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World Council of Nuclear Workers

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The World Council of Nuclear Workers (WONUC) is the brainchild of a 1993 meeting of English and French trade unionists who were growing increasingly aware that the battle for their jobs required the defence of their industry. The employees of the nuclear industry joined the battle alongside the employers.

Some called this “treason”, seeing in it the denial of the fundamental values of trade unionism. The battle for jobs in the nuclear industry did not match the traditional trade union logic, under which the defence of capital is seen not as the concern of the workers, but rather the responsibility of the employer, on whom alone should fall the duty of defending the nuclear industry. This approach, whose foundations are found in the economic and social theories of the 19th century, no longer corresponds to the reality of the 21st century. Our social system has nothing in common with that of the 19th century. The forms of work, the chains of responsibility, the forms of capitalism, the behaviour of the different groups involved in production and the balances of power are now profoundly different. A glance at the global scale of the attacks sustained by the nuclear industry demonstrates how this debate is now obsolete, and how it has become urgent to progress from rhetoric to action.

The nuclear industry has become - in spite of itself - a political football. Just about everywhere, but especially in Western Europe, “pink-green” political coalitions, seeking the support of a self-proclaimed “ecological” minority, are eager to sacrifice the nuclear industry to remain in power. These political circles have turned nuclear energy into an electoral argument. It is useless to denounce the amalgam made between nuclear energy and politics. This is simply an undeniable fact that can be regretted, but which must be taken into account.

In this new social context, the importance of public opinion, strongly influenced by the media, is growing steadily. It is abundantly clear that by ignoring the early signs of this profound modification in voters’ power, the nuclear industry abandoned the field to its detractors for too long. When it finally reacted, its response was clumsy and inappropriate. It is abundantly clear that in this media war, the nuclear industry has mistaken the issue. Against passion it applied reason. Against subjectivity it applied objectivity, without realizing that its credibility had been undermined by cunning and by particularly effective media campaigns. The opprobrium that has fallen on nuclear energy is such that the managers of the nuclear industry are now reduced to attempts to seek justification with a public opinion that no longer believes in them.

WONUC, the trump card of the worldwide nuclear community

Conversely, the credibility of the employees of the nuclear industry is intact. Who dares accuse them of complacency, since they would be the first to suffer the consequences? Working as we do at the “fuel face”, we can claim that we have plenty of first-hand experience and a certain

expertise, especially in understanding the effectiveness of health and safety measures. We believe that the people best equipped to make the case for the future of the nuclear industry are those who earn their living from it and live with it, i.e. nuclear workers and their communities.

In this battle for the defence of nuclear energy, WONUC does not want to substitute for the other players of the nuclear industry, but to stand alongside them. It still needs to be accepted as an equal partner, but this is not always easy. Some parties shun such promiscuity, while others ascribe no benefit to WONUC. Yet others, swayed at the attractions of illusory compromises, do not want this support, for fear of the collapse of the scaffolding they have erected with our opponents, on which they believe they can find a table to sign a peace treaty, but on which our opponents have already placed the block on which we will lose our heads.

We are workers, and we have a right to a voice in the decision making which affects our industry and which concerns our communities. We also have a duty to our fellow workers and to the wider community, who are entitled to work for a World with safe sources of energy, in a safe environment, and with a sound social and economic future. We intend to exercise our rights and do our duty. WONUC is ready to cooperate with organizations pursuing the same objectives: the defence and promotion of nuclear energy for peaceful uses.

WONUC's strategy and actions

WONUC will not participate in violent action. We respect the law. Our approach is peaceful. We disdain spectacular media operations, in which we would play the clown in order to occupy television screens the world over. The employees of the nuclear industry are serious people: they are not circus performers.

Our actions meet the following guidelines:

1. answer questions from the public;
2. confer a positive image on nuclear energy;
3. promote nuclear energy;
4. participate in the major debates affecting the future of nuclear energy;
5. act in political circles;
6. bypass the blackmail of democracy by anti-nuclear bodies

1. Answer questions from the public

Ionizing radiation hazards

Two international conferences on "The effects of low and very low doses of ionizing radiation on human health" have already taken place (Versailles - 1999 ; Dublin - 2001). The third is scheduled in Teheran in 2003, (where the highest levels of natural radiation can be measured : 132 mSv in Ramsar).

We plan to launch a study on the effects of low doses of ionizing radiation on uranium miners by December 2001, with the support of Battelle Institute. This study is aimed to at forestalling the ant-nuclear circles who want to exploit the results of the Rossing Mine (Namibia) study. A database will be created from these results. A similar initiative was initiated by the organisations that manage the information relating to the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These databases must be separated so that the connections made between civilian nuclear energy and the atomic bomb can be discredited. This database will be run by the International Centre on Ionizing Radiation, now being established.

WONUC is looking for the financial support of this long term action.

Waste management

“Oklo” is the perfect media (and scientific) tool for managing the question of the public acceptance of the management of nuclear waste. A conference taking “Oklo” as a model was scheduled in September 2001, at the University of Versailles. The lack of support, and the many obstacles posed by the some agencies responsible for nuclear waste management, forced the postponement of this conference. Considering the importance of this question for the nuclear industry, this lack of support is shocking and cannot be understood unless certain managers, executing the secret instructions of their “pink-green” governments, have the undeclared aim of torpedoing the European nuclear industry!. However, WONUC will be not daunted by such attitudes and will restart the process, with the aim of launching this cycle of conferences in Spring 2003.

Nuclear safety

The first international conference on « Human Factors and Nuclear Safety » was held in Moscow in October 2000. It concluded by adopting the draft « Nuclear Code of Ethics ». The final draft of this Nuclear Code of Ethics is available at this Symposium, for your comments.

It is already under informal discussions with the International Labour Organization – ILO, the United Nations agency in charge of the world of work.

Social spin-off

A first study on the impact of the nuclear industry on jobs was completed in 1999. Despite its obvious importance, it has lacked support, and there is no plan to update it for the time being.

Internet

Thanks to the goodwill and competence of our computer specialists, our Internet site has become one of the star sites with 1500 connections daily, even if it looks too “French”.

2. Confer a positive image on nuclear energy

MaxiMarathons

The Nuclear MaxiMarathon is the only international entertainment event within the nuclear community capable of attracting the attention of the media. Six MaxiMarathons which have already been organized: 1996 & 1997 (France and Belgium), 1998 (Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria), 1999 (Romania), 2000 (Germany), 2001 (Russia). In 2002, the MaxiMarathon will be run in Sweden. The Nuclear MaxiMarathon offers a formidable media opportunity to promote nuclear energy. You yourselves alone can reap the benefits of this media operation.

3. Promote Nuclear Energy

Nuclear desalination and recycling of waste water

A first international conference on Nuclear Desalination will be held in Morocco in October 2002 in collaboration with the IAEA and the World Water Forum. It is planned to extend the topic of this conference series in a second phase to the cleanup, retreatment and recycling of waste water.

Representatives of American pension funds who, as you know, manage a lion’s share of the wealth of the planet, will be present in order to analyse the problems of funding.

I invite you to be a partner in this conference by displaying your know-how, your products and your services at the technical exhibition which will be organized within the framework of the conference.

4. Participate in the major debates affecting the future of nuclear energy

UNCC-COP Conferences

WONUC was and is still very concerned and worried about the possibility of extending the so-called “flexible mechanisms” applied to the emission of green house gas to the “radioactive emissions” (liquid, solid and gaseous effluents). This is why WONUC was so against the so-called “flexible mechanisms”. The obvious hostility of some parties, who did not share our reservations, to the presence of WONUC at the United Nations Conferences on Climate Change, led us to abandon our participation there, despite our success in 1998 in Buenos Aires, and despite the interest aroused by our initiative to go to Bonn in 1999 to seek the support of the representatives of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

Faced with the absence of cogent results obtained by the ‘official’ representatives of the nuclear community, the Brazilian chapter of WONUC has decided to revive the process by organizing, ten years later, at Rio de Janeiro, a second earth summit, which should host nearly three thousand participants. Its success will ensure the reintegration of the nuclear option in the debate on sustainable development.

5. Act on political circles

Act on political circles

In every country where WONUC is present, this action is the least known, because the most discreet, while being quite very effective.

6. Bypassing the blackmail of democracy by anti-nuclear bodies

Legal actions

The way in which the anti-nuclear organizations have introduced their views into political circles has led them increasingly to take “liberties” with the democratic principles that govern us, thereby weakening them. We should exploit these shortcomings. It is accordingly possible to find specific cases today in which action would be feasible before the European Court of Justice. These actions, in addition to the possibility of winning, would also have the merit of making us a body to be reckoned with, and hence listened to by political circles, and consequently to resume the dialogue with the political decision makers on bases which are not systematically unfavourable to us.

The nuclear battle field is very large, and there is a lot of fights to conduct. But the final battle will be on court. WONUC does not have the resources for this type of action. For Europe, we feel that this should be the regular domain of Foratom.