

Where Are We Going?

The first lecture of the Provost's series was given by Dr. Maxine Greene on Tuesday, April 17, in the gallery lounge. Her lecture was entitled "State of Higher Education."

Dr. Greene emphasized that educators today are plagued by increasing doubts concerning their roles in our society. While they are being held more and more responsible for the training of our youth, they are also met by increasing skepticism and cynicism with respect to their professionalism. She stated that today's educator is repeatedly facing issues where difficult choices must be made between contradictory alternatives.

Dr. Greene also discussed our society's standards on the worth of individuals. This is

especially true in the field of education where teachers have sorted out students for years. It is becoming more and more difficult to justify this process. People today, more than ever, feel they are entitled to a decent quality of life, not just ordinary care.

Professor Greene's lecture was well received by the audience. The next lecture in the Provost's series will be held on Tuesday, May 15. Richard Kaplan, an independent film maker will be the speaker.

A professor of education at Columbia University's Teachers College in New York, Dr. Greene has also published articles in many educational journals. She has also written four books, the latest of which is entitled "Teacher as Stranger."



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Nuclear Power:

Energy We Can't Afford

by ralph nader

Lately, it seems the atomic power industry crumbles a little more each month.

On March 28, 1979, what was perhaps the worst commercial nuclear power plant accident in American history occurred at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Harrisburg, Pa., when a cooling pump broke and radioactive steam escaped into the atmosphere.

Earlier this March, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) ordered that 5 reactors be shut down because of faulty designs. Last year, the Commission closed 5 other reactors because important safety pipes were cracking.

In February of this year, the NRC withdrew its support for the 1975 Rasmussen report, which estimated the likelihood and consequences of a nuclear accident. The report, long the bulwark of the nuclear power industry's defense, largely underestimated the risks.

One manufacturer of nuclear reactors, General Atomic, has already withdrawn from the market. Rumors persist on Wall Street that the nuclear giant, General Electric, will soon be pulling out.

And presently, people are crowding theatres around the country to see "The China Syndrome," a new motion picture about a nuclear reactor accident and an attempted cover up, starring Jane Fonda and Jack Lemmon. "The China Syn-

drome" is a fictional thriller to be sure, but its technical reality and balanced script are expected to set the citizenry thinking about the real dangers of nuclear power.

The movement for safe and clean energy is building momentum, but it has not won yet. The building of additional reactors pushes on. However, more and more the public is demanding answers about the safety, cost, and reliability of this technology. Is it dangerous? Is it economic? Is it needed?

Now is a good time to review briefly some of the important facts about this hotly debated topic.

1. Nuclear power facilities produce toxins which pose serious health problems. About 40 radioactive elements are produced by nuclear fission. One trillionth of a gram of one of these, plutonium, has caused cancer in laboratory animals. A millionth of a gram can cause massive fibrosis of the lungs, leading to death within days of exposure.

2. Decommissioning reactors and disposing of radioactive wastes present serious, unsolved safety problems. After about 35 years of operation, whole sections of atomic reactors are irreversibly contaminated with radiation, such that routine maintenance cannot be performed. At this point, the NRC says the entire facility must be decommissioned or

"mothballed" for hundreds of years. The entire plant itself becomes radioactive waste and must be contained. The costs of decommissioning may be as much as the original costs of building the reactors.

Moreover, only time can reduce the toxicity of radioactive waste. Plutonium 239 has a half-life of 24,400 years—meaning that in that time the material will have lost only half its toxicity. Scientists suggest radioactive elements should decay through 10 half-lives before becoming inert. Hence, plutonium must be securely isolated for over 240,000 years.

3. The insurance industry and the nuclear power industry have tacitly admitted the risks of reactor accidents by refusing to accept complete liability for accidents. Take a look at any individual homeowner or auto policy and note the clause excluding protection against nuclear or radiological accidents. No protection against nuclear tragedies is available on the conventional insurance market anywhere.

To entice private companies to invest in nuclear power, the federal government imposed a ceiling on the amount of financial liability corporations will face in the event of a reactor accident. The government knew the insurance industry would never accept any significant liability, so they passed the Price-Anderson Act in 1958

which limited to a tiny fraction of the damage from an atomic plant melt down.

4. Nuclear power is a marginal energy source, requiring enormous financial expense with low reliability. After all is said and done, it is important to note that nuclear power's total contribution to energy production is 3 percent. Even if the most ambitious nuclear program were to be realized, at best nuclear power could supply 10 to 12 percent of our total energy needs by the year 2000. By contrast, the President's Council on Environmental Quality states that "today's fuel consumption levels can be reduced by more than 40 percent" through conservation measures. The Council concludes that if we improve our energy productivity, the U.S. should not need more than 10-15 percent more energy by the year 2000. And the government predicts that renewable energy sources, the sun, tides, wind and heat from the earth could contribute as much as 25 percent of our energy needs by 2000.

What the country needs are energy systems that are safe, clean, reliable—and affordable. Unfortunately, nuclear power doesn't meet any of those basic criteria.

For more information about the nuclear issue, and how to get involved in your area, contact our safe energy group, Critical Mass, P.O. Box 1538, Washington, D.C. 20036.

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