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committed themselves not to personal gain, not to their own pleasure, but to struggle, self-sacrifice, and sometimes physical danger, imprisonment, and even death. So many of the martyrs who fought for the eight-hour day, for a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work, to end the oppression of child labor have gone unmourned and unsung by their sisters and brothers. These women and men whose lifeblood gave us the legal rights to have a voice on workplace issues affecting our health and well-being were the building blocks of the growing labor movement.

Karen Silkwood is such a martyr. She saw the problem—saw the dangerous working conditions she and her fellow workers faced daily. She struggled and fought, she organized other union activists to overcome these threats to their health. Karen didn’t lead a demonstration; she kept scrupulous records. She didn’t seek personal notoriety; she worked to develop a strong, courageous shop committee. The very last meeting Karen had with her fellow union members to map out last-minute strategy exposing the hazards and unsafe working conditions at Kerr-McGee facility. Then she was off, to meet with a representative from her International and a New York Times reporter. Karen Silkwood’s work ended that night as her car went off the road. Yet she left us—women and trade unionists—a burden and a legacy.

Karen left us the burden of finishing the work she set out to do—the work of securing the rights of workers who deal with radioactive substances to rigorous job safety controls; the work of assuring that workers fighting for health and safety conditions on the job need never again fear the harassment Karen suffered; the work of investigating the conditions surrounding Karen Silkwood’s contamination with radioactive materials during the last few days of her life and the ‘‘mysterious’’ accident which caused her death.

Her legacy is one of conviction, courage, and heroic determination: the legacy of one human life invested in the battle to defend the rights of all workers to work in dignity; the legacy of a woman who took the cause of worker safety and health forward and made it a rally cry for her survivors.

This is who Karen Silkwood is to us—the sisters and brothers who never knew her in life—who in her death must carry the burden of her work and preserve the legacy of her life for those who follow us. 

Cognitive Symbolization: Environmentalists for Full Employment

Many social movements evolve a consistent body of theoretical doctrines that amount to an ideology. Theory emerges at a distinct phase of the movement. Internal division or uncertainty within the movement may necessitate the formulation of ideological doctrine, usually at a time when conflict becomes more focused, and growth of the movement may suffer.

The only group to have developed an incipient theoretical doctrine of the antinuclear group has been Environmentalists for Full Employment. This organization was created in response to conflict between environmentalist and labor movement factions within the movement (or to forestall such conflicts), and to conformations between antinuclear activists and workers in nuclear power plants. At the site of the Indian Point reactors in New York, Representative Bella Abzug was jeered after speaking in favor of antinuclear groups demonstrating outside the plant. At Seabrook, construction workers participated in counterdemonstrations that supported nuclear power. Ideological rationalizations of a movement’s goals are born out of such conflicts. When the group formed in 1976, it appealed to Leonard Woodcock, President of the AFL-CIO, to unite these two factions, arguing that “both the environmentalist and the labor movement must keep in mind the ecological principle that there can be no division between the natural and social environment.”

Organized labor in general and the construction unions in particular support nuclear power. Both the Teamsters and the United Mine Workers, the latter in order to protect the coal industry, are pronuclear. Unions that support the construction of nuclear power plants have worked with the utilities to help defeat the California Nuclear Safeguards Initiative and to mobilize pronuclear demonstrations at Seabrook in New Hampshire. But gradually more labor union locals have sided with antinuclear groups and have opposed nuclear power projects at Barnwell, South Carolina; Bailly, Indiana; and at the Clinch River breeder reactor project in Tennessee. Groups such as the Clamshell Alliance have endorsed resolutions that express their solidarity with the labor movement.

While antinuclear groups are open to the labor issues of worker safety in nuclear facilities, they have not overtly adopted left-wing views on capitalism in general. For groups such as the Clamshell Alliances, refusal to condemn capitalism reflects a strategic consideration as well as the existence of competing points of view among their affinity groups. Most of the activists had no desire to broaden the nuclear issue to an attack on corporate capitalism with the advocacy of socialism, as this would alienate the public and the government.

Environmentalist or ecology-oriented groups tend not to recruit from the working class, appealing instead to the college educated and upper-middle–class social stratum. Ironically, the U.S. Labor Party, a
Marxist-Leninist group, views "Naderism" as the ideological enemy in the nuclear controversy. In their publication, *Stop Ralph Nader, The Nuclear Saboteur*, the U.S. Labor Party asserts that banks are trying to increase the cost of raw materials and energy in order to generate capital to amortize debts. These banks supposedly are funding the environmentalist movement in order to hold back technological progress and economic growth, including the denial of nuclear power plants and technical assistance to the Third World.46

The U.S. Labor Party may not accurately reflect the views of the American left wing, but it has been one of the more visible leftist groups in the controversy. At one time, travelers at La Guardia or the other major airports were often urged by members of the Fusion Energy Foundation to subscribe to a magazine entitled *Fusion* at extraordinarily high prices. This group seems to be ideologically affiliated with the U.S. Labor Party and propounds a view that nuclear fission power is a necessary transition to nuclear fusion power and a growth economy. Radical left groups as such have not gained any prominence in the antinuclear movement, although it has attracted many individuals with radical left views.

Another irony in the nuclear controversy is the contention that the federal government is actually a major funder of antinuclear and antiutility direct action groups. In two articles entitled "Where Do the Antis Get Their Money?" H.A. Cavanaugh asserts that the public interest groups that are attacking investor-owned electric utilities, nuclear power, oil companies, banks, and corporations are funded by government grants which total over $2.5 billion.47 Cavanaugh claims that one of the three major antinuclear intervenors in the Seabrook controversy, National Consumer Law Center, was supported by grants both from the Department of Energy and the Federal Trade Commission. Some of the success of the antinuclear movement must therefore be attributed to their access to external resources from factions within the political elite. According to Cavanaugh, many of the government administrators are actually recruits from Ralph Nader and other environmental or antinuclear organizations.48

**Conclusion**

The antinuclear movement has remained a loosely organized movement despite the efforts by a few national organizations to coordinate the activities of diverse local and regional groups. The regional direct action organizations have provided the movement with symbols, especially in the struggle against the Seabrook, New Hampshire, siting of nuclear reactors. The Karen Silkwood case was extremely important to the movement because it offered a martyr and widened the spectrum of the movement's ideology to include issues important to the women's and labor movements. As conflict intensified, antinuclear movement groups have gravitated more to the labor movement as a source of cognitive symbolization or ideological rationalization of the movement's struggle. All of these efforts were both hindered and aided by the federal government.

The dual role of the federal government in the nuclear controversy is the key element in the assessment of the consequences of the antinuclear movement, for the government has been a critical factor in defining both the successes and failures of the movement. The exercise of social control over the movement's activities has been limited because antinuclear activists have been a vital element in the policy-making process as the bureaucratic apparatus struggles to cope with a generalized crisis in industrial society brought on by a growing scarcity of energy resources.
38. The most detailed accounts of this sequence of events I have found is Howard Kohn, ‘‘Malignant Giant—The Nuclear Industry’s Terrible Power and How It Silenced Karen Silkwood,’’ Rolling Stone 27 March 1975; and Organizer 1, no. 1 (November 1975), an issue prepared by Sara Nelson, National Coordinator for the Labor Task Force of the National Organization of Women.
39. ‘‘The cost of Karen Silkwood,’’ Economist, 26 May 1979, p. 57. The settlement in federal appeals court was later reduced to a smaller sum.
42. See Rebecca Logan and Dorothy Nelkin, ‘‘Labor and Nuclear Power,’’ Environment 22, no. 2 (March 1980): 6–12.
43. Ibid.
44. Steven E. Barkan, ‘‘Strategic and Tactical and Organizational Dilemmas,’’ pp. 24–25.
48. Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

Consequences of the Antinuclear Movement

The success of a social movement is defined by the outcomes of the controversy. A complete moratorium on nuclear power development would have signified total success for the antinuclear movement, but this has not occurred. Of all the differing theoretical schools of thought on social movements, the resource mobilization theory of social movements is most concerned with how and why a movement succeeds or fails:

The resource mobilization approach emphasizes both societal support and constraint of social movement phenomena. It examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of the movement on third parties for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate the movement.  

In practice, resource mobilization theory must assume that the movement obtains resources and leadership from political elites in order to succeed. But division among political elites must also be assumed, for while some elite factions may help to sponsor the movement, others will attempt to suppress it or neutralize the movement by incorporating some of its goals into government policy. The antinuclear movement has had a significant impact on government policy concerning both the allocation of energy resources and the problems of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. It has also had dramatic effects on public opinion. However, it would be misleading to overstate how much power the antinuclear movement has. We must keep in mind the keen observation of David Lilienthal, the first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission: