

The Inside Job Against Nuclear Energy

While Albert Wohlstetter's nuclear report put a hold on nuclear development from the top down, other forces were squeezing nuclear development from the bottom and middle levels of policy-making. Such a squeeze required the right sort of bureaucrat and the right bureaucracy to carry out the anti-nuclear thrust, and so the Ford Administration at the end of 1974, removed Dixy Lee Ray, the pro-nuclear chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission; and Congress abolished the agency, and reorganized energy policy into a mishmash agency known as the Energy Research and Development Administration.

(Dixy Lee Ray, who had been brought into the Atomic Energy Commission by President Nixon in 1972, was a scientist and an FDR Democrat, who fought to expand nuclear and educate the public about every aspect of nuclear technology. She went on to become governor of Washington state, and she continued to fight for nuclear energy expansion.)

Under the Carter Administration, nuclear energy was squeezed again, into just another energy office in the new Department of Energy, headed by "energy czar" James Schlesinger, a Wohlstetter colleague at RAND who was then, and still is, anti-nuclear. The regulatory oversight for nuclear energy was given to the newly created Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

In this same time period, 1975, the Ford Foundation released a 450-page tome on nuclear energy, "Nuclear Power: Issues and Choices; Report of the Nuclear Energy Policy Study Group," purporting to be "fair" but arrived at by a group of Establishment academics, many of whom had the same Russellite credentials as Wohlstetter. As the overview to this report states, "We believe the consequences of the proliferation of nuclear weapons are so serious compared to the limited economic benefits of nuclear energy that we would be prepared to recommend stopping nuclear power in the United States if we thought this would prevent further proliferation." The overview went on to say, however, that such a course of action could "increase the likelihood of proliferation, since the United States would lose influence over the nature of nuclear power development abroad."

The most striking aspect of the Ford Foundation study is that it has the same Mickey Mouse approach to economics as Wohlstetter et al. There is no concept of physical economy or a "science driver." Everything is measured in strict cost-benefit terms, without any idea of development.

On the ground level in this period, was a growing swarm of environmentalist groups, hatched by the counterculture and the campus turmoil during the Vietnam War period. These were the most visible of the anti-nuclear forces, in the media and on the street. But the policies they carried out came straight from the neo-con pen of the shadowy Albert Wohlstetter and the lower-down Establishment figures who conducted the Ford Foundation study. The environmentalists and the so-called "left" were the legs, not the head of the anti-nuclear movement.

subsidizing civilian nuclear energy was the way to stop the spread of the military technology. Since civilian and military nuclear energy programs overlap so extensively, a more plausible course might have been to subsidize research and development on the improvement of fossil fuels or of more exotic non-nuclear alternatives such as solar electric or geothermal power."

Taking note of the nuclear optimism still in operation, the Wohlstetter report listed the projections for civilian nuclear plants in the 1990s, and then offered suggestions of how such growth could be derailed—exactly what occurred. "This large growth is not inevitable," the report stated. "It presumes the carrying through of plans, negotiations, and constructions not yet committed and of varying degrees of firmness; some have had setbacks. The growth, moreover, is open to influence, a subject for the elaboration of policy of supplier as well as recipient governments."

Wohlstetter's pessimism was unflagging. The report reiterated in every section how "nuclear power promises very limited economic benefits to less developed countries." "In

all likelihood," the report wishfully stated, "history will reveal that once again the nuclear optimists have greatly overestimated the future growth of nuclear power." And another favorite theme: "Every time a new country obtains a nuclear power reactor, it is moving significantly closer to a nuclear weapon development capability, since the plutonium produced by all nuclear reactors can be made into nuclear weapons."

Like Wohlstetter's tediously exhaustive strategic analyses, this report reviewed every aspect of how every country might be able to make bombs with their civilian nuclear reactors, and what might be done to constrain this. The main constraints from the Wohlstetter point of view were simple: stop nuclear technology, stop reprocessing, don't even think about breeder reactors, load on the statistics equating power plants with bombs, and don't mention any new technology development. His constraints worked. From this evil-minded Russellite neo-con, who remained in the shadows, came the anti-nuclear policies that have kept nuclear technology suppressed for 30 or more years.