

The "Movement" Moves on to Antinuclear Protest

"What a fantastic day. It reminds me of the best days of the 1960's," said former war protester Tom Hayden, one of the antinuclear activists appearing at the May 6 March on Washington. Cheering Hayden on with chants of "No more nukes" was a crowd the police estimated at at least 65,000, by far the largest ever assembled in the United States to protest nuclear power and one rivaling in size the huge antinuclear demonstrations that have occurred in Europe.

"The Movement has started again," declared George Wald, the Nobel laureate biologist long since turned political activist who was one of several scientists to speak at the rally. The crowd had assembled in the morning on the Ellipse, near the White House, then at noon it marched up Pennsylvania Avenue to the spacious grounds on the west front of the Capitol, overlooking the Mall and the Washington Monument. The marchers were predominantly young (though many were old enough to have been war protesters), white, and many had the look of people whose cup of tea is not life in a conventional middle-class suburban community.

Their mood was agreeable, almost festive, and most were no doubt as appreciative of the folk singers—the big names such as Joni Mitchell, Graham Nash, John Hall, and Jackson Browne were all there—as they were of the speechmakers, who included Jane Fonda (of *The China Syndrome*), comedian Dick Gregory, Barry Commoner, and Ralph Nader.

Nonetheless, the march carried a political message for Congress and the White House, for it showed that since Three Mile Island there is enough opposition to nuclear power to support protests on the grand scale of the civil rights and antiwar demonstrations. According to its organizers, the May 6 Coalition is the largest and most diverse to be put together since the antiwar movement and consists of better than 200 organizations. These include some women's groups and labor unions (although labor, taken as a whole, probably remains pronuclear), religious groups, senior citizen groups (the Gray Panthers), the War Resisters League and other peace organizations, student Public Interest Research groups, the Americans for Democratic Action, the Sierra Club, and over a dozen local antinuclear activist groups similar in inspiration to the Clam Shell Alliance that has kept the Seabrook nuclear plant project in New Hampshire tied up for years.

The message for the White House is that nuclear power could be a significant issue in the 1980 presidential race, and especially in the primaries. Jimmy Carter was criticized by Nader, Fonda, and other speakers for talking one way as a candidate in 1976 (when he referred to nuclear power as the energy source of "last resort"), then behaving another way as president, particularly in keeping James R. Schlesinger (the bete noir of the antinukes) on as Secretary of Energy.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts did not attend the rally, but the next day he was to tell May 6 Coalition lobbyists that no more construction permits for new nuclear plants should be issued pending development of better safety rules. A more likely presidential contender, Governor Edmund G. (Jerry) Brown addressed the rally and urged that Congress enact a moratorium on nuclear plant construction, just as the California Legislature did

with his support in its nuclear fuel cycle bills of 1976. But if it's any comfort to Carter, the governor inspired booing as well as applause even though he alone among major national politicians has taken a stand approaching that of the coalition's. Since his rhetoric on the nuclear issue could hardly have displeased the crowd, those booing him and chanting "Jerry Go Home" must have been down on him for other reasons, perhaps out of a general distrust of politicians or of distaste for the Balanced Budget Amendment he is championing.

The message from the May 6 march for members of Congress is that lobbying and constituent mail is now likely to increase substantially for a nuclear moratorium and for repeal of the Price-Anderson Act limiting liability in case of reactor accidents. For the nuclear industry and the electric utilities on whose orders the industry depends, the demonstration may very well portend even more political and regulatory uncertainty, particularly in terms of antinuclear protests and initiatives at the state and local and even corporate levels. Nader, for one, exhorted his listeners to go back home and mount such protest actions.

A demonstration on the scale of the May 6 march might have been impossible before Three Mile Island. Polls taken since this reactor accident have shown a distinct shift in public opinion about nuclear power. Robert Cameron Mitchell, a sociologist on the staff of Resources for the Future, has canvassed all the polling results, past and present. "Until this April," he told *Science*, "majorities on the order of two and three to one in support of building more plants were the rule. Today, the margin of support has shrunk dramatically to a slight plurality." The only comfort for the nuclear industry in the results of the recent polls, Mitchell says, is that only 20 to 25 percent of the respondents favor closing down existing plants as Nader and some other antinuclear leaders have demanded.

In the wake of the Three Mile Island accident many people have concluded that the nuclear enterprise is at a critical juncture politically. The size of the May 6 march and the shift of opinion found by pollsters now offer support for that intuitive judgment.—LUTHER J. CARTER

