Article: 969 of sgi.talk.ratical
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Subject: **Our Plutonium Economy And A Free Democracy Are A Contradiction In Terms**
Summary: **Our plutonium economy must be protected by police state methods.**
Keywords: **totalitarian democracy, plutonium culture, police state methods**
Organization: Silicon Graphics, Inc.
Date: Fri, 22 Jan 1993 15:30:00 GMT
Lines: 365

# Our Plutonium Economy And A Free Democracy Are A Contradiction In Terms

a passage from the 1983 book, *The Russian Threat,* about our plutonium economy

Excerpts follow, from a passage included in full below, about the realities of our plutonium economy, created in the ashes of the Second World War. It is imperative all of us grapple with the contradictions inherent in the situation we find ourselves in, where, by creating and using something as lethal, toxic and certifiably deadly as plutonium, we must give up our civil liberties for 'national security' reasons. "We just cannot have something that can be used for nuclear bombs and can damage and mutate human life with the lethalness of millions of cancer doses per pound floating about in a free society." The following was written almost ten years ago. But since that time, the Russian Threat has disolved into the mists of history and we are *still* left holding the nuclear bag.

For over forty years our society was told the reason we needed nuclear weapons was because we had to protect ourselves against our deadly adversary in the USSR. Now that adversary is a thing of the past. After WWII, MIT mathematician Norbert Wiener wrote about the Manichaean Devil in the following terms: "The Manichaean devil is an opponent, like any other opponent, who is determined on victory and will use any trick of craftiness or dissimulation to obtain this victory. In particular, he will keep his policy of confusion secret, and if we show any signs of beginning to discover his policy, he will change it in order to keep us in the dark." He was writing about the Soviets. But that threat no longer is credible. Why do we continue to allow ourselves to be propagandized by the those who would have us *still* believe in the Manichaean Devil—an opponent who no longer even exists? Who's interests are served by believing there are enemies "out there" who are worth polluting the biosphere with fundamentally deadly radioactive matter, that will annihilate all life on earth for hundreds of millennia to come?

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> What the ruling groups prefer . . . is to produce a situation in which no one dares oppose their plans. Their favourite methods are therefore to exploit people's dependence on consumer goods and on their jobs and exercising prevention controls by means of intensive surveillance. . . .[11]

What needs to be remembered in assessing this state of affairs is that plutonium, if it is to be used, must be protected by police state methods. We just cannot have something that can be used for nuclear bombs and can damage and mutate human life with the lethalness of millions of cancer doses per pound floating about in a free society. *A plutonium economy and a free democracy are a contradiction in terms.* This is a fact that has been recognised by leading legal experts and politicians alike. Writing in the *Harvard Law Review,* Russell Ayres states flatly that 'plutonium provides the first rational justification for widespread intelligence gathering against the civilian population.'[12] The reason for this is that the threat of nuclear terrorism justifies such encroachments on civil liberties for 'national security' reasons. It is inevitable, therefore, says Ayres, that "plutonium use would create pressures for infiltration into civic, political, environmental and professional groups to a far greater extent than previously encountered and with a greater impact on speech and associated rights". . . .

. . . Social control is justified, particularly as far as the plutonium economy is concerned, by the over-riding necessity to avoid the catastrophe which might occur either through carelessness, disobedience, or 'terrorism.' This cultivated attitude enables the Western technocrats to represent themselves to the public as the guardians of the society in the emergency situation they themselves inspired and engineered. . . .

The tragedy unfolding in the West is of a people who achieved liberty at great cost, but who now, faced with the despotism inherent in the plutonium economy, are abnegating it. They are rendering themselves subservient to those few who wish to build a national security state supplied with nuclear energy and armed with nuclear weapons. Our leaders are depriving us of the very liberties they have been entrusted to defend. Moreover, they are manipulating the 'Russian threat' to justify such actions, all the while claiming that they are protecting democracy. Never before have so few asked so many for so much for the sake of so little.

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## from *The Russian Threat, Its Myths and Realities* (c) 1983, Gateway Books, London, by Jim Garrison and Pyrae Shivpuri, pp 231-236

The growing erosion of civil liberties in Western Europe and the United States is closely linked with the nuclear energy-nuclear weapons complex, which mandates a psyche all its own. This complex creates the necessity for secrecy on the one hand and greater protection of investment on the other. Not only are there high financial and environmental risks but also potential ramifications beyond national boundaries. Because of the 'plutonium culture' generated by the nuclear complex, the age old dilemma of striking a balance between state authority and the rights of the individual is being forced to opt for increasing state control, and diminishing individual freedom. The plutonium culture allows for no other choice.

Each operating nuclear reactor produces between 400 to 600 pounds of plutonium waste each year. Less than one millionth of a gram, if ingested, can cause cancer and/or genetic mutation. Twenty pounds, if properly fashioned, can be made into a nuclear bomb. Because of this, *the different aspects of the plutonium economy must be as tightly guarded as nuclear weapons themselves*. Nuclear weapons are kept at military facilities generally away from population centres and specifically under guard in a military system predicated upon discipline, hierarchy and authoritarian leadership. Similar protection for the 'atoms for peace' programme will have a devastating impact upon the democratic freedoms and civil liberties of the citizens.

The potential problem with the plutonium economy and its relation to human freedom has been succinctly expressed by a statement made by Dr. Bernard Feld, Chairperson of the Atomic and High Energy Physics Department of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

> Let me tell you about a nightmare I have. The Mayor of Boston sends for me for an urgent consultation. He has received a note from a terrorist group telling him that they have planted a nuclear bomb somewhere in central Boston. The Mayor has confirmed that 20 pounds of plutonium is missing from Government stocks. He shows me the crude diagram and a set of the terrorists outrageous demands. I know—as one of those who participated in the assembly of the first atomic bomb—that the device would work. Not efficiently, but nevertheless with devastating effect. What should I do? Surrender to blackmail or risk destroying my home town?[9]

The dangers are real, so real that government planners in every country with nuclear programmes have undertaken steps to be prepared for Dr. Feld's scenario. In 1975, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) commissioned a specific study of the problem. One of the participants, Professor John Barton, Professor of Jurisprudence at Stanford University Law School, prepared a paper entitled 'Intensified Nuclear Safeguards and Civil Liberties.' The document began by stating that:

> Increased public concern with nuclear terrorism, coupled with the possibility of greatly increased use of plutonium in civilian power reactors, are leading the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to consider various forms of intensified safeguards against theft or loss of nuclear materials and against *sabotage*. The intensified safeguards could include expansion of personnel clearance programs, a nationwide guard force, *greater surveillance of dissenting political groups*, area searches in the event of a loss of materials, and creation of *new barriers of secrecy* around parts of the nuclear program.[10]

It is important to be clear what the above statement implies. The governments supporting nuclear power are attempting to protect the plutonium economy from two perceived enemies: first, those who would use the nuclear materials to terrorise the country through some type of nuclear sabotage; and second, those who seek to stop nuclear power, meaning anti-nuclear 'dissenting political groups'. This requires a nationwide guard force to be created specifically to deal with any terrorism and the erection of new barriers of secrecy around the nuclear programmes to keep public knowledge and participation at a minimum. Both sets of enemies would be subject to greater surveillance through electronic listening devices such as phone taps.

In Britain, for instance, it is accepted as a matter of course that anyone working for the Atomic Energy Authority be 'positively vetted' before being appointed. The Official Secrets Act, moreover, allows the government and the atomic industry to keep the nuclear installations cloaked in secrecy and the employees forbidden to communicate anything about their work. In 1976, Britain also became the first country to establish by law a nationwide guard force of constables under the direct control of the atomic authorities in order to guard nuclear facilities and specifically the plutonium stores. This guard force has privileges in relation to carrying weapons not granted to any other British police unit. Indeed, so sensitive are these privileges that under the Official Secrets Act, information about them has not been made available to the public. This force is mandated not only to guard against possible terrorism but to keep tabs on ‘dissenting political groups.’

Jonathan Rosenhead, of the London School of Economics, points out that this type of political control is very easily overlooked by the general populace because it is specifically designed and intended to be used as inconspicuously as possible. In America, political scientists refer to this technique as the "politics of the iron fist in the velvet glove." "What the ruling groups prefer", he says,

> is to produce a situation in which no one dares oppose their plans. Their favourite methods are therefore to exploit people’s dependence on consumer goods and on their jobs and exercising prevention controls by means of intensive surveillance. In the event of open conflict breaking out in spite of that, they would hope at least to contain it by ‘limited operations.’[11]

What needs to be remembered in assessing this state of affairs is that plutonium, if it is to be used, must be protected by police state methods. We just cannot have something that can be used for nuclear bombs and can damage and mutate human life with the lethalness of millions of cancer doses per pound floating about in a free society. *A plutonium economy and a free democracy are a contradiction in terms.* This is a fact that has been recognised by leading legal experts and politicians alike. Writing in the *Harvard Law Review,* Russell Ayres states flatly that ‘plutonium provides the first rational justification for widespread intelligence gathering against the civilian population.’[12] The reason for this is that the threat of nuclear terrorism justifies such encroachments on civil liberties for ‘national security’ reasons. It is inevitable, therefore, says Ayres, that "plutonium use would create pressures for infiltration into civic, political, environmental and professional groups to a far greater extent than previously encountered and with a greater impact on speech and associated rights". Sir Brian Flowers, in Britain, has come to similar conclusions. At the end of his environmental impact statement for the plutonium economy in the United Kingdom, known as the Flowers Report, he made it quite clear that Britain could not have both plutonium and civil liberties. Rather, he said, to adopt the plutonium economy would make ‘inevitable’ the erosion of the freedoms that British people had fought for over the centuries and have come to assume and accept as inalienable rights.

What is happening to Western Europe and the US should not be seen as an abnormal occurrence; rather, it should be viewed as the *logical progression* of what the adoption of the plutonium economy in any country implies. There are certain psychological implications inherent in the use and development of nuclear weapons. There are direct physical results on both workers and public alike from the nuclear fuel cycle. So, too, the plutonium economy makes inevitable the erosion of human rights.

Observers in the Netherlands and West Germany refer to the decline of the *Rechtsstadt* (meaning a state guided by laws which are both just and accepted) and the rise of the *Machtstadt*, where state authority is based on power equations. In the US, it is sometimes referred to as a ‘national security state’. We prefer the term *totalitarian democracy* to characterise the governments of the US and Western Europe. It denotes a governmental system of parliamentary democracy within which the official bureaucracy, the police, and the legal authorities are vested with almost total power over the individual.

It has been apparent for some time that the drive in the West for all-out growth, dictated by the need for capital accumulation and profits, has been creating problems that existing institutions, be they national or international, are simply not equipped to handle. These include:

- the alienation through and ruthlessness of the multinational corporations;
- the frustrations of an economy where automation and machinery are replacing human skills and ingenuity;
- the gnawing fears and anxieties aroused by the 'diseases of affluence,' notably cancer, heart disease and stress;
- and the looming threat of environmental destruction, be it at the local or planetary level, from chemical pollution, or the plutonium economy.

As long as the boom lasted, and Western affluence was sustained these pressures could be ignored. But that 'boom-balloon' has burst. The energy crisis is deepening. The economic reality of increased unemployment and inflation is becoming more and more depressing. The pressures of burgeoning populations, as also the youth demanding employment and a piece of the good life, are becoming unbearable.

In order to survive this 'crisis of capitalism', the dominant forces in industry and government are forcing through a ruthless restructuring and re-grouping of the economic system. In Western Europe this is reflected in the wholesale writing-off of vast sectors of traditional industry such as steel and textiles and the resultant social decline of whole areas. The trend is to form blocs such as the EEC but this in turn places increased strain on the member states and does little more than paper over the fundamental problems with another layer of bureaucracy. Under this weight, the welfare state that grew up in the decades after World War II is being dismantled, to squeeze just a bit more money to spend, as often as not, on more weapon systems. In the process, yet another safety net is removed for the individual who is the victim of the capitalist system. If it is any consolation, Marxism hasn't come up with any answers either.

Those in power know they have no way to solve the problems or meet the demands of their youth, of the millions of unemployed, of the anti-nuclear movement, of the populations in economically depressed areas, of the victims of industrial disasters, or of any other discontented groups. The only valid answers are ones which involve fundamental changes in our thinking and in our system itself, and these are ones which those in power are not in a position to offer. So they placate their constituencies with promises which they know they cannot fulfil.

This only adds to the frustration of those who can no longer wait. The next stage after fruitless protest cannot fail to be a challenge to that part of the system of which the individual has become the victim. If this challenge is met with either refusal or with repression, the frustration of those in protest can lead to violent action. Protest by violence against the system which cannot meet their demands when peacefully presented is labelled by those in power as 'terrorism.'

Foreseeing this scenario, the reaction of the dominant groups is to proclaim the necessity to prepare in time to deal effectively with those who are discontented. When there are violations that cannot be put right, then freedom to criticise and, in the end, democracy itself become hostage to 'effective governance.' It is an axiom of history that when the people begin to question the right of their leaders to govern, the leaders question the right of the people to question.

The irony of this situation within the conflict of East-West relations is that although the starting point of their analyses are different, the conclusions drawn by the Soviet leaders and the governing groups in the West are the same: both regard effective governance as being hindered by a genuine democratic government. The result in the East has been the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; in the West, 'totalitarian democracy.'

While it is true that the system of repression in the West is not as extensive or as brutal as in the

East, except in isolated cases, what is necessary to remember is that the *mentality* of the oppressor, whether in the Kremlin or in 10 Downing Street or in the White House, is the same. What is different are the *mechanisms* which oppress the people below. In both cases what is achieved is the setting up of a *standard of behaviour* which, because there are no alternatives allowed, becomes the *pattern of behaviour.* This creates a dangerous person-into-machine social norm. In the Soviet Union this has been done with a ruthlessness that needed only the unity and discipline of the Party; in the West mass control has been achieved by subtle manipulation that needs either public ignorance or public apathy to be effective. Social control is justified, particularly as far as the plutonium economy is concerned, by the over-riding necessity to avoid the catastrophe which might occur either through carelessness, disobedience, or ‘terrorism.’ This cultivated attitude enables the Western technocrats to represent themselves to the public as the guardians of the society in the emergency situation they themselves inspired and engineered.

The tragedy of the Russian people is the suffering of individuals endowed with a passion for personal freedom so profound as to verge on the anarchic, and yet who have been forced to live under a despotism resolutely intent upon the suppression of that freedom.

The tragedy unfolding in the West is of a people who achieved liberty at great cost, but who now, faced with the despotism inherent in the plutonium economy, are abnegating it. They are rendering themselves subservient to those few who wish to build a national security state supplied with nuclear energy and armed with nuclear weapons. Our leaders are depriving us of the very liberties they have been entrusted to defend. Moreover, they are manipulating the ‘Russian threat’ to justify such actions, all the while claiming that they are protecting democracy. Never before have so few asked so many for so much for the sake of so little.

[9] In Robert Jungk, *The Nuclear State,* trans. Eric Mosbacher, London, 1979, pp. 118, 19.

[10] "Intensified Nuclear Safeguards and Civil Liberties," Nuclear Reg. Comm. Cont. No. AT(49-24)-0190, Washington, DC, 31 Oct. 1975, p. 1.

[11] In Jungk, *Nuclear State,* op. cit., p. 132.

[12] In *Ibid.,* p. 142

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yer friendly neighborhood ratman

**KOYAANISQATSI**

ko.yan.nis.qatsi (from the Hopi Language) n. 1. crazy life. 2. life in turmoil. 3. life out of balance. 4. life disintegrating. 5. a state of life that calls for another way of living.