

Marxism and Nuclear Power

For several years a movement has been growing up in the US in opposition to nuclear power. The Three Mile Island disaster has given an enormous impetus to the growth of the "anti-nuke" movement, drawing in new forces and raising its credibility and moral authority among millions of Americans. For Marxist-Leninists the anti-nuke movement has acquired a new importance as an important front in the struggle against monopoly capitalism. No other incident in recent times has cast in such sharp relief the perverted morality of the capitalist class which blandly and routinely places the lives of millions in jeopardy in order to safeguard their investments.

Marxist-Leninists have much to offer this growing movement — the political understanding that the dangers posed by nuclear power cannot be separated from the struggle against capital. Marxist-Leninists bring to the movement the knowledge that it is only in the context of drawing in and building unity with the great social movements against monopoly capitalism, the workers' movement, the movements of the oppressed nationalities and the women's movement, can the social power to really "shut 'em down" be built. Finally, Marxist-Leninists bring considerable organizational experience,

tactical sophistication and ties with other popular movements to the anti-nuke struggle.

SOME ADDED LESSONS

At the same time it must be added that the anti-nuke forces have some things to teach Marxist-Leninists. Furthermore if Marxists are to maximize their contribution to this struggle it is necessary to overcome some sectarian prejudices and dogmatic illusions.

It has been fashionable to debunk the anti-nuke forces as a bunch of utopians who want to turn their backs on modern technology and live out of the Mother Earth catalogue on some country commune. Certainly there are strong utopian and petty bourgeois strains in the anti-nuke movement. The back to nature, self-sufficiency mentality is an expression of individualism and reflects a distance, if not a contempt, for the real situation and actual options of the masses of working people. But generally we have substituted a caricature of the movement for a serious investigation of its actual character

and potential. The real weaknesses of this movement are an argument for why Marxist-Leninists need to participate in it and not a justification for abstention.

What this sectarian attitude also obscures is that for all these weaknesses the anti-nukes have been right about nuclear power and we Marxist-Leninists — with few exceptions — have been wrong. While the anti-nuke activists have been trying to arouse people to the real dangers posed by these plants, communists, by and large, have been indifferent to the issue. Now events clearly show that this danger is very real and this indifference was unwarranted.

Marxists think that the development of the productive forces is fundamentally progressive and that the role of technology in a given society is basically a question of the class character of that society. The attitude toward nuclear power among Marxists, at least prior to Three Mile Island, rests on a vulgarization of these basic Marxist conceptions. For not every advance in technology is *always* progressive. While the question of nuclear power is fundamentally a political question, this should not obscure that there also are very real technical problems associated with its use.

Another variant of leftist thinking goes like this: "It does not matter whether the capitalist class burns coal, harnesses the sun or splits atoms — the only question that matters is who controls energy, who pays for it and who benefits from it." Clearly it does matter because nuclear power poses a threat to the masses of people. To ignore this is to ignore an important front of struggle against the capitalist class — an opportunity to expose the real workings of the capitalist system and thus ultimately to advance in the battle to settle the fundamental question of who will control society — "them" or "us".

The PWOC is self critical for having fallen victim to this kind of thinking. In the future we intend to pay much more attention to the nuclear questions and environmental issues generally. We believe that Marxist-Leninists must begin to bring a working class stand and anti-imperialist perspective to the movements that are growing up around these issues. Fortunately Three Mile Island did not result in a melt-down catastrophe. Also fortunately, it did result in a melt-down of at least some prejudices in our ranks and hopefully among others as well.