions and shrewd omissions, can we trust you to tell us the truth?*

It is useless to demand that the AEC tell us anything as long as we do not have the means for tearing away the veil of secrecy that surrounds the Commission’s activities. Fortunately, other atomic scientists have been more outspoken about the risks involved. Dr. Eugene I. Rabinowitch of the University of Illinois frankly warns: “Radiation from a thermonuclear reaction ..., if a large number were set off, can alter the genes of all living things within its reach. And if cobalt is added [as the AEC seems intent on doing!] to the reactor, the radiation is prolonged.” An *International News Service* Science Writer reports: “Evidence that Japanese survivors of the first atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki may develop deadly cancers in their old age was disclosed by a top cancer specialist ... Similar effects, the scientist indicated, conceivably could appear in the future in the Japanese fishermen recently showered with ashes from this month’s hydrogen bomb explosion.” The scientist, Dr. Jacob Furth of the Children’s Cancer Research Center in Boston, based his conclusions on a number of striking facts. While working at the Atomic Energy Commission’s laboratories at Oak Ridge, Dr. Furth found that 6,000 adolescent mice exposed to the Bikini blast “developed tremendous tumors of the pituitary gland in their old age.” The report continues that the “mouse studies already have found a grim parallel in some of the biological changes occurring in surviving men and women at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.” The mice developed cancer of the blood (leukemia) “—and Dr. Furth said some reports show the incidence of leukemia in the two Japanese cities has been seven times normal since the bomb was dropped.”

The lunatics who are devising the bomb haven't the faintest idea of its power and effects! They have miscalculated on the hydrogen bomb everywhere along the way! In flat contradiction to what Strauss had to say, Rep. Chet Holifield (who witnessed the March 1<sup>st</sup> explosion and apparently is familiar with the facts) speaks of it as "so far beyond what was predicted that you might say it was out of control." This statement was even confirmed by the great golfer in the White House before the suave Admiral arrived from the Pacific to obscure the dangers involved. The British *Manchester Guardian*, a responsible and well-informed source, expressed "doubts" as to whether any further experiments in the Pacific should be continued. According to a *Reuters'* Dispatch: "It said flatly that this time American scientists would be moving into the realm of the unknown." It has even been suggested that thermonuclear blasts might well set off chain-reactions in the earth's crust. But at any rate, as one periodical put it, we seem to have reached "a frontier beyond which pure theory ceases to be a reliable guide."

The domestic press has been only too glad to seize upon Strauss' report and justify the explosions. Even before the report was issued, the *New York Times* rebuked the *Manchester Guardian* by urging that it "is the business of science to enter the unknown. A score of men were killed in early attempts to fly. The history of Arctic exploration is in part a history of death from cold and starvation. But the aeroplane was nevertheless invented and the North Pole was reached." Alas, Messrs. Sulzberger, Adler and Nelson of the *New York Times* Incorporated, this is one piece of print that does not fit! The men who tried to fly or conquer the Arctic wastes took their own lives in their hands—not ours! Their entry into the "unknown" threatened nobody but themselves. As Yamamoto, a Japanese fisherman who was "Bikinied," so eloquently put it: "If we had known we wouldn't have been there." By what mandate, then, have you, and the Truman and Eisenhower administra-

tion, abetted by Strauss and the doubtful scientific talents of Dr. Edward Teller brought mankind to the brink of a catastrophe? By what right do you toy with billions of lives? Who has endowed you with the privilege of effacing civilization and destroying human existence on earth? You are perfectly welcome, gentlemen, to blow yourselves to kingdom come if you so choose. If a horror like the hydrogen bomb happens to mark one of those scientific frontiers you wish to colonize, by all means take your cursed bomb and yourselves, with all your cursed "scientists," generals and businessmen off to Saturn and blow away on the "unknowns" to your hearts' content. But we, the American people, prefer to remain alive! We don't prefer to go with you! If you decide to stay on *this* planet, kindly let us and the rest of the world—whose waters and air are also being invaded by radioactive poison—decide what frontiers *we* want to explore!

You tell us a lot about military "deterrents" to war. But what, pray, is the sense behind a military "deterrent" which, if used, will destroy the United States as well as Russia? And if, as you suggest, the weapon will thus "deter" us as well as the Russians, why continue with insane explosions that may simply poison all life on the planet unless both you and the Russians intend to tear down the whole fabric of human civilization one fine day rather than give up your social interests and obsolete way of life? These questions have thrown the fear of a catastrophe into the hearts of the entire world. Yet despite world-wide protests and denunciations, the AEC went ahead on March 26<sup>th</sup> and exploded another bomb. This outrageous *fait accompli* exhibits a savage, authoritarian indifference to public feeling and opinion. By continuing the explosions against the will of mankind and increasing the power of the bomb, the Eisenhowers, Strausses, Tellers and Company are placing themselves outside the law of society. No self-enclosed government agency has the right to reduce