

PERSPECTIVES

FOR A NEW AMERICA

Socialism confronts cult of individualism



By Robert Hyfler

The notion that the individual may exist as a physical and psychological entity independent of history, culture, and accidents of birth; that her or his actions may be analyzed, judged, and rewarded in isolation from those of others, has been the catalyst for much that has passed for progress in the past hundred years. American "heroes" from Edison, Teddy Roosevelt, and Lindbergh, right down to James Dean, Spiderman, and Evel Knievel have ridden to fame on the backs of our national fetish of individualism.

That today, so many of our prominent individualist heroes are either in films, comic books, or circuses is testimony to the degree to which the dream of individualism is now but a strong memory. As Michael Harrington is continually saying, collectivization is the basic truth of our times. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are a social people, with socially defined tastes and wants, involved in the social production of that which we consume. Marx wrote *Capital*, in part, to show the intellectual trickery and mystification by which essentially collective labor is transformed into private individual property.

Profits of individualism.

Yet contemporary champions of individualism are persistent. They range from libertarian theorist Robert Nozick to Republican politicians and corporate elites. Mobil Oil, whose multinational corporate existence itself points to individualism's death, is fond of taking out ads in major publications to argue for individual initiative and private enterprise. It is of course obvious to many that these corporate elites and their spokesmen in the GOP are out to use the exaltation of individualism to perpetuate their own hegemony in a world that is anything but in-

dividualistic.

But the banner of individualism is raised by others as well. The foot-soldiers of the radical right are not people of great wealth and power, and can never hope to be. Neither were the pseudo-counter culture types of the past decade who were apt to speak of "doing your own thing" much as their parents proclaimed, "mind your own business." Success-at-any-price students continue to fill college classrooms. They come from all races, genders, and social strata.

Perhaps the most conspicuous of all American individualists is the underclass lawbreaker who seeks a redistribution of income on the level of the individual. It is the misfortune of these "criminals" that unlike those who sit in corporate board rooms, they have neither the money nor the access to power so as to secure rules by which they could play the game of individualism honestly.

Illusionary promises and destructive realities notwithstanding, Americans seem hesitant to part with philosophies of individualism. Although as a political slogan it seems to come with a Republican copyright, no Democratic office-seeker would dare challenge individualism's basic tenets. With nobility and naivete, the Democratic Party has stood firmly for "equal opportunity," the establishment of a fair individualism. Rather than attacking the competitive nature of our society, many within the Democratic Party content themselves in devising equitable criteria for a just competition, even while Democrats have sponsored much social welfare legislation to mitigate the pains that go to the game's losers: the poor, the old, the unsuccessful. However, as the policies of the Carter White House more than indicate, the Democratic Party is not as yet prepared to abandon their loyalties to the goals and principles of individualism and competitive capitalism.

Few Democrats are prepared to make the statement, "If the system cannot afford national health insurance, then the people cannot afford the system."

Rejecting socialism as unattainable, dominant segments of American labor, dating back to Samuel Gompers, have also rejected individualism as a philosophical model for the worker. The mainstream of the labor movement has implicitly, yet consistently, argued that the worker must accept the permanence of both the existence of classes and his own class position; the aim being to improve the condition of his class through collective action. For labor, social legislation exists more as palliative than panacea.

However, the pessimism and limited nature of labor's argument is hardly inspiring to those asked to accept the inevitability of being part of an underclass, albeit cushioned by social reforms. Working class creativity, dissent, and dissatisfaction finds its ways into aimless wildcat action, subtle acts of industrial sabotage, and egoistic ways of thinking that shun unionism in favor of personal advancement. Having rejected the accommodationism of mainstream labor, and being often unprepared to embrace a more radical model of social change, many a worker falls back on a variant of old-fashioned individualism. Little wonder that American workers remain the most underorganized in the western industrialized world.

Socialism and the individual.

Contrary to the assertion of liberal critics, the socialist tradition does not ignore the individual. Important segments of the left have always maintained that the individual is at once the basic unit in society, and, at the same time, a social creature with interdependent ties to other individuals. Socialists have rejected a concept of individualism that ignores people's need for social interaction, and that defines individual needs, wants, abilities, and contributions in such a way as to isolate them from the influence of society and the relationship of the individual to other people. Human happiness, socialists argue, is better served through collective solutions than individual ones. However, so strong did Marx see self-interest as a motivating factor in human affairs that he believed that only the working class, which had the most to gain collectively and as individuals from the endeavor, could be expected to overthrow capitalism.

As an alternative to the old individualism Marx wrote of allowing each "to assert his true individuality," and of creating a social order that would "give everyone social scope for the assertion of his vitality." The Russian anarcho-communist, Peter Kropotkin, popularized a similar concept, calling it "individualization." He understood this to mean that each per-

son should obtain "the full development of all...faculties, intellectual, artistic and moral." Many early socialists, whether Marxist or anarchist, never doubted that the life of the individual could only be enhanced under the new social order that would supplant capitalism.

Admittedly, individualization did not always develop as the favorite battle cry of the left. Second International Socialists of the pre-World War I era, aware of the evils of an overtly brutal capitalism, emphasized the need for greater democracy and a more equitable distribution of wealth. The architects of the soviet experiment were concerned with peace and an end to scarcity, while the socialists of the great depression years found it sufficient to advocate a planned economy based on production for use rather than private profit. In times of acute suffering and blatant exploitation socialists were content with obtaining jobs, decent wages, and security.

In the struggle against the archaic individualism of the 19th century, some thought it necessary to champion class over individual needs and aspirations. Sadly, Stalinists, Maoists, and social democrats alike have tended to defer talk of individualization to some future utopia. Other socialists, while discussing individualization, have done so in elitist terms. The Fabians in Britain, and socialists such as Victor Berger and Norman Thomas in America, presupposed an unequal distribution of natural talents so that individualization became compatible with a stratified social order directed by the "genius" of experts.

An egalitarian focus on individualization as a key element of a socialist program would demand serious thought concerning the reorganization of our political and economic institutions. If we assume that "genius" and talent is rather uniformly distributed among people, then individualization also implies restructuring the division of labor, so as to make creative work available to all. It presupposes bold proposals for change and the possibility that such change might not be brought about as smoothly as our delicate sensibilities might desire. Yet only by offering the individual a setting in which full realization of her or his potential becomes more than an opportunity, and enabling people to share equally in making decisions that affect their lives, can socialism hope to appeal to large numbers of people, hardly wealthy or powerful, who live above the level of human misery in an industrialized world. For them, socialism must transcend the notion of material security implicit in the welfare state. Only a socialism imbued with the idea of individualization is capable of dislodging an age-old individualism from people's minds and put the socialist message in contact with the self-interest of modern individuals.

Can a new left emerge and grow successfully in the United States in the 1970s and '80s?

Not unless its participants know about the success and failures of the American left from 1900 to 1970. In those years, three movements—the old Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the New Left of the 1960s—started and failed. Without knowledge of these experiences a new movement will have no more chance of survival than its predecessors.

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Kucinich Election

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strong support of the United Auto Workers, a small but sophisticated political machine, and his well-cultivated rapport with white, working class ethnic groups.

The UAW, after international president Douglas Fraser met with Kucinich, contributed \$30,000 to the anti-recall campaign. Bill Casstevens, director of UAW District 2, actively opposed the recall and was featured in a television ad discussing Kucinich's pro-labor record.

While the more conservative sectors of the labor movement oppose Kucinich, he has gradually picked up the support of more progressive unions. Kucinich's relationship with municipal unions has been largely positive: the administration has reached acceptable contracts with 18 of the 19 city unions. A local Teamster official called their contract the "best agreement we've ever won with a city administration, including the fringe benefits."

During the final week Kucinich captured media attention by holding press conferences and meeting with community people. His supporters meanwhile canvassed registered voters throughout the city. Though a hard-core of recall supporters also canvassed neighborhoods, their strategy relied more on rallies, car caravans and phone banks. By the end, Kucinich's high visibility and his staff's capacity to speak directly with voters, proved decisive.

A prime issue in the campaign was race. Since the ghetto rebellions of the 1960s city politics have been divided sharply along racial lines. Though Kucinich has appointed more blacks to his cabinet than any previous mayor and directed specific programs at black neighborhoods, his active support has never been high there. The recall was supported by the conservative leadership of the black community: the major black newspaper, the head of the city council, the president of the board of education, assorted black ministers, and black city council members.

In the final vote, Kucinich won only 28 percent of the vote in black wards, down from 35 percent in the general election. Because many blacks stayed home, and the turnout was heavy in westside wards, Kucinich narrowly won.

But his enemies maintained the offensive. The *Cleveland Press* dubbed him a

"lame duck" mayor because he will come up for reelection in November 1979. The leadership of the Democratic Party immediately demanded his resignation. And recall leaders threatened court battles if the recount failed to go their way.

A long row to hoe.

Kucinich's prospects for re-election in November 1979 will depend primarily on his handling of two developments: desegregation through busing, and Cleveland's financial difficulties. Busing is scheduled to begin in early September and citizen's groups on both sides are gearing up for battle. Kucinich publicly opposes busing, but pledges to protect the children. The controversy will further divide black from white and intensify political pressure on the mayor.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently predicted that the city would find it difficult to avert a fiscal crisis next year. Like other northern urban areas, Cleveland's revenues from a declining tax base have failed to keep up with rising expenses. In recent months Moody's Investors Service has lowered the city's credit rating twice.

Opinions vary on how close the city is to a financial crisis. Administration officials charge that the bond rating drop was a political move by the banks to buttress the recall. The press predicts that the city will be unable to pay some municipal salaries by mid-September. And the city's books are in such chaos that tracking down past revenues and expenditures is virtually impossible.

The recall vote reveals more about the strength of the opposition to Kucinich than about the extent of his popular support. Some voted against recall not necessarily because they are pro-Kucinich, but because they believe he should be given a fair chance to prove himself. Unless Kucinich can refurbish his public image and present positive alternatives to the city's deep-seated problems, he may be defeated next time around.

Regardless of his specific accomplishments, Dennis Kucinich has emerged as a unique progressive politician on the national scene. While expressing his belief in the free enterprise system, he has refused to bow down to corporate interests and play the usual games of political expediency. His basic philosophy appears to be that government actually can work in the people's interests and that societal change will flow only from fundamental economic reform.

"Politicians are too concerned with hobnobbing with the big-shots," he says. "But I see the pendulum swinging towards a politics that represents the power of poor and working people in this country, and away from the people who already have that power."

Pressmen

Continued from page 5.

The strike illustrates the extent to which roles have reversed in the newspaper business. The unions are no longer the real militants, the publishers are. Although costs have risen dramatically in the last five years and New York's three big dailies face stiff competition from out-of-town papers, business is now so good that a strike is a price that can be paid.

The New York Times Company, having posted record profits in 1977, is from all indications headed for another big year; the *News* is turning a profit, although it is not as large as the publisher of the nation's largest circulation daily feels it should be; and the *Post*, while still nursing the effects of circulation losses incurred under the management of Dorothy Schiff, has picked up a reported 120,000 new readers and a large capital improvement budget since Rupert Murdoch, the Australian who owns 84 papers, bought the paper 19 months ago.

The automation issue has doomed many newspaper craft unions. The result is that workers, having gained significant improvements in wages, working conditions and benefits in the last decade, now find themselves struggling just to

hold on to what they have. Demands for contract "give-backs" have dominated labor negotiations this year.

Interestingly, automation is not directly involved in the pressmen's dispute. Although the *Times* and the *Post* now use "cold type" exclusively (computer-produced paste-ups instead of type cast from molten lead) and the *News* is partially automated, the presses are basically operated in the same fashion as they were when an arbitrator established "Unit manning" levels 55 years ago.

What is different, the pressmen say, is the output of the machinery: the same sized crews that in 1923 ran off 30,000 papers an hour now run off 65,000. In addition, they say, the noise of the machinery is well above allowable federal levels and the hazards of inhaling ink vapor and paper dust are the same, if not worse.

Eventually, a press will be installed that will require a small fraction of the current personnel to operate. When that happens, it will be the end of the pressmen's craft and the end of another union. The pressmen in New York can delay that day, but they know they cannot prevent it. The only uncertainty is whether their current holding action will be nasty, brutish and short or nasty, brutish and long.

David Pitt is currently freelancing in New York. He ordinarily works at the Metropolitan Desk at the New York Times.

Solar conference

Continued from page 6.

Even with the criticisms, there were repeated words of support for the experimental process, and for the DOE personnel who had to watch their programs being dissected. David Mascelli of Friends of the Earth stressed the social function of the meeting, saying that these are the kinds of conferences where the public "can find out who the folks are on the other side." It also means the first step in opening the door to a previously tight department. "Now people can find a familiar face in the bowels of the Department of Energy, call them up, and probably get an answer."

The big industry people were also pleased. Mr. Gervais of McDonnell-Douglas pointed out that even the big contractors rarely get a chance to have more than a one-on-one discussion with DOE about building a certain plant or researching an experimental solar system. He said this was the first time he had been given the opportunity to "see the whole picture."

Bennet Miller took a more philosophical view of the conference. He admitted

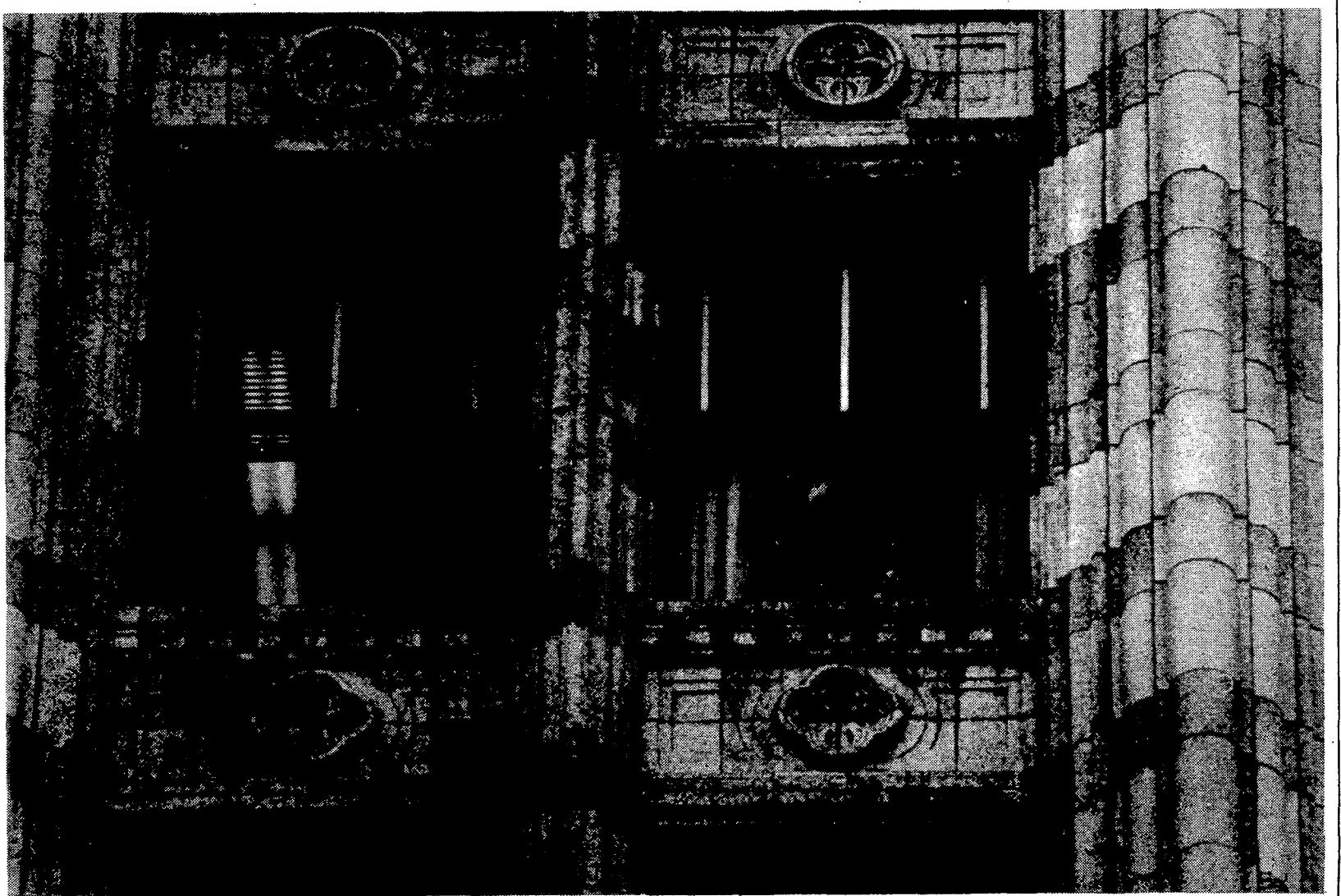
that public interest groups and industry often "talk past each other," but that that is no reason to stop the talking. He agreed that the department as a whole should stop using "this blasted jargon," but that it had to work both ways. "Some of the public interest groups were over their heads technically, but industry is out of it sociologically," he explained. "We must get to the point where at least everyone is floating under the surface at the same level."

As to whether the overall results of the conference will make an impact on the upcoming Domestic Policy Review of the solar energy, or the 1980 budget, "The jury is still out," commented Jonathan Gibson, of the Sierra Club and one of the members of the Executive Committee who helped put together the conference. On that point, we will have to wait and see.

Christy Macy is associated with the Government Accountability Project of the Institute for Policy Studies, which runs a program of support and legal advice for prospective whistle-blowers. The project can be contacted at 1901 Q St., NW, Washington, DC 20009.

Simmering Balkan conflict emerges when Croatians seize German consulate here in Chicago.

A hostage waves from window of the German consulate. Croatian nationalists seized the consulate in order to bargain for the release of a prisoner held in Germany.



Ken Firestone

LIFE IN THE U.S.

NUCLEAR POWER

People in small New York town down in the dumps

By Franklin Douglas

WEST VALLEY IS A HAMLET with no stoplights, a general store, and a school that houses kindergarten through high school. At night townspeople gather in the West Valley Hotel bar, the only one within ten miles. Dairy farms dominate the local economy and gentle hills, thick forests and streams make Cattaraugus County an attractive place to vacation. Yet something within this community has caused New York State to become the victim of a nuclear blackmail threat from the federal government.

West Valley, N.Y., is not a science-fiction site. The town, 35 miles south of Buffalo, is the location of a closed nuclear fuel reprocessing plant that was used to recover nuclear fuel from the atomic wastes of power plants and government nuclear weapons programs. New York and the U.S. government are now wrangling over who is responsible for safely storing 600,000 gallons of highly radioactive liquid wastes and two million cubic feet of low level wastes—the legacy of the plant's unprofitable operation from 1966 until 1972.

The wastes will remain radioactive and deadly for 800,000 years, scientists estimate, but steel tanks liquid wastes are stored in will last only 40 years. Over 10 percent of similar government-owned waste tanks have leaked.

The price tag for safe storage could be \$600 million, according to expert testimony in Congress in 1977, or more than \$30 for every person in New York. This would be the largest corporate bailout in American history. How did New York, a state with serious fiscal difficulties, get into a \$600 million mess that could conceivably bankrupt it?

Nuclear fuel services evolution.

New York's saga of nuclear fuel reprocessing began in 1962, when the state government leased a 3,300-acre site to Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc. (NFS), a subsidiary of Getty and Skelly Oil. Then Gov. Rockefeller emphatically supported the effort, hailing NFS at ground-breaking ceremonies in 1963 as a "major contribution to transforming the economy of Western New York, and indeed, the entire state." Fifteen years later, the Governor's prediction has come perilously near realization.

The only commercial reprocessing plant ever operated, NFS never earned its owners a cent. In six years the plant lost \$42 million removing plutonium and uranium from spent nuclear fuel rods and nuclear weapons waste. NFS president Ralph Deuster closed the plant in 1972 for decontamination and expansion. (Projections showed the plant could be profitable if it expanded.)

The plant never reopened. Nuclear Fuel Services' inability to meet occupational radiation health and environmental standards had a far greater impact on its future than the corporation's deficit.

While the plant was closed Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz grew concerned over NFS employees' cancer risks and possible genetic abnormalities from radiation. Reports of careless plant procedures resulted in Lefkowitz's intervention on

the NFS expansion application in behalf of the Sierra Club in 1974.

David Pyles was employed at NFS from 1967 until just before it closed in 1972. "I left because the plant's operating procedures became so sloppy and poorly run," said Pyles, who lives in Holland, 16 miles from West Valley. Pyle's radiation exposure levels are a good example of careless operating procedures. In his first two and a half years of work he received six rads of radiation exposure. In his last two and a half years he received 19 more rads, or three times as much and dangerously close to maximum allowable levels.

According to Rep. Stanley Lundine (R-NY), who represents West Valley, 60 to 100 cases of overexposure occurred at NFS. Pyles and others are plainly worried: "I've been hearing more and more about the health effects of radiation that take 15 to 20 years to show up." Pyles claims that the radiation levels at NFS were the worst in the industry. He wants the government to monitor the health of former plant workers, a call duplicated by many in the area who desire government health studies of radiation. "I'm thinking of having more kids and I just don't know what they'll be like because I worked at NFS," said Pyles.

Another questionable practice was NFS' use of temporary workers from employment agencies in Buffalo. These people were shipped to West Valley for use in radioactive "hot spots" where permanent employees couldn't be used. They were often exposed to annual maximum doses of radiation in one week, sometimes in only a few minutes. They were paid for the day and sent back to Buffalo, unaware of possible future complications.

And in 1975, the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) discovered that one of the trenches holding low-level wastes was leaking radioactivity into Cattaraugus Creek, which flows westward into Lakes Erie and Ontario. Six million people draw drinking water from the two lakes.

As a result, permits for expansion were never issued, though storage and maintenance operations continued at the plant after 1972, and reprocessing facilities lay idle as they are today. In 1976, the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission ruled that the facility would not withstand earthquakes that may occur in the area on the average of once every 750 years—the wastes will remain poisonous for 800,000 years. A quake might spill 600,000 gallons of waste into Cattaraugus Creek and then into Lake Erie, killing all life in the lake and making its drinking water poisonous.

Soon after the seismological report was released, NFS president Ralph Deuster notified New York that the company was pulling out of West Valley when its lease expired in 1980. Pursuant to the original agreement between the state and the company, the responsibility is now borne by the citizens of New York.

New York Representatives Ted Weiss and Stanley Lundine, and Commissioner James LaRocca of the State Energy Office now insist that the federal government pay for decommissioning the plant, selecting a safe permanent storage place for the materials out of state, and for permanent storage, although no safe method has ever been devised. However, the U.S.



The federal government says that the nuclear fuel dump in western New York will cost \$600 million to clean up. But they will foot the bill only if they can store additional waste there.

Department of Energy (DOE) has its own tentative plans for West Valley.

Cattaraugus County controversy.

Many people of West Valley and surrounding communities want NFS' plant operations to start again and nuclear development to proceed in West Valley. The nation's first experimental solidification plant for nuclear wastes could be located in West Valley, as well as the first deep burial site for wastes. Town of Ashford (West Valley is part of the town of Ashford) Councilman Fred Horning believes "moving the wastes would just put the problem in somebody else's backyard. The government should spend the money on solving the issue here."

The problem boils down to money. NFS has paid over 16 percent of local taxes for education, fire protection, and other expenses since 1966. Townspeople were employed at the plant and as town supervisor Bud Williams sees it, "The people around here don't understand nuclear, but they do understand taxes."

Real estate values have been sharply affected by NFS since radiation leakage was revealed in 1974. Bud Williams plain-

tively asked, "Where did it all go wrong? The plant was supposed to do great things for our little town." Williams, a six-footer with a crew-cut and black-framed glasses blames the declining opinion of West Valley on bad publicity from the "media," but adds, "Sixteen years ago Rockefeller sold us a bill of goods, and nobody knew what would happen."

When the U.S. Department of Energy held the first in a series of town meetings to be held around the country in West Valley on March 18, speakers from West Valley were moved to defend their town. Robert Niver, the district principal, talked of the very few handicapped children born in the district. George Nudack, a private citizen addressing the large crowd, reporters, television cameras and politicians at the hearings, spoke of a school district that resisted consolidation, the town spirit of the Volunteer Fire Department, and the Town Historical Society. "We don't have deformed babies here. We have a nice town."

Despite the presence of such heavy political hitters at the meeting as Rep. Stanley Lundine, Rep. Ted Weiss, a leader in

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