

Finding Common Ground

Analysts & activists must work together

BY FRANK VON HIPPEL

Activists and analysts tend to be skeptical of each other. Actually, they need each other. Change can't happen without activists sensitizing society to the need for altering priorities. Nor can it happen without analysts understanding the status quo well enough to explain how changes can be implemented.

Unfortunately, most efforts to change the status quo, such as the nuclear weapons freeze proposal, have failed in part because activists and analysts have not succeeded in working together. On those few occasions, however, when they have cooperated, as in the movement that resulted in the 1972 ABM Treaty, the combination has proven powerful.

COLLECTING INTEREST

Activists help analysts by asking the basic questions, getting foundations interested in research on policy alternatives, and creating an audience for the results of this research. The freeze movement, for example, has done all of these things.

When a popular movement draws society's attention to a particular issue, it also attracts the interest of independent analysts. This has certainly been true for me. The anti-Vietnam protests of my students at Stanford "turned me on" to public policy research, and I chose my first policy problem, nuclear reactor safety, in part because of the questions raised by the antinuclear movement. More recently, I explored the problem of verifying a bilateral cutoff of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons because such a cutoff could be a key part of a nuclear freeze agreement.

In addition, activists help to generate funding to support research on policy alternatives. It is not accidental that the recent upsurge of public concern about the arms race has been followed by a great increase in foundation support for policy-related research on the subject.

This is important, since traditionally few researchers work on issues of fundamental

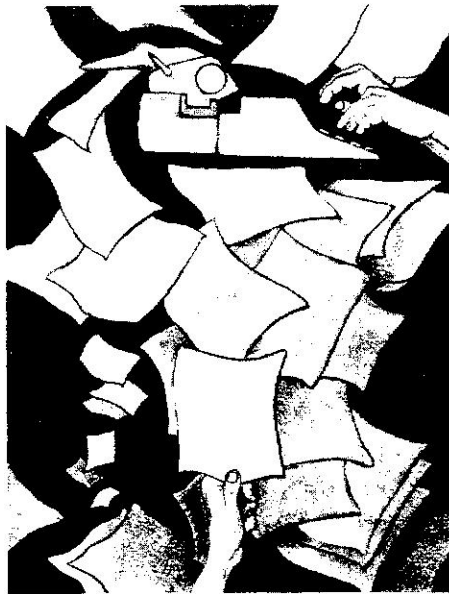
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concern to activists; they're rewarded instead for focusing on the narrower problems defined by their disciplines. And both government and industry often show a lack of interest, verging on antipathy, when it comes to research that might increase the credibility of alternatives to present policy.

Finally, when analysts do arrive at policy recommendations as a result of their research, they depend on the activists to maintain the receptivity in the political environment that generated the interest in such findings in the first place.

CORRECTING PRIORITIES

Activists need analysts, too. Activists depend on analysts to help set priorities, to develop alternative policy recommendations and to respond to the criticisms that



their proposals inevitably evoke.

Incorrect priorities may lead to counterproductive results. Antinuclear power activists in Japan and several European countries fell into that trap when, by emphasizing the problem of radioactive waste disposal, they exacerbated the more serious threat of nuclear proliferation. Partly in response to the movement's concern over the radioactive waste problem, the Japanese and West German governments are financing the building of large-scale reprocessing plants in France and Britain and are currently building repro-

cessing plants in their own countries. Chemical reprocessing, which separates plutonium and uranium from highly-radioactive spent fuel produced in nuclear reactors, does not make the disposal of radioactive waste easier. But it does ease access to plutonium, which can then be quickly converted into nuclear weapons by military or terrorist groups.

While the antinuclear movement in the United States also put the spotlight on the nuclear waste issue, some segments of the movement publicized the research of concerned analysts which showed that the recycling of plutonium is not only dangerous, but unnecessary and uneconomic as well. This made possible the creation of a congressional coalition with enough clout to stop the Clinch River plutonium breeder reactor.

It is well worth remembering that it was also a combination of activists and concerned scientists that 14 years ago halted a strategic defense initiative: the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) system. Presidential science advisors had long opposed the deployment of ABM systems, an enormously expensive undertaking which they believed would increase the risk of nuclear war without making its consequences less catastrophic. It was only after citizens in urban areas such as Seattle, Chicago, and Boston rose up against proposals to base nuclear-tipped antimissile missiles in their backyards that the political environment became receptive to the arguments of the anti-ABM scientists. As a result, President Nixon signed the ABM Treaty in 1972.

CONNECTING SUPPORT

Since the defeat of the ABM system, however, only one nuclear weapons policy issue has attracted sufficient "backyard" visibility to create a successful coalition of local activists and analysts. This was President Carter's proposal to build 4600 concrete shelters and connecting highways for 200 MX missiles in Utah and Nevada.

The most glaring recent failure to obtain the cooperation of activists and independent analysts lies in the proposal mounted by the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. While the Campaign has managed to unite a broad spectrum of activists, it faces credibility problems when confronted with questions such as: How can we verify a freeze on production activities that can't be seen by satellites? How do we include systems such as cruise missiles and fighter-bombers that can be either nuclear or non-nuclear? The silence of most of the community of experts has been extremely damaging.

Why didn't these experts rally behind the freeze proposal, as they have actively opposed President Reagan's Strategic De-

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fense Initiative? In my view, the problem was that the task of providing the supporting analysis for the proposal—with all of its technical, economic and political ramifications—simply appeared overwhelming.

Perhaps activists could have made life easier for analysts by saying, "Although we are insisting on the end of the nuclear arms race as our overriding objective, we don't expect you to be able to explain right away exactly how to implement a comprehensive freeze."

Similarly, analysts could have been more forthcoming and said (as a few of us did): "We already know how to verify a limited freeze that would cover warhead testing and the testing and deployment of ballistic missiles, and we'll continue to work on the problem of verifying a freeze on production." Princeton's Program on Nuclear Policy Alternatives is working on a related proposal that would start with a very broad—but not necessarily comprehensive—freeze, which would lead to the elimination of nuclear war fighting systems and eventually to a tenfold reduction of the superpowers' nuclear arsenals.

While freeze legislation is now stalled, most of its activist supporters would gladly work again for the same objective—if they felt that there was a chance of success. And

large numbers of independent scientists and analysts, frightened by the Reagan Administration's primitive thinking about nuclear weapons, would also welcome a revival of the proposal.

A nuclear weapons freeze proposal is therefore well worth trying again—expanded this time to include a freeze on the militarization of space. The next time around, however, the formulation must be one that will attract both activists and analysts. □