Nuclear Shorts

But one can rebel equally well against lies as against oppression. — Albert Camus

U.S. H-bombs May Return to Britain

The U.S. Air Force has secured $50 million for a project that could pave the way for U.S. nuclear weapons to return to British soil at the UK airbase RAF Lakenheath for the first time in more than 16 years. The Federation of American Scientists previously reported that in the 2023 U.S. military budget, Britain was added to the list of countries where construction is under way on "special weapons" sites. The FAS estimates there are about 100 B61 gravity bombs stationed in those five countries. They were withdrawn from the UK in 2007 after 53 years. The B61s were once declared obsolete by the U.S. military, but instead of being retired, they have been remodeled to improve their "accuracy." The new B61-model-12s could arrive in Europe this year. New Lockheed-Martin F-35 jet fighters have been given certification to carry the new U.S. hydrogen bombs, and the U.S. 495th Fighter Squadron, stationed at Lakenheath, became the first unit in Europe to receive the nuclear weapons-capable jets, according to *The Guardian*. — *The Guardian*, Aug 29, 2023; Dutch Aviation Society online, Dec. 16, 2021

Nuclear Subs to Each Cost Over $15 Billion

The Congressional Research Service published a Report to Congress August 16 on the new nuclear submarine program whose mind-boggling costs continue to skyrocket. The estimated price for *USS Columbia* — the lead ship — is now $15.03 billion, compared to a $14.39 billion estimate made in 2021. The report, "Navy *Columbia* Class Ballistic Missile Submarine Program: Background and Issues," concerns the plan to build 12 new subs (for threatening long-range nuclear missile attacks) to replace today's 14 giant *Trident* submarines. Unlike tax money for education, health care, and pollution control, hardly anyone in Congress asks, "Can we afford it?" The Navy started the first replacement "platform" in 2021, and requests procurement of a second starting next year. The U.S. Navy Institute reports that the "cost estimate for the lead ship grew by $637 million over the last year." The astronomical amount of money for new nuclear weapons systems represents a public dismissal, aggravation, and exacerbation of global crises in climate chaos, pollution, famine, disease, disaster relief, and mass migration.
— U.S. Navy Institute, June 7, 2023

Supreme Court Decision Forces Roll-Back of Wetlands Protections

The Environmental Protection Agency has rolled back parts of the Clean Water Act which protect millions of acres of wetlands, in order to comply with a Supreme Court ruling. The right-wing-dominated court ruled last May that wetlands must have a "continuous surface connection" to streams, oceans, rivers, and lakes to be subject to federal regulations on pollution. Up to 63% of U.S. wetlands will be affected. The White House said the Supreme Court ruling "jeopardize[s] the sources of clean drinking water for farmers, businesses and millions of Americans." — Democracy Now!, Aug. 30, 2023

Florida Gov. Approves Radioactive Mining Waste in Road Building

In June, Florida governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill allowing road construction using radioactive phosphogypsum, which the EPA says contains appreciable quantities of uranium and radium-226. The production of one ton of phosphoric acid for fertilizer generates over five tons of radioactive phosphogypsum waste, which is stored in 25 large, open air "gypstacks," that cause hazardous runoff and water pollution. As the radioactivity decays it releases radon gas, the second-leading cause of lung cancer, responsible for 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year in the U.S., according to the EPA. In 2021, a breach at the Piney Point phosphate mine spilled 215 million gallons of toxic water into Tampa Bay, leading to a red tide event and giant fish kill, and a $3 million cleanup. The EPA banned use of phosphogypsum for decades, though DeSantis wants to exploit an exemption for "research." Attorney Elise Bennett of the Center for Biological Diversity, said the Florida law is a "reckless handout to the fertilizer industry" that "opens the door for dangerous radioactive waste to be dumped in roadways ... under the [cover] of a so-called feasibility study that won't address serious health and safety concerns." — CBS News and NPR, June 30, 2023

Atomic Veterans Dying, as VA and Supreme Court Deny Benefits

In August 2022, the new PACT Act (Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics) expanded eligibility for compensation to 8,000 U.S. military veterans, many suffering from cancers, who were tasked with observing nuclear weapons tests or cleaning up radioactive disaster sites. However, the VA rejected 86% of radiation-related claims filed over the last year. "They're waiting for us to die," said Kenneth Browneil, who was sent to Enewetak Atoll in the Pacific following 43 U.S. bomb tests conducted there between 1948 and 1958. In June, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal by Victor Skaar, a veteran of the 1966 disaster cleanup of Palomares, Spain, where a B-52 bomber collided with a refueling plane and dropped three H-bombs, one of which blew apart scattering seven pounds of plutonium-239 across the village. The court claimed the PACT Act is sufficient, although it recognized it does not cover Skaar.

Florida has 25 giant stacks of waste, like this one near Ft. Meade, left by the phosphate fertilizer industry and contaminated with uranium and radon. The mounds can cover 800 acres and be 200 feet high.

To win compensation, veterans with cancers or tumors "have to provide expert medical reviews and organ-specific radiation dose assessments" through the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, according to NBC News. But it's "virtually impossible" to prove said U.S. Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., an atomic historian, who last month introduced a bill that would lift that burden of proof. The Pentagon recently handed out medals to atomic veterans, making clear the recognition would not accompany any federal benefits. Leo Feurt, a veteran who witnessed 28 of the 36 atomic bomb detonations in 1958 and now faces a dozen radiation-related illnesses, says "Every dang bit of it has been denied."
— NBC News, Aug. 23; AP, June 20, 2023

U.S. Disregards Marshall Islands, Senate Approves RECA Expansion

The U.S. senate approved legislation on July 27 expanding the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act to provide benefits to more nuclear-affected Americans, the New Mexico Downwinders, uranium miners and workers since 1971, and residents of Montana, Idaho, Colorado, Guam, and previously excluded areas in Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. This legislation still awaits a decision in the House. In contrast, the U.S. government claims the pool of funding for nuclear compensation has run dry for the Marshallese people, displaced and poisoned by nuclear weapons the U.S. detonated over their homelands. Marshallese parliament speaker Kenneth Kedi told the *Marshall Islands Journal*, "the fact that U.S. authorities can tell the Marshall Islands there is 'no more money' for nuclear test exposure for people who lived through 67 of the largest U.S. nuclear weapons tests ever conducted while at the same time preparing to expand compensation coverage for Americans is astounding." The U.S. and the Marshall Islands are renegotiating the Compact of Free Association to address the egregious crimes against the Marshallese people by providing compensation, benefits, and access to immigration, though in amounts far below what was requested by the Marshall Islands. Still, Kedi says, "As nuclear test victims ourselves we support compensation for American victims of nuclear tests, whether they are Downwinders or worked at nuclear test sites or worked in uranium mines." —AP and KRWG July 27; *Marianas Variety*, Aug. 21, 2023; trinitydownwinders.com

Navy Contamination "Lower than Zero"

The U.S. Navy has been accused of covering up dangerous radioactivity, including high levels of strontium-90, which displaces calcium in bones and causes cancer, on a 40-acre parcel of its Hunter's Point Shipyard in San Francisco. When the EPA balked at the 23 tests from 2021 showing elevated strontium levels, the Navy simply responded with a new set of data, showing levels "lower than zero." The EPA said "the new testing reads as if the Navy is suppressing data results it doesn't like." Declared a Superfund site in 1989 and closed in 1994, the shipyard was home to the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory, the military's biggest applied nuclear research facility, and later became a site for decontaminating ships from 1946 nuclear weapons detonations at Bikini Atoll. In 2016, the EPA stopped transfer of the land to real estate developers because the Navy was discarding "anomalous" soil samples and obscuring the true level of toxicity. Though the Navy agreed to remediate the area to a level acceptable for residential property, they repeatedly shirked this agreement — downgrading several parcels to "industrial use" with lower standards for toxicity, and installing covers in the soil to suppress contamination rather than removing the soil. On one already developed parcel, residents report cancers and health problems linked to radioactivity. There are currently 12 lawsuits related to the site.
— *The Guardian* June 25, 2023; NBC Dec 2, 2022

Nuclear Fairytales

The industry yarn that solar and wind power are intermittent and unreliable while "nuclear produces base-load electricity 24/7" is disproved with every refueling outage or unplanned shutdown. During the late summer heat wave Sept. 2, New York state's largest reactor, Nine Mile Point on Lake Ontario, went into emergency shutdown — right when customers ordinarily need the electricity most. Surface water too hot to cool reactors have forced temporary shutdowns the world over. Still, the 18-year-old climate activist Ia Aanstoot, from Sweden, told Greenpeace in an open letter to "drop your old-fashioned and unscientific opposition to nuclear power, and join us in the fight against fossil fuels instead." A Greenpeace spokesperson replied "building new nuclear plants just isn't a viable solution. The top priority is to cut carbon emissions as fast and, ideally, as cheaply as possible, and nuclear fails on both scores. ... Solar and wind technologies are a much cheaper and quicker way to cut emissions. We don't have the luxury of endless time and resources so we should focus on solutions with the best chance of delivering." — Nuclear Regulatory Commission Event Report 56710, Nine Mile Point, Sept. 2, 2023; *The Guardian*, Aug. 29, 2023.