Some Thoughts about the Path to Abolition of Nuclear Weapons and Strategies for Organizing in the United States

by Andrew M. Lichterman
April 1999

WESTERN STATES LEGAL FOUNDATION
1504 Franklin St. Suite 202
Oakland, California USA, 94612
+1 (510) 839-5877 wslf@earthlink.net

Introduction

Western States Legal Foundation (WSLF) is a non-profit, public interest organization which monitors, analyzes, and challenges U.S. nuclear weapons programs and policies, with a focus on the Lawrence Livermore, Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories and the Nevada Test Site. WSLF seeks to abolish nuclear weapons, compel open public environmental review of nuclear technologies, and ensure appropriate management of nuclear waste. Grounded in both international and environmental law, the principle guiding our activities is democratization of decisionmaking affecting nuclear weapons and related nuclear technologies. WSLF's legal, technical and organizing activities support the growth of nonviolent public participation in shaping domestic and global nuclear policy. WSLF is a founding member of the Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons.

Since 1982, WSLF has played a leading role in exposing threats to peace and the environment posed by research, testing, production, deployment and threatened use of nuclear weapons. WSLF was one of the first organizations to recognize that the Stockpile Stewardship program represented an ambitious effort to rebuild and modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, with the aim of maintaining large arsenals for decades to come while retaining the capacity to design and deploy nuclear weapons with new military capabilities. Our work in documenting the details of these programs and analyzing their implications for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty regimes has made a significant contribution to the international debate over the role these treaty regimes can and should play in the path to abolition of nuclear weapons.

WSLF is an organization which brings together an unusual combination of skills and values. Growing out of the nonviolent direct-action anti-nuclear movement of the 1970's and 1980's, our core staff and board members have worked closely together for over 15 years. WSLF is small and locally-based, with extensive international connections. Our approach is fact-based and principled, rooted in a deeply-held commitment to social transformation through nonviolence and democratic, non-hierarchical decision-making. In the context of the "big picture," we seek to understand the links between issues. For all of these reasons WSLF has had a long-standing interest in bringing together people and perspectives that ordinarily do not meet.

At present, prospects for nuclear disarmament seem to be shifting rapidly into reverse. In the United States, the abolition movement is weak and fragmented. Many people of good will are acting on outdated information and assumptions. And as the Cold War recedes into history, it is becoming increasingly difficult to come to grips with current nuclear realities. At WSLF we believe that it's imperative to re-examine assumptions, strategies and approaches to eliminating nuclear weapons. To encourage this new dialogue, we are introducing the WSLF Working Papers. Our purpose is to promote discussion of where we should be going, what's working and what's not. The views expressed are those of the authors. We welcome your comments and responses.

-- Jacqueline Cabasso, Executive Director, April 27, 1999

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PATH TO ABOLITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIZING IN THE UNITED STATES

Andrew M. Lichterman[1]

What follows are some thoughts about the current state of efforts in the United States to abolish nuclear weapons, and where we should go from here. This is not a proposal for a campaign, but rather some ideas about the kind of social movement we will need to make abolition possible. Some of the areas identified for thought and action at the end of the piece, I believe, might be worth considering as elements of a campaign.

My main point, in brief, is that we are losing, losing badly, and that it is time for a reappraisal of the approaches and strategies which have predominated in anti-nuclear work in the United States in recent years. I believe that abolition will not come quickly, and it will not be achieved through conventional interest group pressure techniques applied in national political forums. Rather, abolition will not be achievable except as part of broader and deeper social change, and we must come to understand how our work is related to other efforts to bring about the kind of transformation which could make abolition of nuclear weapons possible.

I begin with an overview of our current circumstances and of the general direction I believe our work should take. Next comes a discussion of the problems I see with some of the prevalent current strategies in nuclear weapons work. In the latter part of the piece I suggest some examples of approaches and initiatives which might help build the social movement we need.

For the most part, these ideas are not new. There are many people who already are working hard to make real one or another piece of the still-fragmentary vision set out here. But I feel that it is worthwhile now to try to pull some of these ideas together, because the perspective reflected here is fragile and marginal in a society dominated by enormous organizations and concentrated wealth, and may well be drowned out if the larger institutions which do work against nuclear weapons continue to avoid discussion of broader social change, while pursuing a political "center" in which fewer and fewer aspects of the social forces which drive the quest for military dominance can be questioned.

Some elements of our current predicament

> Peace workshop stresses need for new strategies
> By Beena Sarwar
>
> LAHORE, Dec 20 (IPS): "Peace has been brought onto the world agenda, and a movement is

---

[1] Andrew Lichterman is an attorney with the Western States Legal Foundation. He can be reached at alichterman@worldnet.att.net

being created and developed in South Asia, but we must not repeat the mistakes of the European peace movement," vehemently commented eminent scholar Eqbal Ahmed. "It was rotten. It was ethno-centric, nuko-centric, phobo-centric (creating fear rather than understanding), techno-centric (concerned with the technology rather than causes), Oxo-centric. "It failed to link up with the European and American working class, with issues of race and poverty. And lastly, it never talked of Israel. We cannot, we must not, repeat these mistakes. We must show people that their bread is linked with the bomb."

For half a century, the Cold War was invoked to justify both enormous, constantly modernizing superpower militaries and international arms sales to their allies and clients. In the post-Cold War world, we cannot ignore the fact that these enormous armed bureaucracies and their industrial suppliers continue to pursue their own interests: to constantly produce huge quantities of ever more technologically sophisticated weapons. These interests are not the same as those of the vast majority of the people on the planet. For this to continue, these same interests must persuade the rest of us that there is a new justification for expending vast resources, in a world full of unaddressed ecological crises and starving, sick, and undereducated people, on more and better weapons.

The picture they are painting for us is one of a world of demonized “rogue states” who are at every moment apt to act violently and unpredictably. Against this is counterposed a regime of great powers, at least one of which claims the right to act unilaterally virtually anywhere on the globe to perceived threats to “security.” The “dangerousness” of the so-called “rogue states” is sustained and intensified by high technology international arms sales and technology transfers, made both more possible and, to the arms makers, more necessary by the end of the limitless superpower arms demands of the Cold War.

This never ending, multilateral arms race is driven by decisions and actions which are not conspiratorial, but structural. They are expressed in the everyday bureaucratic inertia of government officials keeping budget lines alive, of corporate sales forces and lobbyists angling for the next lucrative round of guaranteed-profit contracts. But it is also apparent that these military institutions are able to command an enormous share of the talent and treasure of the world’s most powerful nations because they serve other interests. It requires little insight to recognize that military force is most likely to be deployed by the United States where it maintains the access of trans-national corporations to raw materials and to markets under conditions which assure a concentration of riches and power unparalleled in human history for a fraction of a percent of the population of the planet.

Many people in the United States act as if they want to get rid of nuclear weapons without changing any of this– and seem to believe that this is possible. But abolition of nuclear weapons most likely will not be possible unless accompanied by very substantial changes in the way that the United States government uses military force, and in its relationship with the large, concentrated economic entities whose interests are served by U.S. foreign and military policy. In the end, this will most likely also require substantial changes in the distribution of power and wealth within the United States itself.

The abolition movement does not have to solve all of these problems before meaningful work on abolition is possible. Such mechanical notions of sequential cause and effect do not reflect the interconnectedness of social reality, and also overestimate the extent to which we can comprehend the flow of history from our place within it. And if nuclear weapons are not an aberration, but an expression of very fundamental structures in our society and of the intentions of groups of people who hold much of the planet's wealth and wield overwhelming influence over most of its military power, they are part of a system which must be changed in many aspects simultaneously for abolition to become possible.

We do not have to have a fully worked out, coherent position on these issues on which all of us can agree. Such agreement in a fragmented and fragmentary movement is most likely impossible. Further, many of us have experienced both the dangers of seeking a forced and premature world view which serves as both litmus test and blueprint, and the strength and flexibility of social movements which instead bring together a variety of perspectives in a common struggle. But if we are to have a movement which can succeed, I believe that we must have a shared belief that these fundamental issues are relevant, and should play a central role in determining how we do our work.

This does not mean that those of us who have chosen nuclear weapons as a main focus of our work should simultaneously organize and bring political pressure to bear on everything which we identify as root causes of the global inequality, both economic and technological, of which nuclear weapons are an expression and which they help to sustain. Rather, it suggests we should build an open-textured movement, that we should be looking always outwards, seeking both to understand and to make clear to others the connections with other injustices, other oppressions affecting those with whom we must make common cause if we are to gather sufficient social power to be truly effective.

Nuclear weapons are both a preeminent example and a symbol of much of what is wrong with the current order of things. Through studying, discussing, and organizing around the way nuclear weapons are connected to other social ills and injustices, from local ecological devastation and a culture of violence which stretches from the state to the street to global inequality, we can deepen our own understanding of what must be done, as well as the understanding of those we hope to persuade. We then open up the possibility that we will become part of a larger movement which can make the changes which could truly make abolition possible. This movement already is struggling to be born in a million places, around a million particular conflicts, each an expression of the terrible predicament our species has locked itself into, endlessly turning our most highly trained individuals and our most feverish energies to perfecting the means of annihilation as millions starve, while turning our faces from the continuing devastation of the planet we all depend on.

At present, the possibility of a broad-based social movement, with abolition of nuclear weapons as an integral part, seems unlikely. Yet the main alternative now being pursued in the United States– attempting to convince government officials by conventional forms of interest-

group pressure, at a historical moment characterized by unprecedented disparities in wealth, virtually complete domination of the electoral process by money, a very low level of political participation in the general population, and a formal political realm which appears to have been reduced to a spectacle largely disconnected from the arenas where actual political power is exercised and decisions are made, seems more unrealistic still.

At best, we must expect that the road to abolition to be both long and difficult. Does this mean that an idea like "Abolition 2000" and the call for a time-bound framework for abolition is the wrong approach? No. For it is precisely the sense of urgency, concretely formulated, which distinguishes us from the endless vague expressions of good intentions from those who actually have every intention of keeping nuclear weapons so long as they find them useful (and the dominant factions in the United States do find them useful, and are likely to continue to find them useful, even if not in rubble-bouncing numbers and large yields, unless they are replaced by something which allows certain kinds of power to be deployed even more effectively). It is not really central to our task to work out the precise sequence of steps or the timing of the path to abolition. That is not our role, and I believe neither will present insuperable problems once the conditions and the will necessary for abolition exist. Our task is to do our part to create the conditions and the will.

Understanding the obstacles

1) We must identify the people and organizations who want to retain nuclear weapons, and the reasons they want them.

We cannot form effective strategies to abolish nuclear weapons without first identifying those people and organizations who want to keep nuclear weapons, and the reasons they want them. We often argue too unreflectively that nuclear weapons are "useless," risking the possibility that a new state of affairs in which dominant interests find new uses for nuclear weapons– and for new kinds of nuclear weapons– will leave us behind. The debate about first use in NATO, for example, is no longer really about first use in response to a conventional attack on Europe, it is about threat or use of nuclear weapons against possessors of other weapons of mass destruction, most likely relatively small powers without nuclear weapons of their own. And in the United States we see a dual-track strategy of propaganda and technological development to legitimize and make more feasible the use of nuclear weapons, perhaps preemptively, against states or even non-state actors claimed to have weapons of mass destruction. The propaganda campaign strives to equate chemical and biological weapons with nuclear weapons in the public mind and to create a heightened sense of threat, while testing both international and domestic response to unilateral preemptive strikes using less provocative "conventional" high-tech weaponry; the technology development seeks to refine both nuclear weapons effects knowledge and the weapons themselves so that they might be used effectively with "acceptable collateral damage."

Some of these purposes may be served by other kinds of high technology weapons, for example increasingly accurate conventional bombs and missiles delivered by stealth aircraft, aided by space-based sensing, and sophisticated information systems. But before we make "pragmatic" arguments that we don't "need" nuclear weapons because our "national security" can be protected by these other technologies, we must consider whether we share the same vision of national security with those who wish to develop and use those "conventional" weapons. We must also consider carefully whether these arguments are as practical as they seem, for by making them outside the context of a broader critique we are acceding both to the continued existence of an enormous military and supporting industrial establishment which has great political power in itself, within which the everyday institutional drivers– pork, horse-trades, and budget line maintenance– tend to generate support for nuclear weapons programs even from institutional players who do not see them as particularly "useful," and to the purposes which that huge military establishment now serves.

Against this background, we must ask ourselves if the strategies typically represented as "practical"-- variations on the theme of limited campaigns targeted at elite decision making forums, which accept existing definitions of relevant questions, which do not link the existence of nuclear weapons to the purposes for which military force is deployed by nuclear weapons states, and which in some instances do not even mention abolition of nuclear weapons– are really paths to abolition, or paths to a world in which nuclear weapons are rationalized and normalized. With significant factions in the U.S. military, for example, interested in freeing up more money for expeditionary forces suitable for global force projection, and also cognizant of the dangers of a hair-trigger strategic balance, de-alerting and even elimination of many strategic nuclear weapons systems may be an attractive option. This does not mean, however, that these factions favor abolition– there is much evidence which suggests that they would like a "stable "strategic" balance, within which a much smaller but still substantial arsenal of more "useable" nuclear weapons are retained. And while the immense technological and industrial capacity of a few nations, already nuclear weapons states, allows them to become less reliant on nuclear weapons for strategic purposes, elites in other countries may feel so threatened by technologically sophisticated, mass-produced armaments and military structures requiring world-girdling and space-based sensing and communications structures that they retain or develop nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction as an "equalizer"-- in the jargon of the U.S. military, "asymmetric threats" to counter the U.S. race to achieve "full-spectrum dominance."

All of this manifests the potential now present for several simultaneous arms races, some perhaps entailing weapons with a level of destructiveness near that of nuclear weapons. The "strategic balance" also is likely to be far less "stable" due to many players, complex technology, and dependence on sensors, information processing, and computing which attains speeds and complexity difficult for the human mind to encompass, which is itself vulnerable to attack and disruption (a new virtual "fog of war") and which places humans at a remove (alienating, responsibility–diffusing, error-inducing) from the consequences of their actions.

Abolition of nuclear weapons is not a simple project which can be approached step by step

from a plan, like building a house. The advocates of nuclear weapons, and of political domination through military force generally, have strategies too. We have to think about how our strategies play out in a very complex world where there are others with conflicting interests, who currently are far wealthier, more powerful, and better organized than we are.

In sum, strategies which seem appealing in isolation because they may be "winnable" in the current climate, in that they do not require agreement to the goal of abolition but instead focus on the more immediately unstable aspect of the current nuclear weapons regime, may in the actual interplay of contending interests lead not to abolition but to a world in which smaller, modern, diverse nuclear arsenals become an intrinsic part of high-technology global force projection, with the elites of some nuclear weapons states believing themselves more rather than less able to use nuclear weapons without catastrophic risk to themselves. This is by no means a certain outcome, but it is a possible one, and it is the outcome likely to be sought by influential factions within the U.S. military and its associated techno-industrial establishment. This suggests at minimum that we must situate all of our short-run and narrower initiatives squarely in the abolition context. We at the very least have an obligation to think these problems through carefully.

Approaches currently dominant in the United States, and why they hold little promise under current conditions:

– Persuasion of elected officials.

In the absence of a large, mobilized social movement, there is little chance that elected officials can be persuaded to abolish nuclear weapons. Without significant change in U.S. economic and foreign policy, the U.S. nuclear arsenal is likely to be reduced or eliminated only if it is replaced by other forms of high-technology violence. This is not an acceptable alternative, either morally or practically.

Our national politics now are almost completely disconnected from the needs and concerns of the great majority of the population, so much so that only a minority of the population bothers to participate even at the most minimal level– voting. There is little difference among available electoral options on most issues– the distribution of wealth, how to assure the provision of such basic needs as housing or health care, and most of all, on foreign policy and the use of military force. Only five members of Congress opposed the recent round of attacks on Iraq, and few members initially opposed the U.S. intervention in Yugoslavia, taken without any semblance of regard for the requirements of international law. Representatives of both parties overwhelmingly favor massive increases in military spending, despite a military budget larger than the combined military expenditures of any conceivable roster of enemies.

Our political system, it should be clear by now, is dominated entirely by money, and hence by concentrated wealth. It is not merely a matter of money buying access– the very domination of fund-raising as the preeminent concern of elected officials means that they spend the great majority of their time raising money, which means that even before there is any "quid pro quo,"

every elected official spends most of their "constituent" time talking only to people who are in a position to give them significant sums of money. The only possible counterbalance is a large, active, and well organized social movement, one which we have barely begun to put together.

–Removal of those now in power from office.

The same considerations apply here. In an electoral system entirely dominated by concentrated wealth, nothing less than a very significant social movement is required for those without large amounts of money to have a significant effect– particularly where they are opposing very large and concentrated economic interests, who in turn protect and serve the interests of other very wealthy organizations and individuals. Under current conditions (again, low political participation and mobilization, virtually unlimited campaign spending) electoral approaches are very expensive, and tend to pull debate both towards the simplistic and away from any demand for fundamental change. They are the worst first approach for any initiative which requires fundamental change (i.e. abolition of nuclear weapons). Here too, our first priority must be to build a movement, bottom up, nationwide.

Does this mean we ignore Congress and administration? No. There are extreme excesses, particularly dangerous initiatives which must and can be fought. In a time of low political mobilization in this celebrity and power-obsessed culture, activities centered on particular government actions also can be of some use, because that is where the media focus is. But to be really useful, such actions must be carefully conceived to be more than merely reactive, to "break the frame" in which permissible questions can be asked.

But we should not mistake these activities for the main work of organizing the social movement we need for abolition. And the pressures and incentives are strong to do precisely that– funding, career paths, media attention, all those things that make the life of individuals and organizations easier, more stable and predictable in this culture are more available if you focus on conventional forums and approach them in conventional ways. A strong movement, rooted in social and organizational structures we have built for ourselves outside the institutions of the dominant order, is needed not only to mobilize at some future time the requisite social power to make change possible, but at an earlier stage to provide the ground for independent political and ethical judgment. The more independent our base is, the less chance that we will lose our way as we work close to the centers of power, where both the temptations and the threats are strong. Our main focus must be on building a movement, in communities across the country, which forms an independent power base which can be mobilized and which cannot be ignored.

We must not base our movement on the manipulation of fear.

We must avoid taking the short cut of exploiting fear. Fear is the main chord played by the dominant political and cultural institutions we are struggling against. It is a theme that they have practiced well in a million variations, and we cannot hope to match them, particularly since they control the means of amplification. The currents of fear at any given moment in this culture in

many instances have been planfully instigated by one propaganda campaign or another of elites whose solution to our fears is to offer us more "security," "internal security," "national security," the code-phrases for violence deployed either to control us or to control others in our name.

Even when these popular fears have some independent origin (often displaced from some dislocation or violence being worked on millions of people by an economy which ceaselessly grinds up and reorders cities, countryside, entire chunks of the natural world) the response offered to us, in a thousand subtle and unsubtle messages whispered or blared through mass media we do not own, is to let the experts fix it, let the powerful tell us what to do, let us track it down and lock it up or bomb it until it surrenders. Trying to "piggy back" our concerns onto fear-centered issues because they are conveniently present in the media spotlight is risky in the extreme. The representation of the issue– terrorism, computer glitches, or whatever– already has been shaped and filtered largely to foreordain the kinds of solutions which can be offered. Given the relative level of access to the media, we will at best be another voice raising the alarm. And in the absence of a social movement with an alternative vision of how problems can be solved, it will be the National Security State and its allies that responds.

Using the politics of fear manifests a desire for easy solutions to complex problems. Trying to inject energy into the body politic solely through fear is like taking amphetamines for energy instead of eating and sleeping. If we do this, we do it because we ourselves are afraid to face our own fears– about how weak we really are, about our adequacy to the task of building a movement against a very strong, well-organized, and potentially very violent opposition.

This does not mean that we should be pollyanas, or that we can somehow avoid talking and thinking about the dangers of our predicament. But we must do so in the context of a well-elaborated, constantly deepening world-view developed within efforts to build a social movement. This kind of communication can't be done in sound-bytes or thirty second spots– and the search for sound-bytes in this fear-driven culture leads almost always back to the simple exploitation of fear. We must face up to the reality that at this point we must create and spread an alternative account of the world and how it works before our message can be understood without distortion and misdirection. For the most part, this work must be done from the ground up, face to face, one by one.

Some recent history in anti-nuclear weapons organizing illustrates the problem. Campaigns to raise awareness about dangers of Russian "loose nukes" and nuclear terrorism, conducted for the most part in isolation and without a clear connection to a broader, well-elaborated abolition message, became part of the chorus of voices focusing attention on a problem. What kinds of solutions has this brought us so far? These fear-focused campaigns, coming from across the political spectrum, have helped promote (although are by no means solely responsible for), among other things 1) A joint U.S.-Russia multi-billion dollar mixed-oxide fuel program as a "solution" to the now-"urgent" problem of Russian plutonium. This program will provide massive subsidies to the nuclear establishment in both countries for many years to come. It is unclear whether the disposition cycle will increase or decrease the risk of diversion of weapons useable materials. 2)

Increased spending by the U.S. military and the nuclear weapons laboratories in particular on "counterproliferation," including possible improved military capabilities and uses for nuclear weapons, and more money for ballistic missile defenses. 3) Increased cooperation between the Russian and U.S. nuclear weapons establishment, with mixed results ranging from some increases in the "stability" of the strategic nuclear confrontation still existing between the two countries to information exchanges and joint research which may speed development of new kinds of hi-tech weapons. 4) There was a brief flurry of general media interest, with an impact on organizing potential which is unclear, but does not appear to have been great. It is difficult to see any unambiguous progress towards abolition in all of this.

The current Y2K frenzy raises similar problems. It is a major, continuing mass-media story, almost purely fear-driven, with most coverage focusing superficially on the various catastrophes which may result. The complexity and irrationality of the cultural response is intensified by its millenarian resonance. There is almost no attention to the structural characteristics or the particular political, economic, and technological history which has allowed this set of circumstances to arise. So far, most anti-nuclear organizing around the issue has taken much the same tone, trying to attract attention to the particularly horrific possible catastrophes which the interplay of Y2K and strategic weapons systems might cause. It will be interesting to see what kinds of solutions are offered up this time around by those in power, which elite initiatives this set of fears will help to drive. Obvious opportunities (some already being exploited) include more money for military computing and warning systems, also possibly for ballistic missile defense to protect against accidental launches resulting from future computer failures .

It should be observed, moreover, that the Y2K issue has some other interesting defects for anti-nuclear organizing. If something truly awful happens, the campaign obviously will have failed. If nothing obviously awful happens (and we could come quite close to disaster without the public ever finding out), the experts and the military can claim credit for their robust systems and smart quick fixes. The only way this campaign can succeed is if either the campaign or early-developing Y2K problems convince those on the inside that they really don't have a grip on a terribly important problem. It is not clear that this would have significant or long-lasting effects which would increase the chances for abolition in the absence of a broader movement which can provide a more meaningful context. It is worth noting in this regard that computer problems leading to false alarms in the early warning system have been public knowledge for years without a particularly significant effect on progress towards elimination of nuclear weapons.

Again, this does not mean that technology failures like Y2K are not "real," or that we should not attempt to address them as part of our work. Y2K, in fact, presents an opportunity to make new connections, to elaborate a small piece of our counter-story, about the social effects of greed, fear, secrecy, and the inertia of institutions. It is a story not yet thought, much less told, of which I can suggest only fragments. Our tale could help us to understand what happens when technology choices which affect us all are made by small elites, in contexts where the defining tone is first apocalyptic fear, then the lure of unprecedented wealth. It allows us to see the

connections between nuclear weapons and the particular form one of our central industries have taken, tied tightly to nuclear weapons both in its beginnings and in the dangers we now face.

The cycle begins with massive military subsidies to computing to aid weapons design and to achieve the miniaturization of guidance systems, all in the frenetic context of an arms race where the price of any slackening of the pace, in the closed and secretive world of the arms-makers, seemed to be total destruction. As the urgency of the arms race gradually faded, the new industries it had spawned experienced a new frenzy of technology competition, driven now not only by ordinary market pressures but by the accelerating capital surges of the emerging global casino, the dizzying pace of money movement itself made possible in part by the explosive proliferation of cheap fast computing. In this world, stock price is both all-important and driven largely by perception, the quality of products and of underlying technologies overshadowed by surface glitz and speed.

These are technological and economic rhythms which allow little time for collective discussion, for reflection, for consideration of the wisdom of the path chosen– or even to check for bugs. The vast majority of the world's population, those who suffer and will suffer the impacts of production and the risks of malfunction, never have been part of the discussion, had no say in the decisions. And now as we face the consequences, the same people and organizations who built these technologies with our money and in our name the first time around will come forward with more technological solutions to the problems they have caused, entire new profit centers emerging to fix inexcusable mistakes in hypertrophied technologies, responsibility for which is far too diffuse to ascribe blame. At the same time the national security elites, resurgent with a new roster of conjured Threats and recycled rationales for secret decision-making, are pushing the technology forward again with enormous government expenditures for computing initiatives ranging from weapons design to battlefield surveillance and communications.

This little sketch, of course, is far too simple. We will have to do far better to approach the truth. It can't be done with sound-bites.

In the end, we need a politics grounded in hope and not fear. Manipulating peoples' fears cannot build the world we want, it can only lead to renewed efforts to achieve control by one group or another, and hence to more violence. We must start from the love we have for those people and those parts of the living world to which we are most deeply attached, for which we would give up everything. Only there can we find the courage to risk what we must. And only there-- in the memory of a nature we once lived in rather than off, in the hope of a world where we recognize the most distant stranger as our kin-- can we find fragments of the vision of a better world which any movement must have at its center if it is to do anything more than replace one power with another.

What type of organizing should we do?

In the early 1980's there was a vigorous and diverse anti-nuclear movement in the United

States. There were strong elements in that movement who favored the kind of approach I am putting forward here, broadening and deepening the movement by recognizing and addressing connections to other issues with common root causes. This approach for the most part lost out to the Freeze, a classic interest-group politics "campaign," which stressed what were thought to be "winnable" goals in the existing political climate. From the standpoint of abolition, that campaign must be judged in retrospect to have failed, having little meaningful impact on the arms race, on nuclear arsenals, or on the underlying economic and political structures which sustained them, and which continue to do so fifteen years later despite the end of the Cold War. In addition, that campaign did little to build a movement for the long term, and when the immediately visible causes of the fear that campaign sought to exploit receded from view, much of the anti-nuclear movement disappeared as well. We should learn from this history.

For this movement to be broad enough to achieve the fundamental changes we seek (and abolishing nuclear weapons is likely to require fundamental social change, except under the circumstances where they are replaced by something worse), we must build coalitions. And our likely allies also will find most appealing, and in fact in many instances will require, an approach which deals honestly and directly with the interests served by having nuclear weapons– both the direct economic interests of the "military industrial complex" and the foreign policy interests which are served by a military policy which assumes that it is right and necessary to be able to place overwhelming force on short notice anywhere on the planet.

What does all this mean on a practical level? It means that "grassroots organizing" must mean far more, and have a different emphasis, than having the same memberships of the same organizations send postcards or call their congress people on "action alerts." There are nowhere near enough of us yet to counterbalance the power of concentrated wealth, to even begin to shake American politics out of its business as usual rut– with its nearly exclusive emphasis on business. For now, and probably for a number of years, we are better off asking our supporters who are not themselves engaged activists to spend the five minutes or half hour they have this week not on a letter or a phone call to a decision maker upon whom there is almost no hope of having an effect under current conditions, and instead ask them to do one bit of outreach– call or talk to a friend about these issues, tell them how they can learn more and get involved. We also should place our main emphasis on events and activities which will allow people to learn a lot more, to understand why these issues are important and how they are connected to their everyday lives, and to the other issues they care about. This last is important, because it is through understanding these connections that we build the networks of activists and the coalitions which can truly have an effect. Absent this context, sending postcards or telegrams or e-mails to elected officials does little to help people progress as activists and become more engaged.

Our "grassroots" efforts must be aimed at building locally rooted organizations which can sustain the work necessary to achieve abolition over the long run. Our resources and our actions should not be focused primarily on top down, celebrity-centered activities and mass media campaigns. Such techniques can in some instances be useful in serving our purposes of building sustainable local organizations and strengthening links to other movements, but they should be

carefully evaluated for their suitability to these goals, rather than pursued as an end in themselves.

Some areas for thought and action which might be promising (but by no means a complete list):

-A strategy focused on cities aimed at reviving elements of progressive coalitions which in the past have been at the center of the peace and justice movements. The demographic and political strength of any progressive movement in this country in the future will be even more concentrated in urban areas than in the past. This is true partly because the population is more urban than ever, but also because the increasing concentration of wealth in a small percentage of the population, combined with the flight of large portions of the middle class to the suburbs has meant that the impact of skewed public spending policies falls disproportionately on cities, and on their poorer residents in particular.

We should be able to portray concretely the impact of our continued commitment to a huge nuclear arsenal on the fabric of everyday urban life-- the positive initiatives for the cities which are being foregone, from a decline in the quality of public education to the more general disappearance of public goods, and we should be able to make connections to broader issues-- to the way violence is socially sanctioned as the ultimate arbiter of conflict, as the response both globally and domestically to problems which only can be solved by addressing underlying political and economic conflicts (from handguns and the death penalty to no fly zones, cruise missiles, and nuclear threats). Where possible, we should focus on local military and nuclear weapons projects to be able to concretely demonstrate both their social and ecological impacts and the social choices they entail, from toxic and radioactive waste to spending alternatives (particular projects also tend to have price tags both more comprehensible and more comparable to the costs of urgent local needs than the huge abstract figures in the national budget).

This vision for a central element of a campaign is neither romantic nor abstract. Urban coalitions of this kind as recently as the late 1980's in the San Francisco Bay Area brought together unions, environmentalists, traditional peace constituencies, and a number of local elected officials, including Congressman Ron Dellums, to stop major military projects. In the process, a great deal of education occurred within issue-oriented organizations about the relationship between their focus and others– between peace and environmental issues, jobs, housing, local transportation, and the fundamental effects that a huge military establishment has on the shape of urban life. This kind of campaign works best when the connections are made horizontally– between local organizations with diverse concerns, all affected by militarism, the culture of violence, and concomitant public spending priorities.

Nuclear weapons issues can be an effective ground on which to forge the connections for a broader social movement. The long term health and environmental effects of the weapons complex already have brought together local coalitions and national networks of health, environmental, and peace activists. The connections to economic democracy, today made mainly as a simple zero sum accounting of butter vs. guns, can be expanded and deepened by illuminating

the structural effects of hi-tech militarism on the economy: the concentration of scientific and technical research to "brute force" solutions to a wide range of problems, from hardware-intensive approaches to computing to disproportionate focus on high energy density physics, cross-subsidies to dangerous and uneconomical technologies like nuclear power, the way huge centralized scientific institutions amortize expensive, exotic, hyper-specialized facilities like supercomputers and inertial confinement fusion by making inflated claims and coming up with marginal, inefficient applications to attract research dollars that probably are better spent in a more decentralized and varied way.

Organizing among scientists and hi-tech workers.

Scientists played an important role in the "ban the bomb" movement of the 1950's and 1960's and on into the 80's, providing information and a critical alternative to the pronouncements of government scientists about the infinite promise of nuclear energy for both war and peace. Although several of the organizations founded during that period to oppose nuclear weapons development still exist, they are barely visible in the abolition movement in the U.S., apparently finding the rebuilding and modernization of the nuclear weapons complex an acceptable price tag for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and putting forward no real alternatives to an arms control process which has stagnated. This is so despite the fact that the nuclear weapons laboratories are once again assuming a central place in the U.S. military industrial complex, further entrenching increasingly sophisticated high-energy physics tools and knowledges by using the same facilities and computing methods used for nuclear weapons work to develop a wide range of high-technology weapons concepts, ranging from microwave and other directed energy weapons to possible routes to pure fusion weapons which would mean the end of existing materials-based approaches to nonproliferation. Fundamental questions about the ethics of working to develop weapons of mass destruction are seldom heard in the United States today.

Organizing among scientists and technical workers would not be easy. Science has emerged since World War II as a force of production in itself. The upper ranks of this sector have metamorphosed into powerful corporate entities (of which the nuclear weapons laboratories are a leading example), institutions which deploy the full arsenal of modern corporate power– public relations divisions, high-priced law firms, lobbying staffs– to assure their share of the forced levy which we all must pay. Far too many scientists have found comfortable places for themselves in these wealthy institutions, content to spend their days in well-equipped laboratories seeking to unleash savage energies whose effects on the planet and on human beings always is kept at a remove. Their only encounter with the violence they wreak is likely to be a dark blot blossoming on a grainy video screen, ten seconds on the nightly news designed to prove that Our Technology Works, and that the number of dismembered children, orphaned children, shattered families remains within calculated limits. Trained increasingly for specialized roles within large organizations, scientists (and other professionals) are difficult to organize in part because of a self-concept, inculcated early, of intellectual workers as proprietors of their own skills and knowledge, both able and obligated to make judgments about both fact and value individually.

But there are opportunities in organizing scientists and technical workers, some provided by the contradictions between this same set of professional ideologies and the everyday reality of the professional/technical workplace today. In many areas, there is an oversupply of people with advanced degrees. In addition, in a world where most scientific (and other professional) skills are deployed within organizations with predefined goals of gaining and maintaining market, political, and military power, the professional self-concept of neutrality and independence is eroding rapidly. People with scientific and professional skills are becoming less distinguishable from other employees. They may earn more money, but the disciplinary relation between employer and employee has largely eclipsed any substantial "professional" relationship between highly-trained people and the large organizations they work within.

The employee professional has few economic options outside employment in similar large organizations, and has little in the way of an independent social, material, or intellectual basis for judgment outside the organizational context. This becomes ever more true as an increasing percentage of professionals are employed in large organization settings. This is the future faced by most people with technical and professional skills-- to compete for the few spots in the lucrative upper echelons of corporatized professional knowledge oligopolies, or to become functionaries in huge organizations with little control over their work, no intellectual context for reflection or ethical judgment besides the deployment of knowledge for the achievement of predefined organizational goals, and an economic future at the mercy of the endless downward wage pressure of an economy dominated by transnational corporations.

We are still in a transitional period where people enter science and some professions with certain expectations which are inconsistent with the above realities: expectations of some measure of autonomy in the workplace, with regard to both intellectual and ethical choices. This set of expectations can be deepened and made more self-conscious, forming the basis for a critique of the work world in which most technical workers find themselves. Nuclear weapons work , with its secrecy, its hierarchy, its frequent distortions of truth to fit elite political ends, and its intrinsic core of world-destroying violence, in many ways epitomizes the worst tendencies of the larger whole.

When organizing professional and technical workers, however, it is essential to keep both the organizing work and any organizations which emerge out of it anchored in the contexts where the social and ecological consequences of the relevant technology choices are felt. Both activists who organize professionals and activists who themselves have conventional professional skills and training need active, mobilized grassroots organizations to maintain their independent perspective. Otherwise they are likely to fall back into both conventional "professional" approaches to social problems, and also on the information and world view generated within the large bureaucratic organizations they are attempting to monitor. There are a many reasons for this: habit, availability of pre-packaged information, pressures to "be reasonable," professional peer-reference groups with careers within mainstream bureaucratic organizations, and, finally, material need, the temptation to at least "hedge one's bets" and remain marketable within conventional professional settings. In general, oppositional professionals always run the risk of having professional norms

distort their perspective, often in very subtle ways. Hence the need as well to remain firmly grounded, on an everyday level, in social movements which prefigure the way of life we hope to bring about.

Healing the divided society and the divided self: Nonviolence and the modern predicament.
Modernity did not make people more cruel; it only invented a way in which cruel things could be done by non-cruel people."[2]

There are pervasive forms of consciousness in the institutions where nuclear weapons, and decisions about them, are made, which represent a critical barrier even to beginning the dialogue which might lead to social change of the magnitude necessary for abolition to occur. This consciousness is a kind of alienation particular to a bureaucratized world of very large organizations, organizations within which living human beings narrow their consciousness for most of their waking hours into one or another technical or expert function. This world view is increasingly prevalent among all those who work in large hierarchical organizations, and hence presents a problem for political transformation which extends well beyond the institutions of the national security state.

In the culture of experts and bureaucrats, the quantity and tidy ordering of information substitute for richness of experience and understanding. Expertise replaces wisdom, and with the omnipresence of computers as the main tool and filter of bureaucratized work, binary simulacra, overwhelmingly visual, replace lived experience in a body in the world. The preselection of what acceptably can be known, and hence the limits of possibility of our collective fates, becomes invisible as the walls which keep unruly knowledges and uncontrolled nature out become the horizons of our artificial second nature. The culture of experts stands apart (and feels itself irreducibly above) the "local knowledges" which are immediate, embedded in the natural world and in traditions which once were generated in face-to-face interactions, and still are to some degree, and perhaps could be more fully again.

Philosophical nonviolence, adhered to in one form or another by many peace activists over the past half century, has at its core an understanding of the consciousness peculiar to the roles imposed by enormous bureaucratized institutions which reduce their inhabitants, quite literally, to working parts. It seeks to transcend conventional political channels by appealing directly to the people who are experiencing themselves mainly as members of organizations, as functionaries who simply can do nothing differently. It is a reassertion of the living world against the reduction of human society towards a machine which consumes and obliterates life, asking government officials and weapons makers to stop splitting themselves in the way which allows them to function so successfully in their official roles, appealing to the other parts of their being-- as children and parents, brothers and sisters, as living creatures of a fragile planet.

It is essential that we restore this vital insight to the center of our work. One way is

---

[2] Zygmunt Bauman, Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality (Oxford: 1995), 197.

through creative nonviolent forms of direct action– rethinking the now-ritualized pattern of blockade, arrest, and trial, returning again to the fundamental intention to break down the barriers which separate us from each other and from parts of ourselves, and which allow us to be treated and to treat others like things. We must also question whether in the long run reinforcing this splitting by becoming specialists ourselves, engaging only in "rational argument" or "moral witness" or "interest group pressure" in the accepted mode of comfortably separated institutional spheres, really is the path we wish to follow.

There is in some ways a disturbing mirroring of the specialization and compartmentalization characteristic of the bureaucratic form in our own way of doing things. "Public interest" and "social movement" groups tend not only to specialize in content, but in form as well. Most groups fall into one or another identifiable box: some typical combinations are rational and expert, attuned to the knowledges generated by conventional institutions; oriented towards electoral politics, counting votes and attempting to apply countable, measurable pressure in one political forum or another; grassroots, with less in the way of formally recognized knowledge and skills but often having a richly elaborated understanding of the effects of the social, economic, or technological choices at issue; moral/philosophically nonviolent, with or without formal religious ties, often engaging in direct action.

Some groups combine a couple of these aspects, but few can operate in all realms. But we all should try to remain open to other realms of experience and approaches to social change. There is a tendency among some groups to claim superiority for their particular partial approach in all settings, or to criticize other approaches as ineffective or even disruptive. There are good reasons for individual groups either to specialize or to remain true to a particular vision or calling. But a social movement--if that is what we wish to have-- must be able to address all aspects of our modern predicament. And if we separate these aspects of our consciousness in thought and in action, we should do so consciously, not merely because the existing order of things makes it easier or more convenient.

In the United States, the part of the peace movement grounded in faith-based communities has played a central role in developing the tradition of nonviolent thought and action and keeping it alive. In addition, faith-based nonviolent organizations have been a consistent presence in many communities even during times when the larger "peace movement" has ebbed. Many of these groups also exemplify a more comprehensive approach to violence, connecting violence in the street to the violence of the state, and militarism to the broader injustices it serves to enforce. If we are to progress further in addressing the critical problem of this "splitting of consciousness," we will have to work together in new ways, and be willing to confront concerns and divisions which may make us uncomfortable. For many progressive activists, for example, any appearance of breaking down the boundaries between the kinds of attitudes and approaches that are perceived as the province of religion and those that are considered to be properly within the realm of politics is alarming. And these concerns have real basis, in a country where the most politically effective purveyors of organized religion in recent years have for the most part been cheerleaders for all varieties of state violence, from jails and the death penalty as the main solution

to poverty to cruise missiles, nuclear weapons and star wars as the main response to global inequality, and in a world where religious nationalism often has played a role in violent conflict.

Some groups and individuals who work in conventional decision-making forums where formal, professional modes of both argument and presentation predominate, also are uncomfortable with bringing other forms of knowledge and expression in, for example the richly detailed knowledges of communities who have inhabited a place for many generations of the effects of modernity on their world, and the impassioned personal testimony of those who have seen their communities or their health destroyed by the global effects of the nuclear weapons enterprise.

Finding ways to combine the power of our diverse approaches and forms of knowledge in ways which break down the barriers within institutions and individuals which allow the comfortable separation of cause from effect, and the exercise of technical skill from moral responsibility, will require both much work and great discernment, but it is one of the most promising paths we can pursue, and one of the few where we may find unforseen opportunities for rapid progress.

Campus Outreach

Some reasons for this are obvious: This work will take time. We are getting older, and we are not building a movement which can be sustained for the many years it will take to abolish nuclear weapons. For a generation or more raised getting its information from increasingly homogeneous, concentrated corporate media, we must begin again by reaching out to people in face to face settings, counterposing information which is richer and more connected to immediate experience (and again, to local realities) than the speedy ephemeral glitz of TV or the internet. (You may be able to help sustain connections with the internet once it is established; much as you can to some degree with the telephone; but you can't build real trust and community that way).

In addition, many of the goals of the other organizing focuses discussed above can be advanced through on-campus organizing. The young scientists, professionals, and technical workers of tomorrow, of course, are on campus today, hoping for meaningful and creative working lives, not yet beaten down by the narrow economic choices and everyday disciplinary structures of the workplace. And there is considerable evidence that the generation now on campus is moving back towards activism, but usually with a focus on the concrete visible manifestations of the order of things: institutionalized racism and sexism on campus, urban violence, the prison-industrial complex which has devastated the lives of so many of their contemporaries. There are clear connections which can be made between these issues and the institutionalized culture of violence in the service of privilege at the highest level. We can and should make those connections.

In our efforts to organize young people, we need to do more than provide information. We need to ask them what they need to really get involved in our work, both in terms of material

and social support and in terms of a way of understanding the campaign for abolition which links up to their concerns. My own conversations with students suggest that there are quite a few who are intensely interested in our issue, particularly when placed in the broader context of a culture which celebrates and encourages violence, and how we can develop meaningful nonviolent responses to it. From what I have heard, it also appears that we must pay more attention to the basic requirements for young people to do this work, particularly as something more than an occasional volunteer. Fifteen and more years ago, many of my contemporaries (now in their mid-forties) were able to work nearly full time as activists while supporting themselves with part time jobs, and finding both social support and an inexpensive way of life due to the extensive alternative culture present in many U.S. urban areas. With the continuing drop in lower income real wages and the rising cost of urban living, this is more difficult to do today. Many of the young people I have spoken with are willing to piece together their living to do public interest work, but are having a hard time finding a niche. Concrete assistance with this– for example, putting people in touch with what alternative institutions and networks remain in our own areas, and help from people with long experience doing alternative work while living on a shoestring with the everyday basics such as finding affordable housing and managing finances– can help our movement grow.

We should emphasize actions which engage people and develop their knowledge and skills as activists.

In general, we should move away from a model of professional representation of "constituencies" in centers of power and conventional political forums. This type of political activity does little to build movements, for it does little to increase the skills, knowledge, and level of engagement for anyone but the small staffs of professionals who argue in courtrooms or lobby in congressional corridors.

An approach aimed at developing activists will change the way we choose actions and forums and the way in which we approach the forums we choose. We are likely to prefer public forums where participation for ordinary citizens without technical or professional credentials is possible and meaningful. We will devote more time to decision-making processes in which our "clients" or "constituency" become real participants, with enough information and, over time, experience to shape the direction our actions should take. Some small concrete examples of this are training people to represent themselves or extensive, consensus-based decision-making in choosing trial goals and strategies in demonstration legal defense; and providing people with trainings about both environmental review procedures and the science relied on, so that they can combine those knowledges with their own understanding of the impacts technology choices have on their lives and communities.

Even these sorts of efforts, however, can accomplish little beyond incremental change without a widely respected vision of the alternative institution, within a social movement which prefigures the way of life we hope to bring about and of workplaces which also, to the extent possible, strive to fit the same model. Otherwise, grassroots groups are left to choose between

the typical short grassroots organization life-span, in which one or two generations of passionate activists are used up and thrown away, left to rebuild their lives in the cold world of the market, or institutionalization according to the conventional model. This usually entails dependence in large part on mass direct mail campaigns, the relationship to group "membership" reduced inevitably towards advertising, identifying target markets, towards becoming a business selling the work of conscience and citizenship done by proxy to people too busy to do it themselves. In the workplace, it can also mean conventional social roles, 60 hour a week workaholic professionals feeling justified by their stature, their skills, and the sacrifice of doing business-like work at less than market wages to treat secretaries like secretaries and activists from the provinces like supplicants.

Once the connection has grown thin between the “professional” staff and people living at the point where the decisions taken in centers of power have their social and ecological effects, "public interest" groups can come to rely more and more on the large organizations they seek to monitor for both information and, hence, implicitly, for the definition of issues and the delimitation of the range of permissible debate. A typical professionalized, public interest organization which does not have an active, everyday engagement with a mobilized grassroots constituency will largely be limited to identifying gaps, contradictions, and errors in the huge amounts of information gathered by government and the corporations. They will also be able to independently check information and assertions, so long as they remain within the ambit of conventional professional norms. But in most instances, conventional public interest organizations which locate themselves and exert most of their resources in capitol cities and orient themselves to affecting directly upper decision-making levels in large organizations, will remain captive to a considerable extent 1) to the definition of questions made at the center and 2) to information collected and screened in accordance with bureaucratic imperatives.

It is not a bad idea to attempt to influence policy at high levels-- the question is: from what perspective and social base does one do so? This is not just a question of attitude, some mental shift which can be achieved, it is a real question of the structure of oppositional organizations and the use of resources-- where to have offices, what the appropriate balance and relationship is between “volunteers,” “organizers,” and “expert staff.” If our goal is fundamental social change, our first priority must be the construction of a social movement from the bottom up. It must be a movement grounded in the experience and participation of people at the point where the decisions taken at a great distance, both geographic and social, have their effects, and which prefigures in its organizational form and its everyday social relationships the society we hope to bring about. This is so not only because the building of a strong social movement is the most likely path to the real social power we must have to make change. It is also because only within such a context can we create an independent ground for evaluating information, for ethical and political judgment, and for the formation of strategies in a world still pervaded by great disparities of wealth, power politics, and violent conflict.