

# Symbolic Protest and the Nuclear State

reprint from FE #314, Winter, 1984

George Bradford (David Watson)

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Where, then, are the roots of revolt, how can the machine be halted?

A leaflet distributed recently by radicals in California to anti-nuclear protesters argues a point very similar to what we have written in the FE—that fear of being nuked is not enough, and that, “It is not only nukes that menace what is left of life, but the whole structure of modern society, beginning with the obsolescent machinery of work-to-pay-to-work which we call the ‘economy.’ Only a movement which taps into mass rage and desire by challenging this structure can hope to become strong enough to prevent the catastrophe.”

While I continue to mostly agree with this formulation, it strikes me as only a “formal truth” with no direct applicability, for neither rage nor fear suffice to create an opposition to the entire spectrum of the exterminist society. The fact is that the “spontaneous combustion” which will initiate conscious, radical revolt may or may not be imminent, but no “political intervention” or “critical truth” can force it to occur. And if and when it does occur, who can say with assurance that it won’t be the frustrating process of setbacks of the reformist peace movement, the fear of annihilation, or even the example of christians witnessing, which somehow sparks people to move against the war machine and finally the system as a whole?

But somehow we all have to go not only way beyond the symbolic witnessing of christian martyrs, but beyond the cycle of protest—be it “violent” or “non-violent”—which attempts to influence elites into changing the trajectory of a civilization irrevocably heading for its doom. I don’t know how we can effect such action, but ‘I know that prayer won’t do it We’ve got to overthrow this civilization and its gods if we are to truly redeem and recreate the world.

# fifth Estate

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