

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Will nuclear energy survive in U.S.?

Dr. Dixy Lee Ray, former head of the Atomic Energy Commission and Democratic governor of the State of Washington, blasted the timid behavior of proponents of nuclear power at a meeting of the American Nuclear Society here Oct. 31, warning that the survival of liberty was at stake unless they stopped acting like "doormats" in the face of their opposition.

Dr. Ray threw down the gauntlet to a jammed hall of over 300 nuclear scientists and directors of utility industries, calling for the creation of a new pro-technology organization that will become an aggressive advocate for nuclear power capable of "staying one step ahead of the opposition."

She said the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has "fallen into the control of the social sciences," but that the new organization she had in mind would be of the same scale, and called something like the "American Association for the Advancement of Technology." She said it would have at least a half-million members if only the current members of various pro-nuclear engineering and related professional groupings joined.

"If we don't win this battle for the future of nuclear energy, we will lose our liberty as surely as on the field of battle," she said.

She said, "We must know our enemy as well as they know us," and asked how many in the room were familiar with the publications of anti-nuclear groups, like Ralph Nader's

Public Citizen newsletter, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and a publication last year called *Shutdown Strategies*. "Will we ignore them as the Allies ignored *Mein Kampf*, until it is too late?" she intoned.

She added, "Paying ransom to the intervenors will not buy the survival of nuclear power," noting that the South Texas Nuclear Project agreed to pay \$4.5 million to one anti-nuclear group to withdraw its legal action, on top of \$5.5 million to other "whistle-blowers" and \$1.5 million to paid consultants hired by these intervenors.

In addition, cost ratcheting has driven up the price of constructing nuclear plants, she said, and delays forced by intervenors have wiped out productivity. It used to take only 5.3 man-hours in construction to produce a kilowatt of power from a nuclear plant, she noted. Now it takes 23.0 man-hours per kilowatt.

Despite all the anti-nuclear fear-mongering, however, she said, 108 nuclear plants are now operating very efficiently in the U.S., and that without them, the electrical power shortages that are already creating rolling brown-outs in major cities on the East Coast would be much worse.

However, the current shortages are nothing compared to the trend shown by the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC)'s annual report of 10-year energy supply and use projections.

Major energy shortages by 1997

According to the October 1988 NERC projection, the U.S. will require, based on a modest 2% annual growth rate, 90,500 additional megawatts of electrical power by 1997. However, plants now under construction or planned for completion by that date will supply

only 40,000 megawatts—or, less than half of the total amount of new energy that will be minimally needed to maintain the current standard of living in the U.S.

The implications of this study are staggering from every standpoint—running the gamut from strategic national security interests to local services to the average household. Nonetheless, the NERC survey is itself almost impossible to decipher in the form it is produced and distributed out of Washington, which is symptomatic of the "wimp" factor that Dr. Ray criticized.

The report was published as a set of statistical tables, one set listing the forecast for peak demands in 1997 by regions of the country, and the other set listing estimated capacity resources. Nowhere were the two put together to show the result that NERC's Thomas Kuhn forecast at the ANS conference—the drastic net shortfall in energy availability expected by 1997.

Prior to Dr. Ray's speech, Kuhn and five other utility company executives held a press conference to lament the trends in the nuclear industry. Their excuse-making and whimpering reflected the kind of defensiveness the industry has demonstrated ever since it began to come under attack in the early 1970s by the "irregular warfare" tactics of our nation's enemies.

For example, at the press conference, which was covered by less than half a dozen journalists mostly from "in house" journals of the nuclear industry, Kuhn cited his statistic almost in passing, after complaining, "People don't see the need for additional energy." Ron Stinson, chairman of the board of the Management Analysis Company with past experience at General Atomic and General Electric, murmured, "People don't respond unless there is a crisis."