

CALIFORNIA REP INTRODUCES OWN FUSION ENERGY BILL TO CONGRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C., Dec. 5 (IPS)--Rep. Richard T. Hanna (D.-Calif.) has introduced a bill in Congress which calls for the establishment of three "blue ribbon" scientific panels to prepare assessments and make recommendations for a crash program to develop controlled thermonuclear fusion power.

Speaking before Congress Nov. 26, Hanna called his bill, the Fusion Energy Act of 1974, "the first step toward a national crash program." "The designs for the experimental equipment to pursue various fusion options are even now on the drawing boards," he stated. "We need a crash program to take these to final form, to build and operate fusion experimental and demonstration machines needed to get on with the job of creating a practical and useful thermonuclear technology." Hanna's bill also calls for international cooperation and "the establishment of an International Advisory Committee."

An Evaluation

As written for Rep. Hanna by his science aide Ibrohim Clark, a physicist, the bill and Hanna's prefatory remarks competently motivate a positive program for fusion development. As outlined in the U.S. Labor Party's proposed fusion bill, a crash program backed by multi-billion dollar funding could produce prototype fusion reactors by the end of this decade and operational fusion power generation by the mid-1980s.

The bill, however, is not without several significant and potentially damaging drawbacks. Aside from its lack of funding commitment, the bill calls for a six-month study by an advisory committee to evaluate existing programs and make recommendations for their upgrading. At a time when the emergency development of fusion power is a critical factor in arresting the starvation of a large sector of the world's population, such a study represents a criminal waste of time. The Labor Party's fusion bill demonstrates that there is no reason why that evaluation could not be done competently in two months or even less. Second, without working class organizing to assure otherwise, the "shopping list" composition of the advisory committee and the vague methods for its selection enable Rockefeller scientific butchers to easily grab control of the bill's implementation and sabotage a crash program.

Third, the bill contains several references to the development of a specious hybrid fusion-fission process. A concoction of Rockefeller mad scientist Edward Teller, this process is absolutely good for nothing except producing mountains of useless fission weapon and fuel material.

Nonetheless, Hanna's bill, to the extent that it announces both the necessity and practicality of fusion development, is worthy of the support of the working class. The U.S. Labor Party is now taking steps to ensure that it is not killed in committee or put on a distant backburner.

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