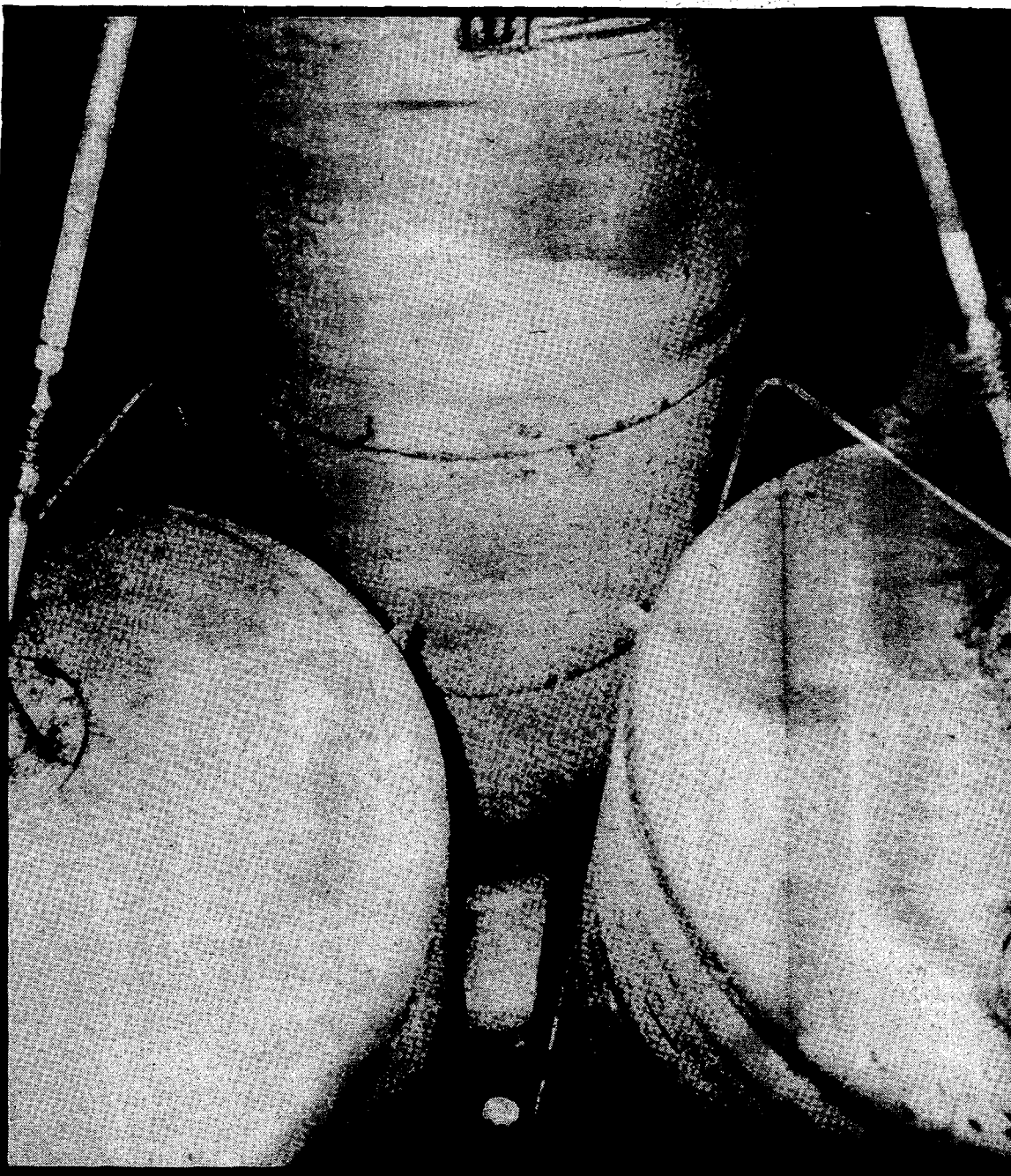


ECO-ECHOES



A federal energy official expressed fear that ERDA's plans to bury nuclear wastes in some states might run into opposition from environmentalists. Observers point out that there have been numerous instances of nuclear wastes leaking from burial sites, angering citizens whose lives are endangered by the increase in radioactivity.

Photo by AEC/Environment

Solar energy from space

The aerospace industry has gained congressional support for adding millions of dollars to the nation's energy and space budget for studies aimed at putting giant solar power plants into space orbit.

The orbiting solar stations would collect the sun's energy high above the atmosphere, where it is strongest, and transmit it via microwave to energy conversion plants on earth. While such a system is only in the early stages of development, the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) reports that it will be technologically feasible and cost-competitive with other non-exhaustible energy sources.

James Harford of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, an industry trade group, told a House subcommittee that "...development and deployment of space-based solar power stations represents perhaps the most significant impact the space program may have on the human race in this and the next century."

He described as "incredibly shortsighted" the lack of any funds in either the energy or space budgets for fiscal year 1978. ERDA had requested \$5-6 million for studies on satellite solar stations. An industry magazine reports that there is now key congressional support for including the funds in the House authorization bill.

(Information from Pacific News Service)

PBB still a Michigan issue

Faced with the chemical contamination of thousands of their cattle, Michigan farmers are charging "willful, wanton neglect" by a chemical company, a coverup by the state's Farm Bureau and inadequate response by government officials. Their fight may result in the recall of Gov. Tom Milliken and the dismissal of other state officials.

The problem began in mid-1973 when a fire-retardant containing PBB (poly brominated biphenyl) was accidentally mixed with cattle feed and sold to farmers throughout the state. The contamination

was not discovered until May 1974. Since then 40,000 cows, sheep and pigs have been destroyed because of high levels of PBB.

The Michigan Farm Bureau, which distributed the contaminated feed, has already paid about \$40 million in claims to 600 farmers. Marilyn and Roy Tacoma of Falmouth, Mich., have refused, however, to accept what they call a "token" settlement and are suing for \$1 million. Their lawsuit came to court in late February.

The Michigan Chemical Co. produces both the fire-retardant and magnesium oxide, the usual feed additive. The Tacoma's suit charges that the products were manufactured less than 50 feet apart, and that loading dock employees were never instructed as to the differences between them.

In addition, the fire retardant was packaged in poorly-labeled bags that looked similar to the feed additive. After the retardant was mistakenly shipped, the company falsified records to hide the missing amounts, the suit charges.

When the retardant arrived at the Farm Bureau, at least three employees noticed the different names but were told to inventory both products as the same. The suit further charges that the Bureau knew the two products had been mixed but failed to take any steps to avoid the resulting contamination. In 1973 the Bureau received complaints from farmers who bought the feed but did not try to determine the cause.

According to the *Detroit Free Press*, the problem was further compounded by the Michigan Agricultural department. It did not begin testing meat sold to the public until January 1975—seven months after they were aware of the poisoning.

Acriculture director B. Dale Ball also saw no reason to warn every farmer to keep contaminated products off the grocery store shelves. "We assume that farmers can read and read the papers," Ball says. "I can't mail something to every farmer in the state. He can test the same as we can if he's concerned."

Both farmers and consumers suffered from the department's failures. Some contaminated herds were not discovered for

two and one-half years after the initial poisoning and Michigan consumers are reportedly still eating meat contaminated with PBB. One test found that nearly 10 percent of the state's citizens have PBB levels higher than is allowed in food.

The United Auto Workers have called on Ball to resign and have accused the administration of Gov. Tom Milliken of "negligence and incompetence" in dealing with the PBB affair.

Another organization, the PBB Action Committee, has begun a campaign to recall Milliken. "We want that governor out of office because he hasn't done his job," says committee vice-president Lewis Trombley. "He hasn't protected the farmer, he hasn't protected the consumer." In April the committee plans to march on Lansing, the state capitol, to press their demands.

We know how to do these things

A federal energy official has suggested that the nation "may have to limit the ability" of consumer and environmental groups to hold up "critically needed" energy projects. Speaking in Philadelphia on Feb. 2, Philip C. White, assistant director of the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), said that the country "cannot afford" delays like that incurred in starting the Alaska pipeline. "We know now that we can do most of these things with minimal impact," said White.

Several weeks earlier, however, a fish and game biologist for the state of Alaska charged that sloppy and hurried work on the Alaska pipeline has resulted in blocked and polluted streams, large oil spills and permanent damage to the permafrost. According to Charles Kay, who is part of a team monitoring the pipeline, state and federal officials are aware of the environmental damage but are keeping quiet so the project can be rushed to completion.

In his remarks before the Chemical Marketing Research Association, Philip White also expressed fear that ERDA's plans to bury nuclear wastes in some states

might run into opposition from environmentalists. "If we are blocked by people who are emotionally exposed, we are not going to solve this nuclear problem," he said.

Observers of the nuclear power controversy point out, however, that there have been numerous instances where nuclear wastes have leaked from burial sites, angering citizens whose lives are endangered by the increase in radioactivity. In Vermont, for example, 83,000 gallons of liquid radioactive waste was spilled into the Connecticut River last July. On March 2, 31 Vermont communities voted in town meetings to oppose the burial of nuclear wastes within their borders.

Similar leakages of nuclear waste have occurred in New York, Colorado, Kentucky, and dumping sites in the Pacific Ocean.

The dangers of LNG

In October 1944 a tremendous explosion ripped through the streets of downtown Cleveland, Ohio, flattening 29 acres of the city and destroying 80 homes and factories. One reporter described the "rivers of fire" that ignited homes "like a string of firecrackers." Temperatures of up to 3000 degrees were created in the explosion, incinerating people and even birds in flight. When the devastation was assessed, 131 people had been killed and another 300 injured.

The cause of the explosion: the leakage of some one million gallons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from a storage tank. Before being ignited, the LNG had run through the city's streets and crept into the sewers.

LNG is the product of cryogenics, a relatively new technology for turning natural gas into a liquid for easy transportation. While this technique has come a long way since the Cleveland holocaust, scientists and other observers believe that it is still at a primitive level. Some also say that the widespread use of LNG may present an unwarranted health hazard.

Several locations in Southern California are now being considered for facilities that would store LNG transported from Alaska and then turn it back into usable form. Gov. Jerry Brown of California, who says that construction of an LNG facility must begin early next year if the state is to avoid a serious energy shortage by the mid-1980s, is trying to push through a final decision by circumventing the local governments where facilities might be built.

Because of its comparative isolation on the California coast, the most likely site is Port Conception in Santa Barbara county. Environmentalists and Santa Barbara citizens have long opposed the plan. Some point out that escaping gas could form into a dense cloud and float 50 miles—to nearby cities—before igniting. "The potential danger from an LNG fire is the greatest ever presented in modern society," says Al McCurdy of the county office of environmental quality. He is now conducting an environmental impact report.

The Point Conception Preservation Committee has been formed to counter Gov. Brown's "emergency" moves. Committee-head Philip Marking questions the need for additional gas supplies. "We don't need this thing," he says. "It would supply only about 20 percent of California's needs. This amount can easily be made up from other sources. The consumer is actually paying for the construction of this LNG plant through our bills and now is the time we should be putting our money into alternative energy sources such as solar heating."

The county board of supervisors is also up in arms. They have protested Gov. Brown's attempts to by-pass local input into the project, calling this "an indefensible abrogation of our legislated responsibility to protect the health and safety of this county."

—Compiled by Dan Marschall

IN THE WORLD

Gandhi had no surprises left

Special to
in These Times
from New Delhi

By Jas Sandu

New Delhi. In the Indian capital of New Delhi these days there is a lot of talk about "forgiving and forgetting" the "excesses" committed during the administration of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Some members of the new ruling group named Janata party have joined this chorus of "forgiving and forgetting."

The new government has not taken a firm stand one way or the other—the attitude of the new Prime Minister is ambivalent at best. Some members of Desai's cabinet have criticized this new chorus of "forgive and forget," and they have promised action against those who committed the "excesses" during the previous regime.

The current minister of communications Socialist party head George Fernandes, who was only released from jail after the election, told a huge victory rally:

"Can we forgive them for making lies into the truth? Can we forget that 14-year-old boys have been forcibly sterilized and that Indira Gandhi tried to end a whole generation? Can we forgive?" The crowd yelled, "Never, Never!" And he shouted back that there would be no injustice, everybody would be given a fair trial, and if there were not enough courts then special tribunals could be set up.

He said that he did not believe in kicking people when they were down, but injustices must never be "forgiven and forgotten." If the new government also talked in this vein, it was perhaps thinking of afterwards, when it might have to ask for the same kind of forgiveness.

►A master of surprises surprised.

Madam Gandhi was a master of surprises. She had always been able to catch her opponents at their weakest moment. So when she called for the elections to the parliament last January, she thought that she would win. Most of the opposition leaders and the activists were in jails, and they were disoriented and disorganized.

It was obvious from the beginning of this campaign that Gandhi's Congress party was a shaky starter and that the opposition, a combination of the old guard, the populists, the socialists and the small farmers, had got hold of issues that had touched the lives of almost every citizen during her dictatorship. The opposition gave voice to the public resentment against forced sterilization, widespread demolition of urban slums, mass bulldozing of shanty towns to make room for "development" and the bullets for those who resisted. This resentment was so widespread that at times during the campaign audiences either refused to listen to the Congress candidates or sat through their speeches silently.

Towards the end of the campaign the Congress party members began to realize that they were in trouble. This was especially true in the northern states of India where a majority of the Indian electorate lives. In order to counter this wave of people's resentment, senior cabinet members of the government started offering their apologies for the "excesses." Gandhi said that to err was human.

But the people were neither prepared to forgive nor ready to forget. They were determined to teach the ruling super-humans the first lesson in democracy.

►One emergency after another.

Since 1947 when the British left, India has lived from one emergency to another.

Janata party headquarters was so small you couldn't hold a decent church service in it. By comparison the Congress party headquarters looked bigger than a maharaja's palace. As the election results started pouring in, the faces of Janata party workers started lighting up.



Moraji Desai, the new Indian prime minister.

Photo by UPI

There was an emergency during 1948-52 to put down "communist agitators." Then there was war with China in 1962 and the emergency was imposed once again. The China emergency was partially lifted in 1969, but the emergency was reimposed again in 1970 during the Bangladesh war. So when Gandhi imposed internal emergency on June 25th 1975, India was already governed by an emergency.

With each emergency came progressive curtailment of civil liberties, restrictions on the trade union activities and an increase in expenditures on internal security agencies—India's biggest growth industry. The over-all budget of these security agencies is a secret, but the budget of federal police alone has gone up by at least 20 times—from \$10 million in 1955 to \$200 million in 1975. That may look small by U.S. standards, but remember that India is a very poor country.

While the government was trying to rule India by imposing one emergency after another, the nation's economy went from bad to worse. Heavy emphasis on the industry in the urban areas spelled disaster for the neglected countryside. Farm prices did not keep up with the increased prices of irrigation water, fertilizers, seeds, gasoline and electricity. Land reforms were passed but were either not implemented or were sabotaged at local levels by an alliance of the landlords, the bureaucracy and the Congress politicians.

By early 1974, the economy was coming to a standstill. Shortages of essential goods like cement, coal, steel, gasoline, machinery were rampant, hoarding of basic foodstuff became a fact of life, urban unemployment was rising fast, and the inflation was out of hand, but Congress party members were either too busy fighting among themselves over the spoils or were engaged in making money through the corrupt practices.

The students and the youths of the Eastern state of Bihar, where the poverty is unbelievable even by Indian standards, were first to rebel against the government corruption. They tried to put pressure on the government through demonstrations, rallies, militant civil disobedience and strikes. The government responded with mass arrests. By May 1975 this student and the youth movement had spread to the northern, the western and the eastern parts of India. Gandhi's political opponents and even some of her supporters, sensing the mass base of the movement, advocated a "dialog" with these young rebels. But

Gandhi would have none of this "dialog" business.

►Convicted of electoral malpractices.

In June 1975 a state supreme court convicted Gandhi on two counts of electoral malpractice and barred her from holding any public office for six years. When she refused to step down, the combined opposition of professional politicians, trade unionists and rebellious youth called for a week of non-cooperation, demonstrations and rallies to force her to quit. Gandhi surprised her opponents by arresting them in hundreds of thousands overnight before they could regroup and launch their movement.

With the emergency came the strict press censorship, a ban on all strikes, a wage freeze for all workers, the forced sterilization campaign to control population, mass bulldozing of the slums to make room for the fashionable "developments," and bullets for those who resisted. Nobody knows for certain how many people died resisting the emergency. Some put their numbers in hundreds, others in thousands.

While all this was going on, big business houses like the Tatas and the Birlas doubled their assets in 18 months. The Birlas were worth about \$750 million at the start of the emergency in June 1975, today they are worth at least \$1.6 billion. Big business liked the government's no-nonsense attitude towards the strikers and those seeking wage-hikes.

The World Bank was so impressed by the government's claim of negative inflation (-3.2 percent) achieved through the industrial peace and by the government's "sincere" effort to control population, that India became the World Bank's favorite child overnight. In its annual 1976 report, Robert McNamara's bank praised India's effort to control the population in no uncertain terms. On the day Indian people went to the polls, a local newspaper carried a front-page story that the World Bank had agreed to loan \$3 billion to India over the next three years.

►Vigilance at the ballot box.

During her election campaign Madam Gandhi said that if the opposition came to power then there will be anarchy in the streets and the country will fall apart. She claimed that she was a progressive leader and that her opponents were nothing but a bunch of right-wing reactionaries.

The government propaganda billboards all over the country proclaimed that ex-

ports had gone up by 36 percent in one year, that half a million more peasants can now read and write, and that one million more trees were planted last year.

On election day the turnout was heavy, especially in the rural countryside. There were fears of rigging and other election frauds, but that became almost impossible because people kept a sharp eye on the ballot boxes.

In the northwest state of Punjab, which has a proud martial tradition, the opposition cadres guarded the ballot boxes with swords drawn to avoid tampering by the ruling party. In the neighboring state of Haryana, retired army men organized the vigilance of ballot boxes. These former soldiers trained about 50 young men in every electoral district "to guard against the enemy crossing the battle line." After the polling was over they were detailed to follow vehicles carrying ballot boxes and check the place thoroughly where ballot boxes were deposited. They were warned beforehand not to take any chances because the "enemy was treacherous and was waiting for an opportunity to attack."

Only in the eastern state of Bengal some selective rigging took place, but even there Gandhi's party won only one seat. The atmosphere in the capital on the night of March 20 was tense. Very few people went to sleep early. People wandered around with their ears glued to their tiny transistor radios and listened to the latest election results. Nobody knew for sure who was going to win.

Janata party headquarters is so small you couldn't hold a decent church service in it. By comparison the Congress party headquarters looked bigger than a maharaja's palace. As the election results started pouring in, the faces of Janata party workers started lighting up. There was such a glow and shine on their faces that you did not need any electricity to provide light.

As the news of Madam Gandhi's defeat came around three in the morning, there was dancing and singing in the streets. A carnival atmosphere prevailed, but then doubts began to prevail:

Does this mean Gandhi is finished or is she up to some new tricks again? Everybody in the streets had this question on their minds. But this time there will be no surprises. Madam Gandhi had no surprises left in her store. All she can ask from the Indian people was "forgiveness." Will they oblige her? ■