



# Theses on nuclear power

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1. For Marxists the goal of communism entails the fullest development of the productive forces so that the material necessities of life are automatically available to all and not only to a tiny minority: the characteristic feature of all class societies.

Capitalism, as the highest and most progressive form of class society based on private property, has witnessed the greatest quantitative and qualitative development of the productive forces, based on the application of science and technology. This development has not been an even and continuous process due to capitalism's contradictory laws of motion. Its development is motivated, not by planned satisfaction of human need, but by the capitalist class's competitive compulsion to increase the rate of exploitation and offset the tendential fall in the profit rate.

Thus cyclical crises, longer periods of stagnation or expansion, wars and revolutionary upheavals have given the development of technology in particular and the forces of production in general, an erratic, convulsive character. Successive scientific breakthroughs and their technological application within capitalism have both raised the productivity of human labour (and with it the quantity and quality of material goods) and intensified the exploitation of the labouring masses (and with it the inequalities of distribution).

The imperialist epoch has sharpened these contradictions. The productive forces have, in certain periods, expanded in certain countries and certain sectors of industry in a manner unimaginable during capitalism's youthful epoch. In other periods they have stagnated and have even been physically destroyed (mass unemployment, mass extermination during World War Two, etc) as never before. The epoch, as a whole, because it is the epoch of monopoly and world economy, has proceeded by way of enormous convulsions, antagonisms, sharp revolutionary and counter-revolutionary periods, of division and re-division of the world market.

It should therefore be obvious that scientific advances and any technological fruits that follow these advances are indelibly marked by the nature of the epoch and the period in which they occur. Electricity, radio, micro-chips, nuclear fission, have all revolutionised industry, communication and energy production. However, each scientific advance does not automatically find its most widespread application under capitalism, particularly in the imperialist epoch. The cramping nature of private property and the relations of production under capitalism restrict the application of new technologies to within the limits of what it is profitable so to do.

The widespread application of computerisation was unthinkable until after World War Two with its enhanced conditions for profitable investment. On the other hand, the scientific breakthrough in robotics is incapable of widespread application in the renewed period of imperialist crises. The expansion of the civilian nuclear power industry in the 1950s and 1960s was itself based upon an optimistic view of the continued future of profitable accumulation, the expansion of production and the ensuing demand for energy. The impetus behind the massive construction programme of the middle '70s was also rooted in the conjunctural 'oil crisis' and the attempt on the part of particular imperialisms, such as France, to achieve a strategically 'independent' energy policy and also in the need of the capitalists to ensure a return on earlier investments, i.e. 'production for production's sake'. But the slow down in growth, sinking oil and coal prices and the two generalised recessions have closed the door on the economies of scale envisaged and required if the promise of 'too cheap to meter' energy was to materialise.

In this context, with only 13% of the world's energy provided by nuclear power, the 'revolutionising' character of nuclear energy is still to be proven.

2. If the fundamental contradiction of capitalism is between the limitless expansive powers of socialised production (and on this basis the unlimited ingenuity of science and its potential for consciously controlling nature), on the one hand, and the cramping mode of private appropriation on the other, then this contradiction gives rise to others.

Production for profit rather than for human need means that capitalist production is also wasteful and destructive on a scale unimaginable before its birth. It is wasteful of the means of production themselves. It ruthlessly squanders the living forces of production—human labour. It also 'masters' nature in a destructive and thoughtless manner. These phenomena were visible even in the earliest period of capitalism where booms, crises and wars saw the wanton destruction of machinery, of workers' health and lives and the environment in both industrial and agricultural areas.

The working class was and is obliged to resist the destructive effects of blind capitalist production on itself and its environment. After its constitution as a modern proletariat, i.e. after the disappearance of the last admixture of the old artisan class, the working class realised the impossibility of halting or reversing the introduction of machinery (Luddism) and adopted a different strategy, most clearly and scientifically expressed by Marx and Engels. It learnt to fight, not large industry based on machinery itself, but its destructive effects on the working class and its environment. This meant struggles to increase safety at work, to enact legal measures against environmental pollution, to prevent the sale of commodities injurious to health, etc. As the scale and universality of capitalist production has increased on a world scale, so has its destructive potential with regard to human life and nature. But the struggles of the working class over safety over nearly two centuries have succeeded in restraining and reversing countless dangerous elements of capitalism.

The class struggle has led to the intervention of the bourgeois state in the form of labour protection laws, factory inspectors and rules on pollutants. Nonetheless, these safety measures were introduced by the capitalists as answers to one or other of the following factors, or a combination of them; firstly, the pressure and organisation of the working class combined with attempts by the bourgeoisie to buy support from sections of the workers in return for 'social peace'; secondly, the safety and security of their own machinery and factories; thirdly the attempt by capitalist monopolies to knock out their rivals through expensive safety measures, hours of work etc, in the knowledge that they could not follow suit; fourthly, the need to avoid working class organisation.

Basically, all this changes nothing in the nature of the mode of production and its destructive effects on the workers and on the exchange with nature. The rapacious drive of capital raises this problem to ever higher levels. Because of this, safety cannot be left in the hands of the capitalists or their state. Because of its material needs and its position in the process of production only the working class can decide on and install real safety standards. For this it must attack and defeat the capitalists' decisive criteria, the driving forces of profit—private property and capitalist competition.

The scale of the new dangers in the nuclear and chemical industries require a higher stage of struggle than most previous ones. This fight poses not only legal changes within capitalism but a struggle to rest control of these industries themselves from the control of the capitalists. These struggles for safety are not simply immediate or 'democratic' but are transitional ones; ones that can only be fully successful to the extent that they join up with and help lead to the abolition of capitalist ownership of the means of production itself.

Thus a qualitatively new technology like nuclear power necessarily brings with it a qualitative increase in the danger to humanity and this can only be met by a qualitatively different combination of tactics; namely the struggle for workers' control as a bridge to the overthrow of capitalism.

3. It is characteristic of the epoch in which this industry has developed that all the contradictions latent within this energy source have reached their sharpest pitch. Thus, in the political and economic sense, the military application of nuclear fission functioned as a kind of midwife for its civil application. Without the development of nuclear weapons it is possible that nuclear power stations might never have been developed to the point of production and that state

investment might have flowed into other energy technologies.

Historically, the main purpose in the construction of reactors was the production of plutonium for nuclear weapons and the existence of a nuclear power industry facilitates the possession of nuclear weapons. But the lack of such an industry is not an insurmountable obstacle to any state determined to develop nuclear weapons. Even where the development of nuclear fission took place from primarily economic considerations (as, for example, in the Federal Republic of Germany) this was a by-product of its military application. At the present time, the industry is still closely tied to imperialist military needs which is particularly clearly shown by the production of plutonium in the case of fast breeders (e.g. Super Phoenix in France).

As a technology and as an industry nuclear power cannot be abstracted from capitalist social relations any more than any other industry which involves risks to the health and safety of large numbers, or which, as with industries such as aerospace and electronics, are intimately linked to imperialist war preparations.

4. We reject the claims of the 'left critics' of nuclear power who either assert that the industry is intrinsically and irremediably unsafe or who hold that a nuclear power industry should only be allowed to operate under a healthy workers' state.

The first position is metaphysical. By what criteria is the industry deemed beyond recall? By what scientific judgement? The revolutionary party has no special authority to determine competing claims in the separate fields of natural science. The revolutionary party makes no claim to 'command' in the field of the separate natural sciences.

This means subjecting the experts' opinions to a rigorous test in front of the labour movement in conditions where commercial and state secrecy can be eroded and eventually abolished. Only in this process can the dishonest hirelings of the bourgeoisie or the petit bourgeois pessimists be exposed.

Only in front of a tribunal that has no vested interest in continuing capitalist recklessness, on the one hand, and on the other has no a priori commitment to closing down nuclear power stations, can the question of operation or closure be clarified. Only in the course of workers' inspection and through these tribunals can the relationship of the dangers of nuclear fission (in normal operation, the safety limits for radiation, the storage of atomic waste, the handling of plutonium, likelihood of accidents) to the political and military tasks and needs of the working class and the technical alternatives to nuclear power be decided.

The objections of ecologist critics, like the assertions of the proponents of nuclear power ('nuclear power is safe cheap?', 'there is a threat of an energy gap?', 'there are no alternatives?') must be proven. In this process the interests of the working class must come to the fore. In this sense workers' control is a school for the planned economy.

We reject, too, the view that the technological fruits of science in the form of the nuclear power industry is in itself reactionary, that is, it can only be used for reactionary purposes. The position that technology which is linked to militarism or, more generally, the offspring of the imperialist epoch, is therefore reactionary technology ignores the contradictory development of technology and again abstracts from the social use of technology under definite class relations, (do we reject radar because it is a by-product of militarism?). However, the opposite conclusion of those who believe in the progressive nature of nuclear power, that the results of the nuclear industry are, 'in themselves' progressive must also be rejected.

Under capitalism it has been the struggle between competing capitals and between capital and wage labour which produced successive waves of new technology. The quest for higher productivity on the one hand, the determination of workers to resist death, degradation and mutilation on the other, has resulted in refinements and replacements of technology. Competition and class conflict have been the far from impartial handmaidens of scientific development. The nuclear power industry is not immune from this law of history!

5. What then are the responsibilities of the 'vanguard of the vanguard' in this area? We are the memory of the class, we seek to embody its historical, generalised experience. We do not abandon our responsibility to lead. We must convince

workers that the bourgeoisie is a reactionary class whose contempt for the future is proven by its carelessness in regard to the dangerous effects of the nuclear industry. We should not seek to minimise the dangers of nuclear power nor exaggerate the preparedness of the bourgeoisie to deal with a major accident in the industry. The record of minor accidents, of near 'melt-downs' over the last thirty years in Europe and America, the deaths and ecological destruction from Chernobyl and lack of concern about the long term future of high level waste disposal are proof of this. A class which is conditioned by its frantic concern for next years' profit ledgers cannot be trusted with the future of humanity hundreds and thousands of years from now!

Against this record we must set down the equally terrible record of many other industries; of Bhopal with its 3,000 deaths and 200,000 serious injuries; of 'Chernobyl' in Switzerland which has killed off 200 miles of the Upper Rhine. The opponents of nuclear power do not call for the total closure of the chemical industries, but merely an enquiry or its 'restructuring'. This indicates an extension of the genuine fear millions feel about the dangers of nuclear power, which in part stem from a grasp of the horrendous consequences of nuclear war.

The safety of workers in the industry and the safety of future generations of working people mesh and find a common focus in the struggle to impose safety standards within the nuclear power industry. Here we should remember that it is not the case that the party leads and the class follows; the dialectic of the relationship means that the class, or this section of it, must also teach the party how to concretise its demands out of the living experience of daily life. Thus our safety proposals in the struggle for workers' control must have a provisional character; the final word on what is an 'acceptable level' of radiation contact, what structural improvements/containment vessels are adequate etc, cannot be settled now by our propaganda.

6. Those 'left critics' who want a shut down now and an opening-up under a healthy workers' state have effectively abandoned the method of transitional politics. The struggle now to improve and impose safety measures upon the bosses pushes forward new scientific and technological developments. Under capitalism if our masters wish to retain their cherished industry then under the hammer blows of this struggle they will be forced to refine and improve their industry. If they decide that the cost of concessions is such an intolerable pressure upon their profit margins that they stop building new plants or close down existing ones then we will fight to stop them closing these plants if such action would be at the expense of the workers in the industry or the mass of consumers. We are not blind and wilful optimists; we are revolutionary realists. We do not say that a safe industry is compatible with capitalism. Cheapening the technology of safety, bringing nearer the day of nuclear fusion, or closing down certain plants'all these are possible outcomes of struggle. But whatever the case, the fight for safety prepares the ground for the solution of the many-layered problems associated with the nuclear fission industry just as the struggle for workers' control in that industry helps prepare the ground for a workers' state itself.

The struggle for transitional politics, for workers' control, builds a bridge to the consciousness of workers in the industry. These workers are not bosses' agents. Great pressure is exerted on them, however, by the fear of unemployment and by the bureaucratic union leaders and reformist parties. These workers combine a respect for the fears of the class as a whole with a determination to hold onto their jobs in an age of mass unemployment (and an age of scepticism about the ability of trade union leaders to find them 'alternative employment?'). But this method also builds a bridge between the workers in the industry and the working class community at large. In short, it unites the working class against a common enemy.

Of course, our programme for the nuclear power industry is not guided by sectional interests. We cannot sacrifice the interests of the whole class to those of one section. Just as we will not tail the spontaneous opposition to nuclear power of many British miners or the demand for alternative production from the German KWU (power station union) and engineers' union IG Metall, and works' councils, because these express chauvinist sectional interests or concern for the profits of 'their' capitalists, so we cannot allow nuclear power workers' complacency about safety prevent a vigorous campaign for workers' control over safety.

The 'left critics' are imbued with a two-fold pessimism. On the one hand they reject that there are remaining reserves within this mode of production for technological advance; on the other hand, they have not fully broken with the

pessimism of the petit bourgeois opponents of nuclear power who have long spurned the revolutionary capacity of the working class.

Apart from this the whole history of the anti-nuclear movement and of the Greens has negatively confirmed the correctness of our approach?that we must proceed from the powerful role of the working class in the sphere of production, rather than from the sphere of reproduction, because the workers in the nuclear power stations are doubly affected by the dangers, as producers and as inhabitants. By contrast the potential of the petit bourgeois opponents of nuclear power remains limited to more or less powerless protests (demos, sporadic occupations) and inner- and extra-parliamentary details (referendums, petitions, resolutions, negotiations over parliamentary support, coalitions). But despite our criticisms of the political and organizational weaknesses of this movement we call on the workers to defend it against the bourgeois repressive apparatus. In certain circumstances it is possible to have a united front with the petit bourgeois movements in pursuit of limited objectives (for example the demand for a workers inquiry, the fight to introduce safety measures, the abolition of certain reactionary laws or the immediate closure of an installation where a major accident has occurred) to be fought for by direct action including demonstrations and strikes. Even during joint actions with such movements communists never cease to criticise their basic positions and methods of action, seeking to orientate them to a working class position.

Whilst we support the democratic right for popular initiatives and a referendum against the bourgeois state we do not agitate for one on the question of closure of the nuclear industry as a whole.

Should either the anti-nuclear movement or the bourgeois state call one, we should campaign for a working class abstention since we can neither support closure in principle nor give confidence to bourgeois ownership and management which either a 'yes' or a 'no' vote would imply. Of course we would use the campaign to agitate for workers control, a workers' enquiry etc.

7. Our action programme for nuclear power must start from a recognition that the issues involved and the struggles that occur are international in character. We reject the national-centred and myopic view of certain centrists whose propaganda and programme starts and finishes with a concern for their national situations.

The struggle in the semi-colonial world has a contradictory aspect all of its own. On the one side there is the need and the urgent necessity to satisfy their energy requirements. On the other hand, an element of the anti-imperialist struggles in Pakistan, India, South East Asia or Latin America involves a fight against reactionary governments conspiring with multinationals who find no market in the imperialist countries (e.g. the USA) for their (often unsafe and out of date) technology. The fight for stringent safety measures and workers' control in the construction of the plant is doubly important in these countries.

8. The transitional programme for the nuclear power industry begins with the fight to change the defensive, economic struggle of the nuclear power workers into the struggle for workers' control, not just of 'health and safety' but of production in the plant. This assumes immediate relevance where accidents occur inside the plants. In this context we fight for:

'Workers' control over safety, radiation levels, manning levels etc. The right to determine partial or full shut downs and closures where workers conclude that a plant or element of it is unsafe. Both in the struggle to win workers' control and the struggle to implement it day to day, the weapons of strike action, occupation, emergency cover only under workers' control, leading to temporary 'shut downs' until demands are met, will be crucial. This does not coincide however with the shut down strategy of the anti-nuclear movement.

'Workers' control over the construction of proposed plants. An end to the system of contract and temporary work (cleaning squads) and their transformation into permanent employees. For power and building workers to fight for the implementation of acceptable levels of safety provision, building specification at all stages of planning and in the supervision of construction.

? Representation of all sections of the workforce in a factory committee as a plant based organ of struggle.

? Structural improvements in the housing of reactors.

? Lowering of safe radiation contact levels, and of emission levels. For health and safety inspectors to be accountable to the workers.

? An end to business/state secrecy in and outside the plant. Bosses? secrecy and workers? safety are incompatible!

? Workers involved in the specifically military aspects of the process to struggle for workers? control over the process.

? Full lay-off pay when temporary closures occur, for alternative jobs with no loss of pay if the workers decide on closure of a plant.

The central element of our programme however is the demand for a workers? inquiry. The demand is applicable both generally in the nuclear power industry of a state or region, and specifically when new reactors, dumping sites, reprocessing plants etc, are proposed, or when an accident occurs. The main purpose of the workers? inquiry is to unite the nuclear power workers, the communities affected, the organised workers? movements, youth and progressive sections of the middle class around the struggle for safety in the disposal of waste, to impose workers? control and a veto in the proposed plants, on the process of construction. Should the workers inquiry find types of reactor or dumping inherently unsafe, or unsafe as planned by the capitalists then the struggle becomes one to shut down or prevent the building of them. In this struggle the battle needs to be generalised to the class as a whole. We fight for mass strike action as the key to this. Whilst we will take part in mass physical confrontations and occupations of sites we fight to win the best elements in this to working class strike action.

The demand for a workers? inquiry, whilst placed on the capitalists and the state in the first instance, may also take the form of first winning the workers? movement to the inquiry, then fighting to implement the demands of the inquiry. In either case it should not be allowed to be an enquiry of pro-nuclear trade union bureaucrats or petit bourgeois environmentalists but centrally of the rank and file representatives of plant workers, building workers, working class women?s groups and representatives of the working class communities affected by local plants. The process of inquiry should mobilise proven pro-working class scientists and technicians as advisers.

9. The reformist parties try to look both ways on the question of nuclear power. They are forced to give expression to the genuine fears of their supporters and yet are intent on reassuring the nuclear power chiefs that a future government of theirs will not impose harsh conditions on it or impede its plans. We must fight for the following:

? Full compliance with the demands of a workers? inquiry. Recognition of the right of workers? committees to veto management decisions in the industry.

? An end to state secrecy in the industry. Open up the records of the Department of Energy to union inspection.

? Repeal the Official Secrets Act. Disband the Atomic Energy Constabulary.

? Full trade union rights for nuclear power workers. Tear up all no-strike agreements.

? No permission for new plants until a labour movement inquiry, including representatives of local working class communities, is satisfied that their demands for safety will be met.

? Full and immediate compensation for the victims of accidents whether in the plants or in the community, whatever the source of contamination.

? Nationalisation without compensation and under workers? control of all private sector contractors in the industry (e.g. Babcocks, Taylor Woodrow, GEC).

? A massive programme of research in medicine, nuclear fusion, alternative energy sources and safety.

10. Relations in the degenerate(d) workers' states are characterised by imperialist encirclement and the domination of a counter-revolutionary bureaucratic caste. The effective expulsion of the working class from actual exercise of power constantly threatens the preconditions for the building of socialism. This leads to the desperate attempts of the bureaucrats to catch up, economically, with the developed imperialist countries and to adopt their technologies unseen and at the cost of the highest security.

In the USSR the nuclear power industry, while not subject to the laws of profitability, has been expanded in the 1960s and 1970s under the direction of a bureaucracy that has cut back on safety standards. As the bureaucracy diverted its oil and gas resources into a means of earning hard foreign currency it built plant at break-neck speed, on the cheap. The consequences are to be seen in Chernobyl. Bureaucratic mismanagement has been aided and abetted by cracking down on dissent and even blocks the means of communication within the bureaucracy itself, making it particularly inept at taking effective preventative action. Chernobyl shows that the Stalinist usurpers must be overthrown by a political revolution if nuclear power is to be harnessed in the transition to socialism. As a consequence we fight in the USSR for:

? An end to bureaucratic secrecy. For workers' inspection and management in the entire nuclear industry. Legitimate defence requirements to be decided by workers' committees.

? For new towns, amenities and compensation for all present and future victims of accidents such as Chernobyl.

? For a full discussion of the plan for energy provision at all levels of the trade unions and a fight for workers' control of the plan.

? Given the anti-Soviet Union propaganda of Thatcher and Reagan, who deflect thereby from the dangers of their own nuclear power industries we must fight to expose their hypocrisy.

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