

# Assaults on the Nuclear State

Fermi, Watts Bar & Prairie Island

Various Authors

1995

## Fermi II

Over the weekend of Sept. 30-Oct. 2, activists from around the country descended on the town of Monroe, Michigan to protest the restart of Detroit Edison's crippled nuclear reactor, Fermi II.

Built at the site where its predecessor, Fermi I, suffered a partial core-melt accident in 1966, Fermi II was completed 20 years behind schedule and more than 2000% over budget.

On December 25, 1993 Fermi II suffered a turbine-generator explosion and flash fire filling a basement radioactive waste processing room with water. Edison officials called this catastrophic turbine failure a "non-nuclear accident," even though it resulted in the accumulation of 1.5 million gallons of radioactive water. In February, calling the water too dangerous to transport, Edison announced they would dilute it 50,000 to 1 and dump it into ecologically sensitive Lake Erie. There was immediate public outrage and although local environmentalists staged a protest in which nine people were arrested, the effort to stop the "Chernobylizing" of the lake was unsuccessful.

Faced with a fatally flawed turbine system, Edison decided to patch together the damaged one and operate the plant under reduced power until 1996 when they say new turbines will be installed. The management announced that the plant would be restarted October 1 even though the plant's critics described the repairs as "duct tape and chicken wire" and predicted another accident.

It was in this atmosphere that 300 people from different environmental groups and as individuals came to Monroe to participate in what was dubbed the Grassroots National Action Festival by the sponsoring groups—Citizens Resistance at Fermi Two, Earth First!, Greenpeace, the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), and the newly-formed Zebra Mussel Alliance.

Friday began with a spirited rally at Edison headquarters in Detroit demanding the utility close Fermi permanently. A drumming circle kicked out a steady beat for the 200 picketers and folk singers Darryl Cherney from Earth First! and Charlie King gave the environmental message in song. Later that night the Trumbull Theater hosted a vegan dinner and music by Cherney for many of the participants. King sang at another venue as a benefit for the action.

Saturday the action shifted to Monroe. Native American Heritage Month was kicked off by a rally at downtown St. Mary's park with speakers demanding Edison cease negotiating with the Mescalero Tribal Council to "temporarily" host a storage facility for irradiated nuclear fuel. Rufina Laws, a Mescalero, called the storage plan "economic blackmail" based on a "racist agenda" which lures impoverished native Americans into accepting deadly waste produced thousands of miles from their land.

The crowd left the rally site and converged on a near-by huge statue of home town boy, Indian killer General George Custer, which we encircled in hundreds of yards of yarn in a symbolic effort to "re-weave the web of life" destroyed by the nuclear fuel cycle.

Sunday was Ghandi's birthday and since Edison had failed to meet the demands to close their nuke plant, protesters prepared a non-violent blockade of the Fermi site. Protesters set up two tripods, constructed of three thirty-foot trees, on the road leading to Fermi's two secondary gates and three 700-pound cement-filled barrels on the road leading to the main gate. Two hundred people picketed at the different gates which were Kryptonite-locked shut and covered with anti-nuke signs and more yarn.

Within minutes 20 Monroe County Sheriff Deputies arrived and attacked the first tripod by shaking its legs, forcing Corey Conn to descend and be arrested. The cops then pushed the tripod over and it landed on Mark Robinson, an *Earth First! Journal* writer and photographer who was maced and arrested. When local SEAC organizer, John Trapp, protested this brutality, he was maced and placed under arrest for his troubles.

The other tripod sitter, Jim Sherman, had chained himself to the tripod and could not obey police commands to descend. The cops pushed the structure over with Sherman still on it and when it crashed to the ground, maced and arrested him. Emboldened by the ease in which they stopped the tripod blockade, deputies moved on to those locked in the barrels who had created a traffic back-up on the road leading to the plant.

By twisting and pulling on their arms the police were able to quickly cut Stephen Durkee, Rebecca McCall, Joseph Mold, Aaron Schattler, and Mike Trapp from their barrels. However, thanks to dimwitted, over-eager cops who left their lights on when they screamed up to the scene in their patrol cars, two of their vehicles failed to start and the road that the demonstrators blocked for only twenty minutes was stalled for over an hour by the police.

As the rally continued at the plant gates, the police began pushing and shoving demonstrators, telling them to "disperse or be maced." A free-lance photographer and Jonathon Lurie, a reporter for the Michigan Daily, were arrested by a particularly out of control deputy, D. Vandercook. Lurie was charged with felonious assault for allegedly biting one of the deputies.

As many of the 150 people at one gate were dispersing, the cops provoked a confrontation by shoving people and telling them, "The Constitution was suspended!" As the deputies reached for their mace, Roger Prunty objected and his audacity earned him a beating and a severe macing including the injection of the spray directly into his mouth. He was arrested for assaulting a police officer and his wife was arrested when she protested her husband's beating.

A total of 16 people were arrested. All pled not guilty and are awaiting trial. The organizers of the weekend's activities feel their actions were successful in bringing national attention to the issue and plan on maintaining the struggle to stop the crippled Fermi reactor from restarting.

Actions continued Dec. 7 with statewide demonstrations at Detroit Edison offices. Also, to celebrate the one year anniversary of Fermi's shutdown, Santa Claus and his helpers entered the Fermi grounds on Christmas Day with a present for Edison officials. For their troubles, three people were arrested, including Santa.

—Mike and John Trapp

For more information on Fermi or the December actions, or to donate to the legal defense fund, write: Zebra Mussel Alliance (ZMA) P.O. Box 1069 Monroe MI 48161.

## Watts Bar

Fresh from the annual Round River Rendezvous in Katuah (the North Carolina, Tennessee bioregion), Earth First! activists targeted the Watts Bar nuclear facility in rural Rhea County, Tennessee for a post-gathering action, July 11.

The group successfully blocked the main entrance while in the early morning hours unknown persons entered the grounds and sabotaged equipment and property. A spokesperson for the Tennessee Valley Authority charged the action caused an estimated \$500,000 in losses from "vandalism" and the blockade, which kept over half of the workers from reporting to the job that morning. This is likely a grossly inflated figure to bolster a threatened law suit against the demonstrators.

The Watts Bar plant, a bad joke even within the collapsing nuclear industry, has been under construction for 22 years at a cost of \$7.5 billion and is the only nuclear plant currently being built in the U.S. It also holds the record for the highest number of whistleblower complaints on safety issues.

Watts Bar is perhaps the best example of the lie that nuclear power is economical. The project operates under the aegis of the Tennessee Valley Authority and, similar to all other nuke plants, has functioned mainly as a gravy train or cash cow for bureaucrats, construction workers, engineers and the like. Even if it becomes operational, this plant, funded by tax dollars, will never recover its costs

At the action, EF!ers were organized into affinity groups, some of which entered the site under cover of dark to carry out the sabotage and vandalism. Others protested in front of the incomplete, over-budget facility. None of the saboteurs was arrested.

Early in the day EF!ers set up a roadblock to stop incoming construction workers. They were unintentionally assisted by Rhea County sheriffs who diverted traffic around the roadblock and off the road, slowing traffic. The protesters were ordered to leave, but as they started to comply, the cops charged and began making arrests.

The cops brutally attacked people who had locked themselves in cement barrels to create the roadblock and an EF!er who ascended a 30-foot tripod set up over one access road was shaken off of it. However, most of those arrested were not breaking any laws, but were arbitrarily seized by crazed cops who smashed personal property and stole video tapes which recorded acts of police brutality.

The cops made 58 arrests, four of which occurred at the county courthouse as people were attempting to bail out other protesters. Bail was set at \$1,000 each, with “criminal trespassing” the favorite charge of the day for 56 of those arrested, while “disturbing the peace” was a poor second, claiming only two rowdies.

To protest the circumstances of their arrest and deplorable jail conditions (prisoners were harassed and injured, and 32 men were placed in a four-person holding cell for several days), 17 people went on a six-day hunger strike.

Fortunately, the prosecution blew it. Only three cops turned in paperwork on those arrested, and were unable to identify the accused or to even say where the plant property line began. This essentially eliminated the state’s case. Realizing this, the local district attorney offered a plea bargain of no jail time and a \$125 fine. Twenty of those arrested took the deal, but the rest plan to fight the charges and, if found not guilty, sue Rhea County for false arrest, poor treatment and stolen property.

The demonstration and subsequent events received extensive media coverage and helped make public the issues of safety and cost over-runs at Watts Bar.

## **Prairie Island**

Anti-nuke demos are spreading as it becomes clearer that the industry is tottering. A protest against the Northern States Power company’s Prairie Island nuke plant near Minneapolis located on Mdewakanton Dakota land was held Aug. 29. Over 600 to 800 people attended and 39 were arrested.

Demonstrators came from several adjoining states including Michigan and the event was supported by the American Indian Movement. AIM’s Dennis Banks said, “Standing behind me is a monstrous entity that has declared an end to life,” referring to the plant’s cooling towers.

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