

# Nuclear engineer exposes Teller lie

By Robert M. Nelson

**I** HAVE NEVER MET ROY WOODRUFF, NOR, chances are, will I. Woodruff has dedicated his life to engineering and managing a variety of nuclear weapons programs at the Department of Energy's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, where he rose to the rank of associate administrator for defense systems. There he managed the X-ray laser program that is supposed to play an important role in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), President Reagan's "Star Wars" system.

My work has been devoted to astronomical research, particularly the peaceful activity of exploring the solar system as part of the planetary research program. In my free time I also serve as co-chair of the Southern California Federation of Scientists, an organization that encourages scientists to speak out on the dangers of the nuclear arms race. But an odd set of circumstances recently brought me and Woodruff together in what may prove more than just a footnote to history.

**Woodruff's complaint:** Last month I received a series of documents from an unknown source. These documents included a photocopy of a letter written by Woodruff to David Gardner, president of the University of California—which manages the Livermore weapons laboratory for the Department of Energy. The letter was a griev-

ance by Woodruff written against Livermore Director Roger Batzel.

The allegations were astounding. According to Woodruff's letter, Edward Teller, the father of the H-bomb, and Lowell Wood, another top Livermore advocate of X-ray laser development, conveyed incorrect statements to the nation's highest policy-makers and were discovered by Woodruff, who reported this to the director, Batzel. Batzel then forced Woodruff out of his job. These charges required verification. Inquiries—by myself and my colleagues in the Southern California Federation of Scientists—confirmed that Woodruff had indeed made such a grievance against Batzel. It also became clear that it was not possible for Woodruff to have leaked the documents. I suspect that the source was probably an honest version of Fawn Hall, someone who recognized the serious nature of the material and would not consider being part of a cover-up.

After much discussion we became convinced that these charges should be brought to the attention of Congress and the public. If a responsible independent investigation were to confirm the charges, there might be a profound impact on the next round of Star Wars funding in Congress.

But it was made clear through several intermediaries that, despite his dispute with



Batzel and Teller, Woodruff did not want this made public. He is known as a scrupulously honest engineer and manager who believes in applying his talents to research-and-development activities related to the nuclear weapons program. Apparently he wanted to continue his work in the weapons program after this matter was resolved. Although we were sympathetic to Woodruff's situation, the issue of informing the public took precedence. If Teller had misled President Reagan about Star Wars, the public should know while it is still possible to change course. After much discussion and disagreement, my colleagues and I ultimately went public with the material despite Woodruff's objection.

**Reactions:** We briefed several members of the press and released the information at a press conference in Los Angeles in late October. The *Los Angeles Times* published the story on Page 1 under the headline "Tel-

**Livermore Laboratory manager Roy Woodruff caught H-bomb father Edward Teller giving false reports on Star Wars feasibility to top policy-makers. In return, he was fired.**

ler gave flawed data on X-ray laser, scientist says." The story ran that day in many newspapers in California, and on the next day a story appeared in the *New York Times*.

Two days later Woodruff was in a closed-door session with Rep. George Brown (D-CA), chair of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, and with Rep. Charles Bennett (D-FL), a member of the Armed Services Committee. Brown asked the General Accounting Office to conduct an investigation. And Armed Services Committee member Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA) asked

the chair of the armed services subcommittee on investigations, Rep. Bill Nichols (D-AL) to look into the matter.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported a few days later that the University of California had ruled that Woodruff should be reinstated to a position of comparable status as a result of the grievance. Although it is not clear if the University found Woodruff's allegations to be true, it is inconceivable that he would have been reinstated if his charges were false. One simply does not level false charges at a laboratory director such as Batzel and a scientist such as Teller and get away with it.

The matter has now been placed on the public agenda, although the charges have yet to be investigated. A full discussion of this matter might well occur behind closed doors on Capitol Hill. While such an outcome might be a partial remedy to the particular problem, the only satisfactory solution is to have the public made aware of the findings as soon as possible.

**Reagan cornerstone:** After the Reykjavik summit, which foundered on the Star Wars issue, Reagan returned to the U.S. and spoke to the nation. "I asked our military a few years ago to study and see if there was a practical way to destroy nuclear missiles after their launch but before they can reach their targets rather than just destroy people," he said. "That is the goal for what we call SDI, and our scientists researching such a system are convinced it is practical and that several years down the road we can have such a system ready to deploy."

Could it be that Teller had bent the president's ear before he went to the summit that failed? If so, when will the public know? Will it be now or several decades hence when it will be a mere footnote to history—one that will do little to change public policy?

Consider that 25 years ago legend has it that a young, strong President John F. Kennedy stood eyeball-to-eyeball with a boisterous Nikita Khrushchev over the issue of Soviet missiles in Cuba. And that Khrushchev backed down. Thus, a generation of Americans learned that the way to deal with the Soviet Union was to be tough, even to the point of risking a nuclear war.

But recently scholars researching the JFK archives firmly established that what happened in 1962 was a negotiated settlement in which Soviet missiles in Cuba were withdrawn in exchange for the withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey and Italy. While it is good that the historical record has been set straight, the political damage cannot be repaired. Twenty-five years of U.S. attitudes toward Soviet relations have been influenced by the "tough-guy" mythology.

Today another president talks tough and summit conferences that may shape the future of civilization founder on the issue of Star Wars technology. Will the issue of Teller's alleged bad advice to the policy-makers be resolved as a footnote to history in 1997 or 2007, or will the resolution of this issue be in the present context where it will be relevant to determining the future? Only Roy Woodruff, Rep. George Brown and a few selected members of the House Armed Services Committee can decide that.

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## U.S. Editing Out of This World

One of the more remarkable excisions of history achieved on a weekly basis by the U.S. mainstream press are opinions of the rest of the world about the U.S., as expressed at the General Assembly of the United Nations. In the days when the U.S. could regularly command majorities in the General Assembly, votes favorable to U.S. concerns were proudly recorded in the press here. But now, a quarter of a century on, when support for the U.S. is not automatically forthcoming, a different situation prevails.

A few weeks ago a General Assembly vote condemning the Soviet Union for its activities in Afghanistan received wide coverage in the press. A vote two days later essentially urging the U.S. and other countries to abide by decisions of the World Court concerning Nicaragua passed almost unanimously and was mostly ignored. On November 30 the U.N. General Assembly stated its grave concern at the militarization of outer space and called on both the U.S. and Soviet Union to conduct bilateral negotiations to prevent this. The resolution passed by 154 to 1, with no abstentions. The U.S. cast the sole dissenting vote. I saw no report of this in any U.S. publication available to me, even though the Gorbachov visit was imminent and therefore the views of the world on SDI presumably of some interest.

Similarly unreported was the fact that the U.S. cast the sole dissenting vote against a resolution condemning the development of any new weapons of mass destruction (18 abstentions), and was joined only by France in voting against a call for a comprehensive test ban (eight abstentions). The Assembly cast more than 25 votes on arms issues. In 14 cases, the U.S. opposed the resolutions while the U.N. endorsed them.

## Red Noonday

The symbolic transfer of power from Ronald Reagan to Mikhail Gorbachov has been very evident to me in journeys around the country over the last month.

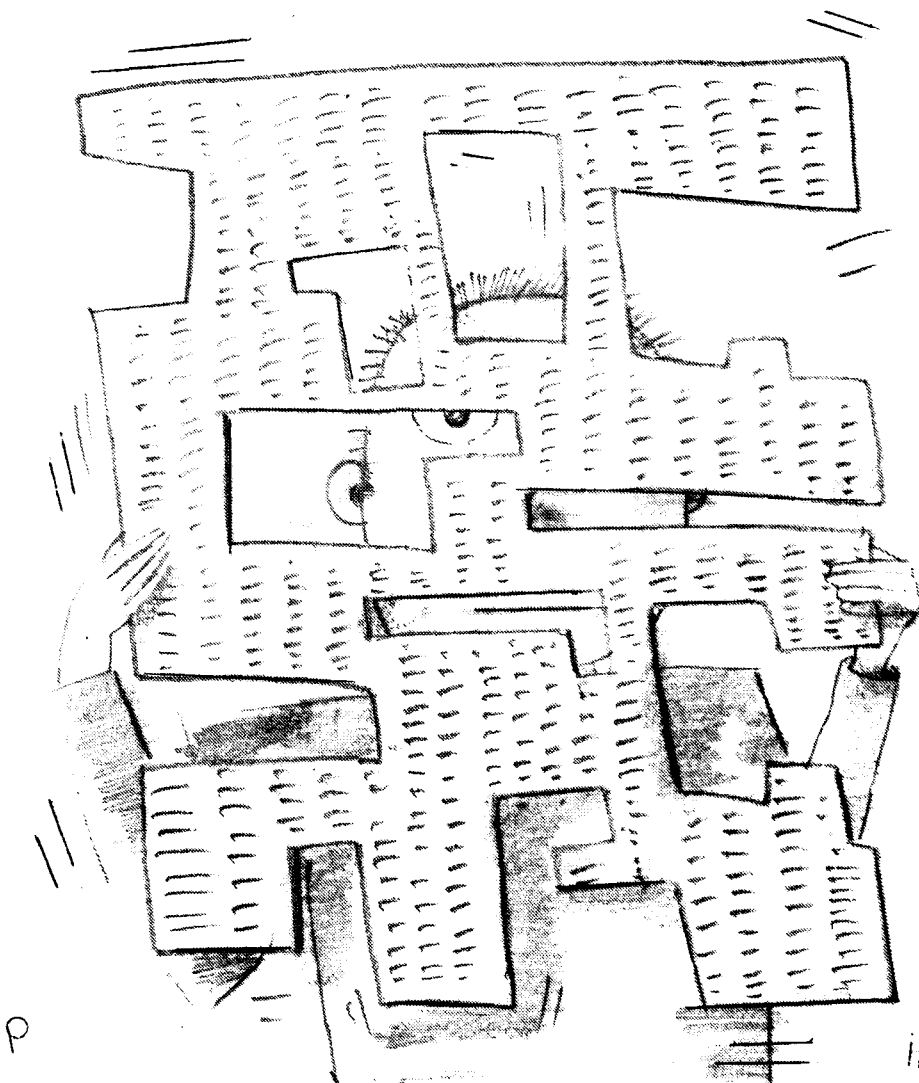
I'm not speaking here merely of the famous "Peoples' Committees" that have sprung up spontaneously in such traditional centers of dissent as Madison, Wis., Boulder, the Bay Area, the Northwest, Burlington, Vt., and so on. But less predictable areas have also seen demonstrations in favor of Gorbachov-style openness and economic renewal.

The committees are already organizing state-by-state campaigns to put Gorbachov or some appropriate proxy on the ballot during the upcoming primary season and demanding that their position gets equal time in innumerable TV debates scheduled over the coming months. Some strategists are arguing that such mechanistic adherence to "electoralism" is unnecessary and that stage known in Leninist theory as dual power is already a realistic prospect. In this analysis Reagan has a year remaining of ceremonial office during which time the effective control of the state would be shifted to the Kremlin, where the major decisions would be taken.

This perspective has been denounced—rightly, in my judgment—as *etatism*, a crude reading of Lenin's April theses and his pre-emptory injunctions to the Petrograd Military Committee of October 1917. The cautions of Zioniev and Kamenev, erroneous in that instance, are here appropriate. It is already evident that the enemies of openness and eco-

# ASHES & DIAMONDS

By Alexander Cockburn



omic renewal, appalled by the success of Gorbachov's visit, are seeking to regroup. Outgoing Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger openly affirmed his view of the Soviet Union as an evil empire at exactly the moment that President Reagan was saying that he no longer believed this to be the case. Secretary of State Shultz has called for an increase in conventional arms to offset the INF nuclear accord and the Senate, controlled by Democrats, passed \$16 billion in aid to the Nicaraguan contras on December 12.

*Etatist* fantasies are clearly out of place. The next stage is one or more Peoples' Committees fostering a debate on economic renewal, leading to a national convention in the midsummer of 1988 and designed to contrast with the sterile procedures of the national conventions of the Democratic and Republican parties. Bulking large on this agenda will be the *glasnost* USA campaign, calling for popular access to the major means of communication.

The prospect then is for nurturing of a broad progressive movement for change and renewal in the United States, impelled by the fundamental principle of democracy from below, and liberated from the constrictions of the present one-party system inhabited by the Democrats and Republicans.

## The Future of the Jackson campaign

The perspectives discussed above naturally provoke the question: What about Jesse Jackson? In my travels I encountered considerable debate about the proper attitude toward the man's campaign for the Democratic nomination. A number of recent developments have fortified uncertainty. The

somewhat unsparing description by Mary Summers, his former speechwriter, in *The Nation* (November 28), has been widely discussed, as has the murky affair of the rejected endorsement.

On December 4, the *New York Times* ran a story by Michael Orestes reporting that the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) were about to endorse Jackson as their preferred candidate for the Democratic nomination, but that this endorsement had been turned aside by Gerald Austin, one of Jackson's campaign managers, who made a sybilline distinction between his accepting of "support" or "endorsement," saying that in the case of DSA the former was preferable. Among socialist or radical groups who regard involvement in two-party politics as a waste of time, this development aroused a certain amount of malicious glee at a comical failure of the DSA to establish any political rapport with the man deemed to be one of the most progressive forces within the Democratic Party.

This reaction, while understandable, is not particularly creative. In 1984, younger members of DSA had been incensed by the refusal of the group's leadership to address itself to the issue of Jackson's candidacy. Irving Howe let it be known that if DSA said anything good about the reverend he would bolt, an act that should properly have raised the same philosophical reverberations as the old conundrum about the noise of a twig falling in the forest. This time around, after determined politicking by many of DSA's younger cadres, DSA came through with the endorsement properly rejected by Austin, a mainstream political operator from Ohio whose chief distinction in the Jackson campaign, alluded to on all possi-

ble occasions, is that he is Jewish. The malicious glee of the faction of DSA sympathetic to Howe's posture was swiftly in evidence; and in maneuvers surrounding the retirement of DSA Chair Michael Harrington, who is very seriously ill, this same faction had the better of it over their more radical opponents.

A day later Jackson himself—warned by advisers that the Austin rejection was enormously damaging both to the image and blurred reality of a Rainbow movement and to the enthusiasm of activists prepared to work long and hard for Jackson—announced that the DSA endorsement was welcome, causing Michael Harrington to lament the media-induced confusion. This may have showed that the candidate was sensitive to pressure from the left—a *sine qua non* in any relationship of a progressive movement to a Democratic candidate—but did not quell suspicions that Jackson has bolted himself into the diving bell of "responsible candidacy" and now often sounds like someone filibustering on behalf of the Council of Foreign Relations.

Consider what he said at the "presidential debate" on December 1, where massed ranks of candidates curvetted at the behest of Tom Brokaw. Brokaw had asked, "If there is a Soviet satellite state in Central America—another Cuba—would that bother you?" This question, which has the same scholarly detachment as Sen. Al d'Amato's recent poll to his constituents, "Should the U.S. be defending freedom in the Persian Gulf?," initially elicited from Jackson the response that "If we support self-determination and economic development...we can win Nicaragua." Excepting the unattractive conceptual connotation of "win," this is all right. But then he went on:

"Yes, we should negotiate bilaterally with Ortega. No foreign military advisers. No Soviet base. And if they, in their self-determination, choose to relate to the Soviets in that way, they must know the alternative. If they are with us, there are tremendous benefits. If they are not with us, there are tremendous consequences. If we are clear...the response will be clear."

In other words, if you are not with us, you are against us—and in case you're wondering what that means, read up on the history of Guatemala.

Insofar as Jackson articulates issues—Palestinians' rights, for example—normally expelled from mainstream political discourse, he nourishes a progressive movement. But there has to be some sort of accountability—dare we call it dialectical—between such a movement and its representative, also continuity of a movement beyond the personal tactical program of one mainstream candidate; otherwise dreams expire with a few balloons below the roof of the convention hall in Atlanta.

If considerations of personal security would permit, Jackson could certainly energize his campaign and distinguish himself more sharply from his competitors if he dares to go soon to Haiti, there to proclaim that the abuses to democracy—abuses underwritten by the U.S.—are as great as they were in the times that provoked the march on Selma; and to call publicly on the U.S. to give its full backing to the original electoral council that the U.S.' creatures, Namphy and Regala, have attempted to depose. Thus could a candidate placed on the defensive by hypothetical questions about Soviet bases regain the political and moral initiative.