

On June 19, 2012, the Berkeley City Council voted 8 – 1 in support of a resolution to Decommission California Nuclear Power Plants and Transition to Green Non-Nuclear Generation Sources. Prior to the Council Meeting a rally was held on the steps of City Hall.

## **Berkeley Rally for a Nuclear-Free California, June 19, 2012**

### **There's Nothing Good About Nuclear Power**

-- *Jackie Cabasso, Executive Director, Western States Legal Foundation; member, Nuclear-Free California*

Though I'm better known for my nuclear weapons abolition advocacy, I got my start working against nuclear power. In 1976 I went door to door collecting signatures on the nuclear safeguards ballot initiative, which passed, prohibiting the construction of any new nuclear power plants in California until a permanent solution can be found to the problem of safe disposition of highly-radioactive spent nuclear fuel. That problem is no closer to being solved than it was in 1976, and fortunately, the law is still on the books. Now, in the aftermath of the continuing nuclear disaster at Fukushima, it's time to take the next step – in fact, it's urgent. It's time to shut down and decommission California's aging, leaking Diablo Canyon and San Onofre nuclear power plants – before the inevitable earthquakes strike – and replace them with clean, renewable, decentralized, non-nuclear, non-fossil sources of energy.

Western States Legal Foundation got its start, way back in 1982, providing legal representation for nonviolent activists arrested protesting construction of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant. I was arrested there myself a number of times. Let me explain our name. Western States was formed to counter the right-wing Pacific Legal Foundation which was asserting that the nonviolent protesters had injured PG&E workers and was trying to force the arrestees to pay for law enforcement costs! We prevailed.

In the early 1980s, Western States, as part of the anti-nuclear movement in California, shifted its focus from Diablo Canyon to the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory – and from nuclear power to nuclear weapons. Over the years, Western States has increasingly sought to link nuclear disarmament with global and domestic issues of peace, justice and sustainability. *With Fukushima, we've come full circle.*

In May of last year, two months after the beginning of the ongoing Fukushima nightmare, I was at the United Nations in New York with a small group of Japanese Atomic Bomb survivors. One of them commented, "In 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan. Now we've done it to ourselves."

There is nothing good about nuclear power.

In addition to the certainty of catastrophic accidents and the resulting massive releases of radiation that do not respect city, state, or national boundaries, there are routine emissions at every step of the nuclear fuel chain, from mining, milling and enrichment of uranium, to fabrication of nuclear fuel, to daily operation of nuclear power plants, to storage of spent fuel.

These releases always endanger public health and safety. In addition, at both the front and the back ends of the process, nuclear materials can be diverted to make nuclear weapons. *Nuclear power powers the bomb!*

Moreover, nuclear power is incredibly expensive and capital intensive, and highly centralized. Nuclear power plants take years to build and have a limited energy production lifetime before they become too dangerously radioactive to operate. The dangers associated with producing and processing nuclear materials, and the extremely sensitive nature of these materials due to their inherently dual-use capability necessitate a level of secrecy and security that is fundamentally anti-democratic.

Nuclear power benefits that infamous 1%, who know it's such a bad economic gamble that they won't even consider building new plants without federal loan guarantees and the Price-Anderson Act, which caps the a utility's liability for an accident at \$10.8 billion. It's estimated that a serious nuclear accident could cost as much as \$600 billion, the balance of which would most likely be paid by taxpayers.

And, there is no way to safely dispose of, or sequester from living things and the environment, the highly radioactive spent fuel that remains deadly for more than 100,000 years – the same number of years that the human species as we know it is believed to have existed. The U.S. has an estimated 77,000 tons of such high-level radioactive waste, and the amount increases every day any nuclear power plant operates.

Nuclear power is not a solution to global warming. While it's true that the fission of enriched uranium in a nuclear reactor to generate energy produces no carbon emissions, every other step required to produce nuclear energy releases carbon into the atmosphere. One independent report calculates that with high quality ores, the CO<sub>2</sub> produced by the full nuclear life cycle is about one half to one third of an equivalent sized gas-fired power station. For low quality ores the CO<sub>2</sub> produced by the full nuclear life-cycle is equal to that produced by the equivalent gas-fired power station.

Finally, nuclear technology has come to be viewed by the international community as the currency of technological sophistication. And, while the nuclear power and nuclear weapons infrastructures in the United States are for the most part separate, this is not necessarily true in potential aspiring nuclear weapon states. Over the long term, that includes every country with nuclear power. We must do our part to delegitimize nuclear nuclear weapons and nuclear power and make renewable, sustainable energy the new gold standard!

While earthquakes and tsunamis are uncontrollable acts of nature, nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons are man-made creations whose construction and use is 100% preventable.

We don't need nuclear power – in California or the rest of the world. A landmark report published last spring by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations body of the world's leading climate change scientists, concluded that renewable energy could account for almost 80% of the world's energy support within 4 decades – if governments apply themselves – if there is the political will. That's our job, to create the political will.

The United Nations has declared 2012 the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All, with the goal of supporting universal energy access by 2030. This comes in recognition of the fact that hundreds of millions of people, especially in rural areas, do not have access to affordable, reliable, and clean sources of energy.

A new report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) has found that energy access through renewable energy technologies can generate significant employment: reaching the objective of sustainable energy for all could create almost 4 million direct jobs by 2030 in the off-grid electricity sector alone.

As my Japanese colleague Akira Kawasaki wrote in a recent commentary: “To summarise, the lessons learned from Fukushima for the world’s energy future are as follows: The energy system symbolised by nuclear power generation not only has high risks regarding safety, it is also centrally monopolised, and prone to wasteful spending. It is necessary to establish a system with local community participation and ownership, built upon renewable energy sources founded on traditional wisdom. It is these responsible, sustainable policies which will provide security and accessibility for future generations. Excuses of lack of sufficient technology are no longer relevant, and such a crucial policy shift is indeed possible with sufficient political will.”

What happens in California has ripple effects across the country and around the world. California has an opportunity to lead by example, by renouncing nuclear power and making the shift to clean, renewable, sustainable energy. That’s why it’s important and right that the Berkeley City Council tonight adopts the resolution to Decommission California Nuclear Power Plants and Transition to Green Non-Nuclear Generation Sources.