

AN OPEN LETTER

TO: Old nuke fighters and safe energy organizers, fellow veterans of the **Seabrook 1414**, and other delegates to the 1991 Conference for a Nuclear Free 1990s.
FROM: Richard Grossman, *The Wrenching Debate Gazette*
RE: "DEFIANCE!"
DATE: April 26, 1991

1. The expressed intentions of the oil - chemical - electricity - engineering - highway - auto - money - construction - scientific - university - government industries constitute an assault on every living cell, every leaf, every stone, every droplet of water. This time, the boys are not even bothering to be subtle. They want to dig everywhere. To strew their poisons all over. To kiss-off the democratic process. They want everything.

Bush says: *we are going to make the energy boys and the highway boys bigger and richer and stronger and happier. And you environmental types won't be able to do a thing about it because of jobs, national security and our ability to lie.* Sununu says: *we will fission and fusion and slurry and drill and pave and make citizens pay for it all.*

Bush and Sununu and Watkins have up and slapped the environmental movement precisely across the face. POW!

The response by most national conservation and environmental groups **insults** this country's tradition of citizen resistance. At this moment, these groups are pleading, *"Oh sirs! Please give us 40 mpg in the year 2003. Please give us Senator Tim Wirth's Southwest oil and gas development bill masquerading as halfass energy efficiency. And please don't drill in our one very special place, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge!"*

2. Industry and government intentions reflect the arrogance, stupidity, greed and hubris of the people in charge. The environmental and conservation organizations' response is due to habit, disregard for history, unwillingness to analyze paper victories of the past, desire for "credibility" with industry and government officials rather than with citizens, and the absence of a strong, community based citizens' energy movement able to change the agenda and force the national groups to be accountable.

We are at the threshold of a renewed, long-term struggle for control of our resources, our labor, our money, our communities, our health, our citizenship, our history, our democracy. That's what "energy" is all about. How well we analyze current political conditions, how well we plan together and how well we **intentionally** escalate our demands and our actions will determine our success in the years ahead. It does not make sense for us now to shy away from grappling with the real power that confronts us. We should not allow **any** national conservation or environmental groups to plead for trifles in our name, to set our goals for us, to position themselves for declaring victory to their members while the polluters take our money and unleash upon us new waves of poisons and destruction and dominance.

3. Let us remember: **We are the remnants of a once vibrant movement. We stopped 800 nuclear power plants. We stopped nuclear fuel cycle factories and radwaste dump schemes. We stopped coal and oil plants, pipelines and drilling that no one needed but industry. We stopped the robbing of billions of dollars from citizens, pockets. We shifted money to investments we wanted. We helped each other see who the energy industry was and how they thought.**

We learned that the primary criterion of the energy and government industries was and remains -- **control**, that waste and inefficiency and destruction and pollution were built-in; that **our** criteria were very different from **theirs**.

We created a transformational energy debate in the 1970s. We even persuaded economists that the nation could use less energy to get the same work done. We started to specify what that work should be and how it should be organized.

We became a movement. We were diverse. We were defiant. We were strategic. We were unpredictable. Non-cooperative. Effective. We made demands which sent shivers up and down the spines of officials everywhere. We were denounced by academics and editorial writers. We created a culture of resistance which spread out across the land. We energized citizens. We were transformed by our activities. In turn, we transformed others.

We were more than a "no nukes" movement . We were a movement of citizens determined to gain political power, to reclaim our democracy. We challenged corporate America's sacred right to invest where it chose, to dig where it chose, to destroy and poison where it chose. We sought to empower ourselves and to break the corporations' grip on our government.

But in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we made the mistake of letting energy debate and activity shift to Washington, DC **before** we were ready. The President, the Congress, regulatory agencies and the national conservation and environmental groups took over, replacing our demands for control and democracy with modest technological, regulatory and spending reforms.

Since that time, the industry has been consolidating its power. It rolled back most of those modest reforms. It lowered wages, busted unions. It sent fear and terror into communities everywhere. It perfected the buying of Congress and elected first a tree-hating president, **then** an oil president. It learned the language and fashion of environmentalism.

4. So the timing of this gathering could not be better. What a wonderful opportunity to help each other draw from our own diverse experiences, to help each other define what we face, to review past tactics used against us, to think and plan commensurately.

What better time to go on the offensive, to begin taking action in solidarity with people everywhere trying to protect wilderness, diversity, community and citizenship. We know well how the energy industry fought against us in the past. Recently, we experienced a powerful demonstration by our government of what it was prepared to do, to get what it wanted. We are still in the shadow of Bush's war, of what Paul Goodman labeled "tantrum diplomacy", followed by the infliction of mass violence.

Our government -- the government we have been turning to for redress against the energy giants -- showed us that it was prepared to slaughter and maim thousands of people. That it was prepared to force young Americans to kill. That it was prepared to cause vast ecological destruction, prepared to lie, prepared to provoke a super patriotism in which dissent is equated with un-Americanism.

And in the middle of that violence, George Bush announced an energy plan that gave away our nation's wealth to corporations that had robbed us for so long. George Bush told the energy and highway boys, "*Go ahead! Dig up the rest of the Earth!*"

5. They want everything. The energy corporations and the government are prepared to do whatever they think they have to. They understand they must undermine the democratic process to succeed. That's why they take such pains in their propaganda to say, "*The NES allows Americans to make their own energy decisions. It provides the public with more opportunities and information. The NES leaves energy choices up to the consumer. It does not seek to impose the judgement of the government.*"

These, as you know, are what we call lies. When the government which brought us synfuel robbery, nuclear power insanity, massive radioactive and chemical poisoning, subsidies and military backing for the oil industry, war and destruction and whole lot more, starts babbling about "consumer" choices and "opportunities for the public", we know that its real intent is to rip these choices and opportunities from our grasps . . . by persuasion if it can; by force, if it must.

6. When scores of environmental and conservation groups issued their "three fundamental principles" for a national energy strategy recently, nothing was included which reflected the ownership and control struggles citizens waged a little over a decade ago.

The principles did **not** speak to citizens' rights, to community rights, to Native peoples' rights. They did **not** address the need to decrease the massive wealth and political power of the energy conglomerates. They did **not** acknowledge that our government has been revealed to us as the biggest polluter of them all, and the biggest funder and supporter of the poisoners. They did **not** discuss the role of the energy industry workers and community neighbors in planning and carrying out the transitions to appropriate energy use under citizen control.

Alas, the DC based environmentalist strategy for the near-term is not about any of these things. It is not about empowering people to organize against the great forces poised to intensify their plunder of the planet. The focal points of the DC lobbyists are these: 40 mpg by 2003; no drilling in ANWR [Alaska National Wildlife Refuge]; the Wirth Bill.

a. 40 mpg: This is a grand diversion. The auto companies could have achieved this great milestone decades ago. For them to reach this goal in 12 years would be **no accomplishment, no victory**. It would **not** force the auto industry to make much real change. It would **not** shift power from the companies to citizens. It is **not** a transformative demand. It is likely that industry and politicians will settle for 32-35 mpg, with complex rule-making procedures controlled by EPA as to what the standard really means. And when.

What kind of goal is that? Maybe if we were demanding 100 mpg by 1995, no exceptions . . . now **that** would stir things up! The boys would declare, *"Impossible! Never! How irresponsible! How hysterical!"* But we would have a clear fight on our hands, a fight which could stimulate revealing debate on transportation investment, on the **politics** of transportation production, on planning the transition based on **our** criteria, based on **our** timetable.

There are many other goals we could lay on the transportation table which would break the current dynamic, get us off the defensive, spark citizen interest, provoke corporate and government officials to overreact, to change their strategies. How about starting with citizens taking control of the billions and billions of dollars in the Highway Trust Fund?

b. ANWR: We already won this. That's why it is a preserve. So what is going on here? Consider this scenario. The industry wants access to everywhere,, with public subsidies, especially wilderness areas and Native lands all over North America.

It wants oil/coal, uranium, plus places to dump poisons. So the industry provokes yet another diversion, tying up the entire Sierra Club and others on ANWR, knowing that these groups will not link the ANWR struggle with other Native struggles. The industry knows that these groups' focus on this one place will help drive bigger wedges deeper between mainstream environmental groups and people of color. In the end, the oil companies probably will "give" them ANWR which, after all, environmentalists had already won anyway. But the price will be everywhere else. The environmental groups will declare another "victory" in ANWR, but the industry will be the real winner.

Native peoples and the Earth will be the losers. It will be harder in the future for coalitions of Native peoples and environmentalists to form. And without such coalitions, ANWR and other Nativejands will be there for the taking.

c. The Senator Tim Wirth (CO) Bill: Wirth astutely removed the nuclear power component from his bill. But he has said that he will not toss it away and will introduce his nuclear plans as a separate bill. What remains is some wishy washy conservation that does **not** even compare with 1975 citizen demands; and which helps to conceal the assistance to regional oil and gas development that Wirth's bill will provide.

With this three-pronged approach, it is likely that the short term environmental agenda will apparently be totally victorious. All the more reason to be wary. The reality will be that each such "victory" will continue to mask the growing domination of energy industries and government, each "victory" will set up new roadblocks to broader-based citizen consciousness and resistance. This approach does **not** prepare the ground for taking on

George Bush and Bennett Johnston on the Big Plan next year. Indeed, it sets us up as predictable, as patsies.

7. We need to free ourselves from any lingering notions that we are only confronting some pollution and some polluters. Or excavators. Or stubborn corporate and public officials. Or uninformed press. Or misguided scientists.

The fact is, we have always had the "data" on our side. And we have seen that the greatest "data" in the world turn out **not** to be persuasive where these boys are concerned.

We have been turning to the federal government for help. But our government turns out to **be** the nuclear industry, to **be** the toxics industry, the excavation industry, the money industry, etc.

The major media has always shilled for the energy giants. We shouldn't get angry at *TIME* magazine this week for its full-color propaganda job on nukes. *TIME* is just doing its job. The press as it is owned today will **not** be our vehicle for empowering citizens, reformulating debate, making connections between issues. Look at "energy conservation". In many respects, the "energy conservation argument" has been won in the press. Yet none of the structures of power have been shifted by this victory.

Congress is **not the place to begin our debate**. We are weaker than we were in the 1970s. And we lost control then. If we don't organize ferment across the land, if we don't create an escalating movement, we will be powerless before the industry's advocates and arguments on Capitol Hill.

8. If we are to truly change energy policy, we need **now** to help one another to acknowledge that we are, in fact, taking on the most powerful institutions of all time, backed by the most powerful government of all time. We must support each other in a struggle where the other side has, the capacity to intimidate, to manipulate, and to wreck violence on its opponents.

We also need to realize just how fragile the corporate structure of domination really is; that others successfully challenged their production and investment prerogatives, their control of money and resources in the past. We can do it again.

9. So what to do? Well, first, **don't** write your congressperson.

And don't let this conference structure prevent you from talking about what you want and need. Don't let all the talk be channeled through speakers from the podium and workshop leaders. Have your own discussions. Take control of the conference as a first step towards taking control of the larger debate, the strategizing, the engines of finance, resources and politics in this country. **The experience embodied in the people attending this gathering is enormous: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT.**

We can come up with clear demands such as community veto power for all plant siting; public ombudspersons on every company board of directors with access to all company information, with staff and resources to get that information out to the public. We can demand bans, phase-out, shut downs, accompanied by our own clear, non-negotiable timetables. We can demand the break up of energy monopolies, the actual dechartering of recalcitrant energy corporations. We can put forth explicit timetables for decreases in energy production and transition to renewables. We can require heavy penalties for non-compliance including jail time for corporate executives. We can invest authority in citizen boards which have power **over** EPA and DOE. We can save ANWR by linking it to **all** struggles to preserve Native lands and protect Native rights. We can be very, very clear: NO TRADEOFFS.

We are at the beginning of a new phase in a long and bitter fight. I believe we need to create a climate which nurtures creativity, nurtures education, nurtures organizing across constituency lines, nurtures our own unpredictability and which forces our opposition to make mistakes, which helps people empower themselves and their communities, which encourages us to raise our sights, to believe what we see, to think we can get what we actually need.

That's one of the ironies about the low aspirations in DC groups. The people in these organizations are wonderful folks. They are smart. They know that we need a great deal more than what is on the table today. But they are committed to being "realistic". I suggest that the more there is a true **citizens' movement**, the more there is a culture of opposition brewing across the land, the more ambitious "realism" becomes for everyone.

Shouldn't we learn from the history of other social movements? Once, the abolition of slavery was considered unrealistic. The eight hour day was unrealistic. Child labor laws, banning atmospheric nuclear bomb tests, ending legal segregation, stopping the Vietnam War while some Vietnamese people were still alive -- the lists can be very long.

What has made the difference in these struggles? I believe it is people saying it **is** possible. People organizing to fulfill their citizenship. People being defiant. People learning not to let their leaders censor what we know is right.

10. As long as you are gathered here, I hope you will do something exciting, something unpredictable. John Sununu lives at #2737 Linda Marie Drive, Oakton, Virginia 22124. Surely, he might like to hear from you, the citizens who pay his salary, in some diverse and creative ways. Maybe instead of lobbying Congress on Monday, it would be more productive to engage some environmental lobbyists in conversation about their analyses and strategies. Maybe they should be the first to be held accountable?

And if you must go to the Hill on Monday, why not perform an exorcism on Bennett Johnston to get the oil and nuclear industry out of that poor man's soul.

We need to make intentional effort to delegitimize the existing institutions of our grief. And to legitimize citizen actions to create other forms, smaller, more accountable forms to provide what we need and want.

If we do not challenge the right of destructive institutions to exist, if we do not challenge the authority of manipulating ideologies, then we give away so much authority inherent in ourselves as citizens, as humans. We give away so many opportunities for creative educating, protesting, organizing and reorganizing.

We have the smarts. We have the data. We have the people. We are the people. We have the right. And we have the responsibility. After all, these corporations and this government are daring to do what they do in our names, in the names of all Americans. It is our job to bring them under our control, so that they cease taking our good names in vain.

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