

SPECIAL REPORT

Democratic Party's Energy Policy: Glass Pyramids, Bankers' Socialism

March 23 (IPS) — Strange, isn't it, that all the gladiators in the Democratic primary arena are in complete agreement on the controversial question of energy policy. But this fact is far less surprising than the mind-boggling stupidity of the policy they have agreed on.

"Radical populist" Harris, "moderate" Carter, "liberal" Udall, "conservatives" Jackson and Wallace all agree that we must conserve energy by eliminating waste and substituting muscle power for machine power, thus creating jobs into the bargain. They all ignore "impractical" fusion and demand cutbacks in dangerous fission. They all agree that in the short term we must increase coal production, and over the long term shift to full reliance on solar energy.

Thus Udall: "The adoption of a strong energy conservation program is an absolute necessity ... coal constitutes one of the nation's most promising energy sources...the federal government must concentrate its efforts on renewable resources such as solar energy." With a down-home twang, Carter: "We must conserve energy drastically, make a major shift to coal, and substantially increase our use of solar energy." And so on down the line.

Where does this remarkable unanimity come from? From the scriptwriters, of course — all the candidates are briefed by the same handful of think-tankers, who in turn take their orders from the New York bankers. In the case of energy, the think-tank involved is Barry Commoner's Scientists Institute for Public Information. Commoner, frequently accompanied by fellow Institute board member and United Autoworkers union executive Irving Bluestone, has been traveling around briefing Democratic candidates, Congressmen, and key Democratic machine leaders on the correct energy line. Commoner's recent series of three articles on energy in the New Yorker magazine are now quoted as the bible of energy policy by practically every top Democrat, and one eager beaver entered the entire series into the Congressional record.

Sci-Fi Horror

Let's examine what the world would look like if the proposals Commoner and his Democratic pitchmen make to replace gas and oil with solar energy were carried through. The fascist regimes and evisceration of living standards required to implement even the early stages of the Commoner plan would ensure that the world would end in either thermonuclear war or a holocaust of disease and ecological collapse in a few short years: the "Year 2000" world described here is only a science-fiction horror story.

The more minor part of Commoner's catastrophe would be the solar heating of individual homes by rooftop solar collectors. For the U.S. alone, the installation of such collectors on each of the 50 million existing one-or two-story homes would involve, very conservatively, a construction labor force of 2 million working for 25 years, to say nothing of those involved in making the materials involved, such as 2 million square feet of plate glass a year, equal to current total U.S. output. Since this labor force is comparable to the total number of skilled construction workers formerly

engaged in construction of housing, presumably new housing construction would have to wait 25 years, by which time the solar collectors would be about due for replacement!

This is nothing, however, compared with the core of the energy plans of Commoner and his Democratic friends, the production of electricity and synthetic fuel (hydrogen) from diffuse sunlight. They propose to cover large parts of the American desert, and on a world scale presumably the Sahara as well, with glass pyramids — titanic arrays of mirrors focusing sunlight up to elevated water boilers, which produce steam to generate electricity and to electrolyse water, producing hydrogen fuel.

The scale of waste here is staggering. A solar generator sufficient to produce merely the electric energy consumed by New York City (about 15,000 megawatts) would require a mirror-array covering more than 300 square miles, using Commoner's own figures. The area of New York City is only 360 square miles! (Now we know why Big MAC banker Felix Rohatyn wants to raze 80 per cent of the city.) If such a generator were to produce all of New York City's energy requirements, the area would have to be four times larger.

Pyramid-Building

For the world as a whole, this means covering a total area of 125,000 square miles (at a minimum) with glass pyramids over the next 25 to 30 years.

A single 300 square mile generator (of which 400 would have to be built) would require at least 10 million tons of glass, plastic, and other materials. Just about as much weight as went into the original pyramids. This is 300 times more mass than the material required by the bulkiest possible fusion reactor for the same energy production. The energy involved in producing that much material would represent two years production for the generator itself. This means that with even a modest rate of energy growth and a 25 year life expectancy for energy collectors, at least 20 per cent of total energy supply will be going into the production of the solar collectors themselves!

In terms of labor, solar generators would require at least 15 to 20 times as much labor as comparable fusion generators, even taking into account the latter's greater complexity. On a global scale, this means the allocation of at least 8 to 10 million workers for the glass pyramid projects, equivalent to 50 to 60 per cent of the total U.S. industrial workforce. These then are the jobs to be provided the U.S. working class under "full employment" slave labor — building glass pyramids in the desert.

Such an incredible scheme makes sense from only one standpoint, that of the Harriman faction of financiers who pay Commoner and Bluestone in the first place. Far from advocating more productive technologies, like fusion power, which cheapen commodities and permit the rapid expansion of the economy as a whole, they want to turn technology back to preserve the historic value of their paper debt. Labor-intensive boondoggles, requiring little investment of capital relative to the quantities of slave labor, are a dream-come-true feeding-ground for these parasites. For the Nazis, it was

armaments and Autobahns; for Rockefeller's faction it was oil shale and coal gassification; the Harriman faction's recipe is glass pyramids.

Bankers Socialism

But it won't do for the Democrats to go around saying, "I'm for labor-intensive schemes and glass pyramids because it's the only way to protect the bankers!" That doesn't win votes.

Here is where Commoner must earn his pay, by devising a "scientific" rationale that will convince, if not workers, at least Democratic Party hacks and their petty-bourgeois peers. Commoner begins by deriving the necessity of raising the return on capital from a mere "respectable" theoretical basis — the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

The Second Law asserts that randomness is everywhere increasing, and once energy is used, it is converted into random heat and irretrievably lost. The universe, says Commoner, is running down (a law the Democrats can understand upon self-reflection). Therefore, since energy loss is irreversible, we must at all costs conserve energy and everything that takes energy to make, especially capital plant and machinery. Therefore we must get the maximum "productivity" out of each precious drop of oil and each precious dollar of capital.

Having established this vital point for the bankers, Commoner must then demonstrate that it is in the interest of the working population to preserve the return on capital (in other words, debt service) by turning back technological advance. Quickly donning his overalls, Commoner steps into his role as

friend of the working man and proceeds to explain the present economic crisis as a result of capitalism's insatiable drive for technology, a view he modestly ascribes to...Karl Marx!

The wicked capitalists, preaches Commoner, have continually replaced primitive methods of production like wood chopping, which uses lots of labor and little capital and energy, with advanced methods like electric generation plants, which use little labor and lots of capital and energy. This creates mass unemployment, by destroying jobs, and leads to energy and capital shortages. This has driven the capitalists to gouge wages to fuel their insane race to invest more and more in high technology, leading to the tremendous technological advances and booming growth in modern plant and equipment since the current depression got underway five years ago.

Since he has identified himself as a Marxist, Commoner's proposed solution to the energy and economic crisis is, of course, socialism, a socialism which will cure the fundamental evil of capitalism — progress. Instead of freeing the development of productive forces from the fetters of capital, as the real Marx proposed, Commoner wants to free capital from the fetters of development. An immediate retreat to the coal-run 19th century is merely Commoner's minimum program; his maximum demand is to return to Ancient Egypt. The socialism of Commoner and his Democratic co-thinkers is the opposite of the socialism of Marx. It is more exactly called bankers' socialism, better known as fascism.