

Will Pentagate be the Three Mile Island for defense?

by Marsha Freeman

On March 28, 1979, the commercial nuclear industry in the United States suffered its worst public relations defeat ever, at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The fallout was not radioactive; it was political. Due to the cowardice and short-sightedness of the industry, which refused to launch a fight to counter the hysteria being generated by the anti-nuclear environmentalists inside and outside the government, this otherwise innocuous incident became the Waterloo for an entire industry.

The nuclear industry today is nearly nonexistent. The last time a nuclear plant was ordered by a U.S. utility was *10 years ago*. Instead of designing and building new power plants, the industry keeps busy fixing the already-operating facilities. No one has any hope of ever advancing to the next-generation nuclear technologies, which have been on the drawing boards for more than a decade.

The public response of the aerospace/defense industry to the onslaught of accusations and innuendo by the media and the Justice Department is, so far, a cowardly replay of the nuclear industry's response to TMI. Just as the nuclear industry bent over backward to "cooperate" with the raving anti-science mob taking down their industry (under the guise of making power plants "safe"), spokesmen for the aerospace/defense companies and Pentagon officials are volunteering to aid in "fraud" investigations being carried out by the Justice and Defense Departments, under the guise of finding the "few rotten apples."

Only being willing to tell the truth will stop what will quickly escalate into a top-down restructuring of the way the defense industry and the government ensure our national defense. The purpose is to eliminate any institutional opposition to the U.S.-Soviet condominium designed to leave only one superpower.

Setting the stage

The destruction of the nuclear industry did not start in March 1979, just as the first volley in the war against the defense establishment did not take place on June 14.

In its *1980s Project* report, the New York Council on Foreign Relations had dictated to what would become the Carter administration that there should be a "planned phase out of nuclear power." This energy policy went hand-in-hand

with the "arms control" program pushed by Carter's Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, and played on the President's irrational fear of radiation.

RAND Corporation print-out James Schlesinger was brought back into the government to head the newly created Energy Department to finish off the highly effective working relationship between the Atomic Energy Commission and the industry. Earlier in his career, he had overseen wrecking operations against the Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, and the budget process.

In 1962, Schlesinger had written in his book, *The Political Economy of National Security*, that there was no longer a necessary link between a strong economy and national defense. Therefore, advanced industrial technologies, such as nuclear power, were no longer necessary.

During his stint as energy secretary in the Carter administration, Schlesinger tried to slash the nuclear fission and fusion research programs, end the development of the nuclear fast breeder reactor, agitate for an oil crisis, and kill international research cooperation; he did succeed in squandering billions of dollars on "soft energy technologies" such as conservation, solar, and biomass (burning garbage or food).

Three months after Three Mile Island, Energy Secretary Schlesinger described nuclear energy as a "barely viable option."

Also years before Three Mile Island, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) had been working to destroy the effective relationship of the nuclear industry, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy.

In the early 1970s, the UCS managed to find "disaffected employees" in the AEC to meet with ("whistle blowers"), and collected "anonymous" letters from them on supposed safety violations at nuclear power plants. They were somehow able to get their hands on classified documents leaked to them from these "employees."

These "revelations," that the public was "at risk" from this energy source, created such a stink on Capitol Hill that calls were raised by Congress to separate the regulatory function of government, which had been performed by the technology division of the AEC, from the "special interest" groups, i.e., the industry, who were unduly influencing government

policy (sound familiar?). That is how the Nuclear Regulatory Commission was created.

At the same time, on the street level, the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Policy Studies and a gaggle of new "environmentalist" organizations were organizing anti-nuclear demonstrations at power plants and construction sites, and the nation's television stations were showing this growing "mass movement" virtually every night. Months before TMI, actors and actresses became involved in the fray, as the movie "The China Syndrome" was released, just to make sure that the misinformed public would assume any nuclear plant accident would lead to the ubiquitous "meltdown."

The stage was set to turn almost anything into a disaster, and an excuse to shut down nuclear power.

Fighting back?

If you think the media are hanging the defense industry before there are any actual charges, remember what the press said about TMI. "Nuke Leak Goes Out of Control," "Race With Nuclear Disaster," "Pregnant Women, Kids Flee N-Zone," are only a small sample of the headlines generated at the time of TMI. People who fled from Harrisburg only did so because they believed what the media were reporting!

No matter what industry or utility spokesmen said, the media refused to report any of the facts, but the industry did not go on its own media offensive. Printed rumors appeared for years, reporting on two-headed cows, children with birth defects, increased cancer rates, and many other horrors, none of which were true, of course. Somehow, the industry thought that if it just "defended" itself, and did not take the anti-nuclear lobby head on, the problem would "blow over."

For its June 1979 issue, *Fusion* magazine interviewed some of the spokesmen for the nuclear industry, concerning their plan of action. The Edison Electric Institute, the lobbying arm of the nation's electric utilities, stated valiently, "Our response so far has been to lay low and say nothing, hoping the whole thing blows over."

The Atomic Industrial Forum, the nuclear industry lobbying organization in Washington, stated, "We see the future of nuclear power as a pretty tough battle for the next year or so—until we can study or learn from what happened, especially at Three Mile Island."

"Time is needed for corrective measures," looking for rotten power plants. "The public has to sort out the comparative risks between nuclear power and other methods of producing energy. The Atomic Industrial Forum will be active in informing the public about Three Mile Island and other problems."

The industry representatives busily set up training programs and institutes to "improve" nuclear energy, while the companies responsible for building power plants had a bit more sanguine evaluation. A Westinghouse Corporation official told *Fusion*, "The reactors now on order will be completed, then that's it. It's the end of the nuclear industry in

the United States." Because companies, including Westinghouse, did not lead a political fight, that statement has come true.

How to win

Only the Fusion Energy Foundation (FEF) and this publication had the guts to tell the American public the truth about TMI and nuclear power. The most likely cause of the "accident" was sabotage, an Independent Commission of Inquiry to Investigate Three Mile Island, organized by the FEF, determined. This message was repeated in full-page newspaper ads, in college campus debates, at conferences and symposia, and even on bumper stickers.

The real purpose of the "mass movement" to shut down nuclear power, the FEF insisted, was to carry out the agenda of destroying the industrial, agricultural, and military power of the United States. The attack on nuclear energy, the FEF warned, was only the opening shot in a broadside against the development of new technologies which are required for real economic growth.

The groups seen marching on television did not represent the "American public," the FEF said. Each group was well-financed by Eastern Establishment think tanks, such as the Ford Foundation, and by financial interests. An effective fight, FEF warned, would require that the industry expose these supposed "do-gooders" as the malthusian wreckers they were. The industry chose instead to hide and try to "correct" its "mistakes."

The "scientists" paraded before a frightened public, trying to scare people about radiation, were largely just representing the political line coming from the modern-day Luddites, the FEF warned.

The nuclear industry barely exists today, because the anti-nukes won the war. Since 1978, there have been no new orders for plants. Less than a year after TMI, General Electric and Babcock and Wilcox, two of four U.S. nuclear suppliers, announced shutdowns of major production facilities.

By the mid-1980s, power plant construction time had more than doubled to 120 months, and the infamous Shoreham plant in New York, was in its 18 year and still awaiting an operating license, when the utility reached an agreement with the state to destroy the plant. Today, due to the stretch-outs and obstruction of the anti-nukes, half of the cost of a power plant is finance charges, and less than 10% of the total investment is the actual nuclear reactor.

As a result of this sabotage, the electric grid is in the most vulnerable position it has been in since the introduction of electricity 100 years ago. It has become nearly impossible, and certainly "economically unviable," to build any kind of baseload power plant in the formerly industrialized U.S.A.

Whether this will be the way of the aerospace/defense sector of this nation, largely now depends on whether the patriots in that industry learn a lesson from an unfortunate predecessor.