Reflection and Commitment on Being a Better Ally

Editorial

In our winter fund appeal, we highlighted Nukewatch's engagement with the struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) led by Indigenous Water Protectors at the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. Since then, we have reflected on our position—as a mostly white organization—in relation to a Native-led struggle, and we realize we made some mistakes that perpetuated, rather than resisted, the forces of colonialism that continue to oppress and work to erase the presence of Native people in our society.

The letter included a photo of one of our members at a Standing Rock camp holding our *Nuclear Heartland* banner, which shows the location of US nuclear missiles deployed throughout the Great Plains. We referenced the intersection of our anti-nuclear mission with the No DAPL movement in an appeal for funds, excerpted here:

"The combination in North Dakota of nuclear-armed missiles, dangerous oil pipelines, and 3,000 active hydraulic fracturing wells, has created a literally explosive conflation of the worst environmental threats faced by rural communities anywhere. Help us relieve the region of at least the military leg of this terrible triad by donating to Nukewatch today."

Simply put, we used the success of a Native-led struggle for justice to draw attention—and money—to our own issues and organization. This was wrong, and we deeply regret it. Because in doing so we failed to prioritize the concern of the Indigenous people who are leading this difficult battle: the fact that they have a fundamental right to exist on the land that white colonizers have been trying to take from them for generations. Native rights are the main issue here and should not be obscured by the concerns of more racially privileged activists.

We are grateful to writer and organizer Kelly Hayes for her piece, "How to Talk About #NoDAPL: A Native Perspective," published October 27 on her blog transformativespaces.org, which helped us realize our mistakes. Here is an excerpt:

"In discussing #NoDAPL, too few people have started from a place of naming that we have a right to defend our water and our lives, simply because we have a natural right to defend ourselves and our communities. When 'climate justice,' in a very broad sense, becomes the center of conversation, our fronts of struggle are often reduced to a staging ground for the messaging of NGOs.

"This is happening far too frequently in public discussion of #NoDAPL.

"Yes, everyone should be talking about climate change, but you should also be talking about the fact that Native communities deserve to survive, because our lives are worth defending in their own right—not simply because 'this affects us all.'

"So when you talk about Standing Rock, please begin by acknowledging that this pipeline was redirected from an area where it was most likely to impact white people. And please remind people that our people are struggling to survive the violence of colonization on many fronts, and that people shouldn't simply engage with or retweet such stories when they see a concrete connection to their own issues—or a jumping off point to discuss their own issues. Our friends, allies and accomplices should be fighting alongside us because they value our humanity and right to live, in addition to whatever else they believe in."

Water Protectors stand together in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline in October 2016. Photo: Rob Wilson.

Rather than referencing Standing Rock's relationship to our anti-nuclear work in our fundraising letter, we should have amplified the voices of Native Water Protectors and called for our fellow white activists to support their efforts. We acknowledge these mistakes here as part of an effort to improve the way we work in solidarity with those fighting for racial justice. We hope our white readers in particular might be reminded by our reflections to avoid similar pitfalls through truly listening to the voices of people of color and more critically analyzing our ally roles, as we intend to do.

Nukewatch is committed to amplifying and supporting calls for justice from marginalized groups not just because they are related to our anti-nuclear work, but because they need to be heard. We will continue to take action in ways that reflect the priorities of disenfranchised activists, such as answering calls from Standing Rock to organize local protests that target banks funding the DAPL. We will also send a portion of the donations received as a result of our fund appeal to the legal defense collective at Standing Rock. If you are not already involved, please join us in defending Native rights at Standing Rock and beyond.

For more about the continuing struggle at Standing Rock go to LastRealIndians.com.

To learn more about being an ally, see the Standing Rock Solidarity Toolkit from Showing Up for Racial Justice at http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/standing_rock_solidarity.

—Arianne Peterson wrote this piece, representing the views of the Nukewatch staff.

First Nations Condemn High-Level Liquid Waste Shipments

By Arianne Peterson and John LaForge

On February 22, both the Iroquois Caucus and Anishinabek Nation in Canada declared their opposition to plans to transport more than 5,812 gallons of extaordinarily radioactive waste in liquid form through their territories. The US Department of Energy (DOE) plan, backed by Atomic Energy Canada Limited and Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, intend to send 100 to 150 truckloads of waste, over the course of four years, roughly 1,300 miles from Chalk River, Ontario to the Savannah River Site in South Carolina using public roads and bridges.

The never-before-attempted long range transports of high-level liquid waste are set to start this spring, following US District Judge Tanya Chutkan's Feb. 2 ruling in favor of the DOE and against a challenge brought by a coalition of environmental groups led by Beyond Nuclear. The exact shipment routes for the waste are being kept secret due to terrorism concerns, but the convoys must pass over at least one waterway directly tied to the Great Lakes—the drinking supply for 40 million people. The waste liquid is so extremely toxic that just one quart of it, evenly dispersed, is enough to contaminate the entire drinking water supply of Washington, DC (a reservoir of just over 140 million gallons) above the safe drinking water standards of the Environmental Protection Agency.

"We assert inherent ownership of the water and jurisdiction within our regions and traditional territories," said Patrick Madahbee, the Grand Council Chief of 40 Anishinabek First Nations. "We will stand with our Iroquois allies to protect the drinking water. Water is the lifeblood of Mother Earth. Why would we put our precious resource in jeopardy? A spill into any of the waterways would have a tremendous impact on the Great Lakes. Millions of people would be affected—on both sides of the border."

The weapons-grade waste material, which originated in the US and has been made almost 17,000 times more toxic and more radioactive through processing in Canada, will be "down-blended" at the Savannah River Site into a form that cannot be used for weapons. But critics point out that the process can be done onsite in Canada without putting dozens of communities and the Great Lakes environment at unnecessary and repeated risk of contamination.

The 6,000 gallons are so radioactively volatile that they cannot be shipped all at once, but sent in small, radioactive containers. The total has so much uranium-235 that combing it in a large shipment would risk a "criticality" accident—the uncontrolled chain reaction of nuclear fission—that would look like a bomb blast.

So much gamma radiation is expected to be emminating from the casks that extra long tractor-trailers are intended to separate drivers from the deadly hazard.

"The Iroquois Caucus is well aware that liquid of a very similar nature has been routinely solidified and stored at Chalk River since 2003," Kahnawà:ke Grand Chief Joseph Tokwiro Norton explained.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples mandates that states ensure no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent. The Anishinabek Chiefs in Assembly in 2010 passed resolutions opposing the exporting and storage of nuclear waste by either land or water across the Anishinabek Nation, and Canada is a signatory to the UN Declaration.

The indigenous governments are joined by more than 22 municipal councils in the Niagara Peninsula that have passed resolutions opposing the transports.

Seven plaintiffs had urged the court to either suspend the shipments or require a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) in compliance with US environmental law, because such highly radioactive material has never before been transported over public roads in liquid form. But the February ruling deferred to the DOE's earlier claims that transport of this deadly waste in liquid form poses no more dangers than hauling it in solid form—even without an EIS.

Mary Olson, Director of Nuclear Information and Resource Service's Southeast Office, one of the plaintiffs, said,"Even without any leakage of the contents, people will be exposed to penetrating gamma radiation and damaging neutron radiation just by sitting in traffic beside one of the transport trucks."

—Dr. Gordon Edwards, "Radioactive Roads: Transportation of Highly Radioactive Liquid Waste," Feb. 21; *Anishinabek News*, Feb. 22; Iroquois Caucus, Feb. 22; WBFO News (Toronto) Feb. 21; and *Aiken Standard*, and BeyondNuclear.org, Feb. 3, 2017

NUKEWATCH QUARTERLY

Nukewatch is a project of The Progressive Foundation
a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization
founded in 1979 by Samuel H. Day, Jr.

Progressive Foundation Board of Directors
John LaForge, Molly Mechtenberg-Berrigan, Michele Naar-Obed, Jeff Peterson, Bonnie Urfer, Gail Vaughn

Nukewatch Staff
John LaForge, *Quarterly* Editor,
Arianne Peterson, Kelly Lundeen

Volunteers
Sharon Cody, John Bachman, Bonnie Urfer, Kevin Brown/SmartSet, and Jay Coghlan

Nukewatch Quarterly
submission deadlines: Nov. 1, Feb. 1, May 1 & Aug. 1
Please subscribe. $25/yr.
~ Printed on 100% recycled paper ~
The Progressive Foundation *&* Nukewatch
740A Round Lake Rd., Luck, WI 54853
Phone: (715) 472-4185
nukewatch1@lakeland.ws / www.nukewatchinfo.org
ISSN: 1942-6305

In accordance with Title 17 USC, Sec. 107, this material is distributed without profit or payment to those who have expressed a prior interest in it for non-profit research and educational purposes only.