

Have U.S. media gone 'pro-nuclear'?

by Marsha Freeman

After 15 years of an unrelenting campaign to turn the American people against the development of nuclear energy by scaring people to death, the U.S. media are slowly changing their tune. We all remember the headlines after the Three Mile Island accident in March of 1979: "Radiation Cloud Heads Toward New York," "Radiation Leak Out of Control," *ad nauseam*.

Just weeks before the accident, the public was treated to Jane Fonda and Jack Lemmon, in *The China Syndrome*, about a nuclear power plant meltdown, covered up by a greedy utility. The American people have been continually bombarded with propaganda about how dangerous, expensive, and unnecessary nuclear power plants are.

But when the summer of 1988 began to look like record-breaking heat and drought, and an undercapitalized electricity industry might not be able to handle the load, some of the press started sending up danger signals.

The two most irrational situations in the nation are in New York and New England, where nuclear plants that are ready to run have been held back by local politicians' refusal to produce "population evacuation" plans. These two regions suffered the worst in this summer's heat wave.

On May 31, the *Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial titled, "Lights Out," scored Mario Cuomo and Michael Dukakis, who "managed to beach two big East-Coast nuclear-power projects, Shoreham and Seabrook."

The *Journal* continues, "Because the electrical-utility industry developed a substantial surplus of capacity at the beginning of this decade, politicians have played the no-nukes game with blissful unconcern over the threat of shortages. But such follies usually bring a day of reckoning. This one is no exception."

The *Journal* states, "The political blockage of new generating capacity would have been more excusable had there been legitimate reasons for doing so. But the so-called 'safety' issue has been a red herring from the beginning. There hasn't been a nuclear-radiation fatality in the United States in 30 years."

Ten days earlier, the *New York Times*—which for more than a century has led campaigns not only against nuclear power, but against the airplane, the space program, and even electricity itself—stated that before any new capacity could be brought on line if Shoreham were scrapped, Long Island

"must live with razor-thin capacity margins. At best, that will mean summer 'brownouts,' voltage reductions that dim lights and slow appliances. More likely, it will mean brief outages, or even planned rolling blackouts that deny power to individual communities for a few hours each week."

The *Times*, however, is never far from some "scientific" hoax. If scare stories about "death-dealing radiation" from nuclear plants won't sell in a heat wave, maybe people will buy the "greenhouse effect." This unproven, supposed rise in the Earth's global temperature due to the burning of fossil fuels, has made it very difficult for anyone proposing to build coal-fired rather than nuclear plants.

As the summer wore on, and new records were set for consecutive days over 90°, the stupidity of not allowing at least the New York Shoreham and New Hampshire-Massachusetts Seabrook plants to produce power, became more and more obvious.

On July 18, the *New York Post*, which had the most bizarre screaming headlines during the Three Mile Island episode, stated, "There is . . . something almost flaky about junking a newly built \$5.3 billion facility. There is . . . a simple way for both the governor and the legislature to escape blame [for stopping Shoreham]: They could admit that scrapping the brand-new, never-used facility is a bad one, and go forward with Shoreham."

What about all the years of screaming about how much nuclear power costs? "Many of those who opposed Shoreham," the *Post* editorial continued, "seem not to have realized how much scrapping it would cost. . . . Lilco [the utility company] has a very slim electricity reserve. Without Shoreham, it will have to buy power from other utilities—power that might well be unavailable during peak periods."

Finally, during the 100°-plus August heat wave, the dam even broke in the other bastion of anti-nuclear propaganda in the nation, Boston. On Aug. 15, the *Boston Globe* called for the rejection of the November anti-nuclear ballot referendum, which would shut the state's two operating nuclear plants. One, the Pilgrim plant, has been down for refueling and maintenance, but kept closed for more than two years, because of obstructionism on the part of federal regulators.

The *Globe* described referendum backers as "anti-Seabrook zealots," praised the 28-year record of safe power production at the Yankee nuclear plant, and called for the immediate reopening of the Pilgrim plant.

The *Baltimore Sun* on Aug. 16 stated, "Make no mistake nuclear power plants require well-trained workers, expert management, and flawless equipment. They cannot be allowed to operate where this is lacking. But neither can this nation afford to turn its back on the vast potential of nuclear energy."

What now remains to be seen is if the mass media will not only say that closed-down plants should be opened, but that without an aggressive nuclear power plant construction effort, every year from now on will be worse than the last.