



DEDE FELDMAN

## **Citizens versus the MX**

**I**MAGINE A STATE THE SIZE of, say, Connecticut, isolated from the rest of the United States. Across this Connecticut-sized area huge trucks, each carrying a hundred-ton nuclear missile, roll back and forth, endlessly, from one hole to another. Now add decoys, and shuttle them around with the real missiles, at night, and during the day.

If you think this sounds crazy, you should hear what the governor of Kansas said when *he* heard about the plans the air force is making for the MX missile.

"I find this proposal utterly unbelievable and inconceivable," Governor Robert F. Bennett said in a letter last October to President Carter. "I would not be concerned if it was a pipe dream of some Washington bureaucrat, but I'm informed that the air force is moving into full scale development and site selection by next summer, and acquisition of potential land for the MX within a year."

For several years, air force officials have been concerned that by the 1980s, ICBMs will be vulnerable to Soviet attack. Their response has been to push for a mobile missile system, called the MX, which would be deployed in one or more of seven "geotechnically suitable" sites in the western United States. If the air force has its way, the missiles will be shuttled from silo to silo in underground trenches or by truck. The idea, of course, is to fool the Soviets about the exact location of a few missiles perpetually in motion among thousands of holes.

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What Bennett and others in states selected as potential sites are worried about is not just the bizarre nature of the new system or even its \$40 billion price tag. What concerns them, is that the scheme requires from 4000 to 19,000 square miles of land now used by farmers, sportsmen, and others in Arizona, New Mexico, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, California, Nevada, and Texas. That makes nuclear weapons a local issue.

The amount of land to be withdrawn from all other uses in these areas depends on what "basing mode" the air force chooses for the MX and what type of security it puts into effect around the missiles. At one point, the air force was considering shuttling the missiles along tracks in buried trenches, locating them under shallow ponds, even sinking them in quicksand. More recently, White House officials have suggested placing the missiles aboard large aircraft and either firing them from the air or landing at small airstrips to launch them. But the basing mode most popular among air force officials now is the multiple-aim-point system in which missiles would be shuttled from silo to silo above ground in trucks. And that requires a lot of land—from approximately 5400 square miles of it in the South Platte plains to 7000 square miles near the White Sands missile range in New Mexico.

as, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. The private lands on the plains and in west Texas are productive agricultural areas. The South Platte plains produce \$41,000 worth of agricultural products per square mile and the New Mexico-Texas high plains produce \$86,000 worth of crops per mile, making it, according to the air force, the most agriculturally productive area in the country. The federal lands are owned either by the Bureau of Land Management or the Department of Defense. In New Mexico these lands are leased for oil and mineral exploration, and elsewhere they are used as recreation areas, wildlife refuges, and wilderness.

Whether the land is publicly or privately owned, the impact of the MX on the sites finally selected is sure to be drastic. According to the impact statement, building the MX would spur a local construction boom, attracting new population and outstripping the ability of rural communities to supply services. More important, where the land is privately owned, deploying the MX would mean moving people from their homes. For example, under one of the air force's security options for the South Platte plains, the environmental impact statement states that 70,000 people living in the affected zone would have to be "relocated"; in the high plains, \$1.7 billion worth of

**Conservative Nebraska  
farmers ask, "Where are  
our human rights now?"**

Local concern over the MX was aroused last year when the air force released a five-volume environmental impact statement about the missile. The massive document pinpoints seven areas where the MX might be deployed: the central Nevada great basin, the Mojave Desert in California, the White Sands region of New Mexico, the Luke/Yuma area between Arizona and California, west Texas, the high plains between Texas and New Mexico, and the South Platte plains in Nebraska, Colorado, and Kansas.

The proposed MX sites include not only land owned by the federal government, but also privately owned land used for farming and ranching in Tex-

agricultural production would be "displaced" each year.

Public officials in several states are alarmed by the tremendous amounts of power that would be required to build and run the MX. Kansas Governor Robert Bennett says energy requirements for the MX in his state alone would be equivalent to a city of 50,000 people, and Nebraska State Senator Steve Fowler has wondered aloud whether the huge energy requirements in his state will necessitate the construction of a nuclear power plant.

The environmental impact statement admits that locating the MX in the New Mexico-Texas plains would

indeed require a new generating facility. In addition, the impact statement estimates water requirements for the MX to range from a minimum of 3 billion gallons per year to a maximum of 12 billion, a figure large enough to send chills down the spine of many a farmer, especially in the Southwest.

Environmentalists are concerned that the MX presents a direct threat to the habitats of many birds and animals, some of them on the endangered species list. In New Mexico, for example, a potential MX site is located near one of the few refuges used by whooping cranes. The site is also home for peregrine falcons and contains the archaeological remains of early Indian tribes.

**T**HE ECONOMIC AND social costs of deploying the MX are dwarfed by another consideration: What would happen if war breaks out? Residents living near potential MX sites got a particularly vivid answer to that question when, in a rather unfortunate choice of words, General Lew Allen, Jr., chief of staff of the air force, said that the idea behind the MX was to "deploy a great sponge of targets in the United States to absorb the Soviet warheads, making

a surprise attack look futile to the Kremlin." If the possibility of losing their water, their farms, and their livelihoods didn't do it, the prospect of becoming a target for a nuclear warhead was enough to send many residents straight to the town meeting hall.

Local opposition to the MX missile first surfaced last summer in Arizona, where two areas are potential MX sites, but public concern was first aroused when the Defense Nuclear Agency began conducting high-explosives tests in the northwestern part of the state to see what impact a direct enemy hit would have on an MX buried in an underground trench.

Last June, before the first of the two high-explosives tests, Tucson's Animal Defense League tried to get an eleventh-hour injunction prohibiting the blast. The league contended that the agency had not prepared an adequate environmental impact statement and that the blast would destroy the habitats of several endangered species, and indeed the animals themselves.

In August, before the second explosion, the Colorado River Indian tribe came out strongly against the test. Their reservation is 20 miles west of the test site and south of Lake Havasu

City. Between Lake Havasu City and the reservation lies the Parker Dam, and the tribe was worried about the effect of the blast on the dam, as well as damage to Indian archaeological resources located in a basin between the reservation and the test site. The detonations occurred despite the protests.

Meanwhile, in Tucson, opponents of the tests had begun to focus on the underlying cause of the tests: the development of the MX. Carrying signs saying, "You Can't Eat Missiles," and wearing buttons marked "Bury the MX," about twenty people marched around the Tucson Federal Building to protest the August test. The Stop MX Coalition in Tucson is requesting public hearings in Arizona on the MX—so far without success.

In neighboring New Mexico, another group opposed to MX, the Coalition to Stop the MX Missile, is just beginning to lobby the state's conservative congressional delegation to oppose deploying the mobile missile in any of the three sites the air force is considering in the state. The concerns of the New Mexico group include the loss of farm and ranching land in the eastern part of the state, depletion of scarce ground water reserves that will be used to construct and maintain the project, and the prospect of becoming a prime nuclear-strike zone in case of a war.

But while the peace-oriented Coalition to Stop the MX, centered in Albuquerque, is well informed on details surrounding the proposed missile, many New Mexicans who live in areas the air force has pinpointed as potential sites have no idea what's going on. Newspapers in Artesia, Clovis, Lordsburg, and other small New Mexico towns have run few articles on the MX, and the environmental impact statement that enraged citizens in other areas is available only at the state's two largest universities.

The Clayton-Union County Chamber of Commerce, in eastern New Mexico, has actually gone on record in favor of having missile sites in the area. Dreaming of hundreds of new jobs, local supporters of the MX talk of "landing" the missile project the same way they landed the country's largest wind generator, which now supplies one-fifth of their electricity. And according to the *Union County Leader*, they're getting some support from the state's congressional delegation, which, with one exception, supports both the MX and the multiple-aim-point system.



BRUCE MCGILLIVRAY

The response of Clayton residents stands in marked contrast to that of citizens living in the South Platte plains, another agricultural area where the MX might be deployed.

Residents of the flat, wheat- and corn-growing country that spreads across Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado, first heard about the MX from Nebraskans for Peace, a group in Lincoln that is trying to halt the arms race. "People around here are a conservative lot—family farmers, sons and daughters of immigrants who have farmed the land for generations. They're in favor of a strong defense posture, and, for the most part, they trust the government," says Kevin Johnson, editor of the *Benkelman Post and News Chronicle*. "So the initial reaction to the MX—and especially to the fact that the air force might take away their farms for the project—was absolute shock. Some people still don't believe it."

But as the initial shock wore off, anger took over. Farmers and their wives were especially upset by the fact that the environmental impact statement had not been made available to them, and that they had only two weeks to comment, once they found out about the air force plan. The result was a veritable flurry of meetings throughout Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado, and a torrent of letters to public officials, newspapers, and the air force. In the heaviest reaction from any state, some 2500 Nebraskans, by letter and petition, made known their opposition to the MX. Many of the letters to the air force were handwritten, many from women and school children. Some of the angriest were from public officials.

"Why was the public given such a short time to respond?" asked Ralph Conrad, chairman of the Kit Carson (Kansas) Board of County Commissioners, in a letter to the air force. "Where is our freedom any more?" "This is government by the government and not by the people," the mayor of Burlington, Colorado told the air force.

Residents were irritated particularly that the environmental impact statement managed to describe the area without mentioning its two chief crops: corn and wheat. "We produce \$46 million worth of wheat per year in the five counties in southwestern Nebraska alone," says John Wallace, president of the Nebraska Wheatgrowers Association. "We've developed this land

## ***The air force wants to seize up to 19,000 acres for its MX shell game.***

through private enterprise, irrigated it, and worked it from sun up until sun down. My own grandfather homesteaded our farm and I bought the rest at public auction. Our deed says forever, but now Uncle Sam's coming around saying, 'I was just kidding.' Now that's hard to swallow. You wonder where are the human rights we hear them talking about so often."

"Yuma County, Colorado, produces more shelled corn than any area in the country and there are 40,000 head of cattle in the county," says Ralph Spillman, a mortician and a city councilman from Yuma. "People here are worried about the disruption of all they've worked for."

Although the air force has not specified how much land would need to be taken out of production for the 20-year life of the MX project, the figure most Nebraskans refer to is about 5000 square miles. But even if one of the air force's less drastic security plans were adopted, farmers say that would disrupt the area's circular irrigation systems, making farming uneconomical.

Attendance at the town meetings in the South Platte area was overwhelming: 400 in Yuma, 600 in Ogallala, 400 in Goodland. Representatives of almost every local organization, including the Southwest Nebraska Council of Governments, the American Agriculture Movement, the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, the Cornhuskers Council of Governments, Women in Farm Economics, and the Wheatgrowers Association, rose to denounce the MX. The Nebraskans for Peace pointed out that if the MX were located there the area would be a prime target in time of war. Others asked about the possibility of a traffic accident with radiological consequences, citing an incident in Rock, Kansas, involving liquid fuel Titan missiles, in which an air force man was killed and nearby farms had to be evacuated. Still others asked if their state would become part of "the great sponge" of targets. One man at the Kansas meeting said simply, to a burst of applause,

"When you go back to Washington, tell 'em we don't want 'em."

Air force representatives attended two meetings to present their case and to brief the local population. While air force officers listened politely to the farmers, they were careful to call their meetings "briefings," not "hearings." Major Allen Sabsevit, the air force briefer, could not answer many questions because, he said, the decision on the MX was too far in the future for consideration of specifics on each site.

Predictably, response to the briefings was confusion—then anger. "There's no way you can characterize what went on as a hearing. It was just a PR man giving out the air force line," said Shirley Parks. "And personally, I don't like to be patronized." Parks said her organization was going to keep their eyes on the MX.

Concerning the briefings, Sabsevit, a public information officer from Norton air force base, says jovially, "You've got to expect this kind of response when it's a question of private land."

**T**HE MX IS NOT THE FIRST strategic system that has become a local issue. Both the Trident submarine and the navy's Seafarer project have been targets of citizen protest in California, Washington, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Connecticut. Grounds for opposition to the Pentagon's plans vary: Opponents range from conservationists in Michigan who don't want underground wires through wilderness areas, to veterans of the antiwar movement of the sixties, who this year went "over the fence" to protest basing Trident subs in Puget Sound in Washington.

For almost 10 years now the navy has been trying to find a hospitable home for its Seafarer submarine communications system. Originally named Sanguine, the \$500 million project is an extremely low-frequency submarine communication system that would permit disruption-free radio transmissions to submarines. At present, submarines must surface and trail wires



to communicate with the mainland, which increases their vulnerability and prevents the rapid communications with missile-firing subs that would be necessary in case of a nuclear war. The answer to this problem, according to the navy, is a system consisting of 4000 miles of underground cables arranged in tic-tac-toe patterns, capable of communicating with subs by low-frequency radio.

In 1967, when the navy first proposed the project, then called Sanguine, the site it selected, for geological reasons, was Wisconsin's Laurentian sheath. But Wisconsin residents raised such a storm of protest in 1973 when the navy installed an experimental Sanguine network in a northern wilderness that the service, with a push from former Wisconsin Representative and then-Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, retreated to Texas.

But Texans raised the same kinds of environmental questions, and the navy began looking at federal land in New Mexico and Nevada. In New Mexico the navy ran into another opponent: the army.

Army officers at White Sands missile range, which occupied the same land in southern New Mexico that the navy wanted to use for Seafarer cables, said that the navy system would interfere with weapons testing going on there. According to the army, the interference would mean the loss of between 1800 and 3600 jobs, with a payroll of \$28 to \$58 million.

Horrified by the prospect of such an economic loss, officials of neighboring cities raised their voices in protest. At hearings held in Las Cruces in 1977, Mayor Albert Johnson read a resolution from city commissioners citing the possibility of "serious economic decline" in the Las Cruces area if Seafarer were located there. Nearby, the defense-oriented Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce went on record against Seafarer, and the governor of the state, who is from Las Cruces, asked for state veto power over the project.

In New Mexico and in Nevada citizen resistance to Seafarer got a boost from an unexpected source: the navy's own environmental impact statement, which said that for geological reasons it would cost about \$200 million more to locate Seafarer in either state than in the navy's first choice—the upper peninsula of Michigan.

But Michigan residents had their own ideas about Seafarer. The eight

upper-peninsula counties that would be affected by the underground cable system voted it down in separate referendums; in the state as a whole public sentiment runs against the project four to one. Most local opposition is based on environmental concerns. Seafarer's potential neighbors are worried that the project will disturb wildlife, tear up the wilderness, and expose animals and humans to radiation; and that Seafarer's radiowaves could electrify fences, knock out TV and radio stations, or even alter human brain waves.

Some Michigan residents were upset about the treatment they were getting from the navy. Virginia Prentice, leader of the Sierra Club's task force on Sanguine/Seafarer, pointed to "continuous obfuscation of facts, plans, and

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proposal for  
"Seafarer"  
threatens  
Michigan,  
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Nevada, and  
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with a major  
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statement of intent on the part of the navy," and Michigan Governor Milliken accused the navy of suppressing a report that showed that exposure to extremely low frequency waves led to an increase of triglycerides in the bloodstream, associated with heart disease.

Finally, in March 1977, amid growing opposition to Seafarer, Governor Milliken vetoed the project and asked the navy to take its plans and leave the state. But Milliken, who had been promised the power of the veto by President Gerald Ford and Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, still doesn't know whether his veto will stick. Carter is now deciding what to do about Seafarer. On the one side stands the navy and the \$130 million already spent studying and shopping for Seafarer; on the other, Carter's 1976 campaign promise to Michigan residents that Seafarer would not be located there against their wishes.

Opposition to the \$40 billion Trident submarine program is centered in three states—Connecticut, where General Dynamics is building the first seven subs; California, where Lockheed is manufacturing the missiles themselves; and Washington, where the subs will eventually be based.

**I**N THE SEATTLE AREA, opposition to Trident began five years ago with a group of homeowners who were, as the name of their group implied, "Concerned About Trident." Their concern was based on fears that a major naval facility would disrupt the rural, small-town style of life characteristic of the area, bringing in its place a boom-town atmosphere that would put strains on local sewers, schools, and, ultimately, pocketbooks.

As concern about Trident grew, another more activist organization, the Pacific Life Community, began a public educational campaign that culminated in May 1978 with a rally at the Trident base that drew 5000 people from all over the West Coast. Of these 5000 demonstrators, 290 were arrested for going over the fence and onto federal property.

Trident's opponents in other areas such as Santa Cruz, California, and Connecticut emphasize Trident's role in escalating the arms race and are pressing for the conversion of military facilities to peaceful uses.

While local groups protest against these strategic systems, the Pentagon is pushing ahead with its request for funds to begin full-scale development of the MX this year, although the exact basing mode remains a question. Carter's Defense Department is now asking for a total of more than one billion dollars to proceed with the program, including \$675 million for supplemental 1979, and \$423 million for fiscal 1980.

With angry constituents putting pressure on congressmen from the western states, the MX may face some problems. Peace groups like SANE are also raising difficult questions about the new weapon's relationship to SALT II, and 50 members of Congress, upset about the multiple-aim-point basing mode, have written Carter asking for a top-level study.

These protests make clear that nuclear weapons are no longer just a national issue decided by the specialists in Washington. They are a very real local concern, and everyone, from mortician to Indian chief, has a stake in the outcome. □

not-so-

# IN COMMON CAUSE

**In fact, Common Cause is a lobby  
for those who would like to keep  
things pretty much the way they are.**

**By STEPHEN CHAPMAN**

**E**VERYBODY'S ORGANIZED BUT THE PEOPLE." That was the slogan used by John W. Gardner seven years ago in launching a membership drive for Common Cause, his new, self-styled "citizens' lobby." If it was true then, it's not true any more. "The people"—at least those who defer to John Gardner as their guardian—are now one of the best-organized lobbies in Washington, and one of the biggest and best-financed. Who would have guessed that in a nation distinctive for its tradition of interest-group bargaining, the people could be a force for change? In a town where idealistic "public interest" lobbies are lodged on every street corner, as transient as Capitol Hill secretaries and leaving no deeper imprint on national policy, Common Cause has written an uncommon success story.

Created seemingly *ex nihilo* by a bland former HEW secretary with the patrician bearing and ostentatious piety of an Episcopalian vicar, the group swelled in three years to 314,000 members. With the dispersal of President Nixon's criminal clan, Common Cause's numbers have fallen to 250,000, but its prestige and clout on Capitol Hill have continued to grow. The *National Journal*, a highly regarded weekly on politics and government, recently reported that, in addition to achievements in Washington, Common Cause has gotten legislative reforms enacted by every state: an accomplishment probably unmatched by any lobby group, private or public interest, in American history. Its success has the breathtaking quality of some good-government fairy tale come to life, with Gardner cast as a wily Mr. Smith doing things Jimmy Stewart never would have dreamed of.

Much of the credit goes to Gardner, for a decade now the nation's chief custodian of high-mindedness. Although he resigned as president in 1977, Common Cause remains largely his lengthened shadow, and he continues to be active on the group's governing board. Gardner has his office in the same building as Common Cause's, and there is no evidence of a change of policy since he left the helm.

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Though he is now a familiar spokesman for the public interest, surely there never was a less likely tribune of the masses. In credentials and thinking, Gardner embodies the American establishment in whose bosom he has spent most of his adult life. It is fitting, therefore, that Gardner's Common Cause group relied on the wealthy and established for start-up money, has pushed proposals that lend themselves to manipulation by the elite, and in practice serves as a lobbying group for the upper middle class.

After doing his undergraduate work at Stanford and getting his Ph.D. in psychology in 1938 from the University of California, Gardner taught at two posh women's colleges, Connecticut College and Mount Holyoke, before enlisting in the marines in 1942. From there he went to work for the Office of Strategic Services (oss), the forerunner of the CIA; in the oss he assisted Harvard psychologist Henry Alexander Murray, and after the war Murray found Gardner a job at the Carnegie Corporation.

In 1947, Gardner saw that the new international role assumed by the United States needed better backup in the universities. Together with his colleagues at the Carnegie Corporation, he approached Harvard University with a proposal for an interdisciplinary research institute that would examine America's foe in the emerging Cold War. To head this new Russian Research Center, Gardner and the Carnegie staff suggested anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, like Gardner a veteran of the oss. The center was set up, and is still active.

Gardner was the man who persuaded James B. Conant to write his famous reports on the American high school for the Carnegie Corporation. Besides serving as president of Harvard and as a diplomat, Conant had been the planner in charge of the atomic bomb for the Office of Scientific Research during World War II. He had frankly set forth his aims for the American high school in a series of lectures in 1952 in which he enlisted education in the Cold War and lashed out at parochial schools as a "threat to our democratic unity." Afterwards, Gardner signed him up to write the Conant Reports, which advocated increased centralization of the public schools and came out at a time when the orbiting of sputnik, in Gardner's words, "led the