



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Oklahomans prevent completion of Black Fox Nuclear Plant, 1973-1982

- Anti-Nuclear Power Movement (1960s-1980s)

May
1973
to: February
1982

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Inola, Oklahoma

Goals:

To prevent the building of Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 011. Records, radio, and television

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 177. Speak-in

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 016. Picketing
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches

- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Notes on Methods:

Many peripheral groups entered the anti-nuclear cause and used small-scale protests or other methods that have not been documented

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Environmentalists
- civilians
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Carrie Barefoot Dickerson and Ilene Younhein of Oklahoma City, co-chairs of Citizens' Action for Safe Energy (CASE)

Partners:

Citizens' Action for Safe Energy

External allies:

Sunbelt Alliance (composed of a collection of "affinity groups")

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Carrie Anderson Dickerson

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- CASE

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Sunbelt Alliance

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 1 year 6 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO), The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Arrests of about 500 people protesting Black Fox in 1979

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

In May of 1973, the Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO) announced plans to install Oklahoma's first nuclear power plant in Inola, just east from Tulsa. It was to use two General Electric boiling-water reactors and the project was to cost \$450 million. With the support of U.S. Senator Henry Bellmon, PSO advertised that the nuclear power plant could provide unlimited power and help economic growth in the area. The power plant promised the opportunity of thousands of construction jobs and new tax money of \$5 million a year that could make the Inola school district the richest in the state. Many people in Inola welcomed the new construction plans.

However, when Carrie Barefoot Dickerson, a Claremore teacher and nurse, read about the new nuclear plant, she educated herself about the risks of nuclear power and decided that the Black Fox Power Plant needed to be stopped. The proposed power plant would draw in 44 million gallons of the Verdigris River water each day to cool the reactors, only to dump the heated waste water back into the river three miles upstream of the intake pipe of Broken Arrow's water supply. A 1965 study predicted a nuclear plant meltdown would cause radiation to be released and would make the entire state uninhabitable for centuries and cause acute radiation poisoning. Radioactive effluents could cause cancer, leukemia, and severe birth defects in infants. Furthermore, the nuclear power plant would produce long-lived, high-level radioactive waste that would not decay for thousands of years.

Dickerson decided to get involved and prevent the building of the Black Fox Power Plant. Her first public appearance was at the Claremore city council, where she warned officials of the dangers of nuclear power and delayed the council's approval of the plant. She started to become a public figure, and in a radio interview with Hugh Garnett on KWHW in Altus, she announced the formation of a Citizens' Action Group inspired by Ralph Nader's campaign against nuclear power. She would later rename her group Citizens' Action for Safe Energy (CASE), an organization dedicated to fighting nuclear power and promoting clean, safe energy. She worked with Ilene Younhein of Oklahoma City and co-chair of CASE.

CASE opposed Black Fox, based not only on the risks of accidents and radiation, but also on the fact that nuclear power would not be affordable or necessary for the community. Therefore consumers were only to be underwriting large profits for PSO and water resources would be at risk with the power plant. They also claimed that disposal issues hadn't been solved and the company had not explored passive alternative energy sources like wind and solar.

CASE's strategy was to stall the progress of the hearings and licensing process, as well as to postpone the issuance of a construction permit. Eventually, the PSO would have to ask for a rate increase Construction-Work-In-Progress (CWIP). When a nuclear power plant was planned, the company would ask the state utility commission to grant a rate increase so that ratepayers would have to start paying for the building of the plant. At that point the protesters would be able to go to the Oklahoma Corporation Commission hearing and prove that electricity from Black Fox would be too expensive for people to pay.

1976 was the year of the first public hearings. The hearings usually lasted about two days and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) warned CASE that the law didn't allow interveners to stop a nuclear power plant. Despite this, Dickerson and CASE paid for attorneys and expert witnesses so that they were able to extend the hearing from being less than a week to eighteen months. Attorneys Tom Dalton, Joe Farris, and Louis Bulloc worked with CASE in many of their legal battles. The Dickerson family supported many of the legal expenses and Carrie Barefoot Dickerson began to make quilts to sell in support of the cause. Eventually Dickerson and a group of women were able to make \$60,000 from the sale of quilts in support of the cause.

Dickerson also began to travel around Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri to educate people about Black Fox by organizing conferences, seminars, and rallies, as well as hosting screenings of "What's Wrong with America's Reactors?" To continue to finance her campaign, she sold her family farm as well as the nursing home she ran.

When the first hearing on environmental and site suitability ended, the government granted a Limited Work Authorization (LWA) in the summer of 1978, which allowed for the clearing of trees and building road on the site. The next hearing on health and safety was a success for CASE because the group was able to demand an additional hearing on the G.E. Reed Report, an in-house study done by G.E. that had been kept secret and found numerous problems with the reactors.

By 1979, Dickerson's funds were depleted and she mortgaged her land to continue the campaign. The anti-nuclear movement was now a national issue that gained widespread attention, especially when on March 28, 1979, a partial meltdown occurred at the Three Mile Island Power Plant in Pennsylvania and a temporary moratorium was placed on nuclear power plant licensing.

The Sunbelt Alliance, a group involved in other anti-nuclear campaigns, became involved in the fall of 1978 when it decided to plan a large-scale protest at the site of the Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant. The group was composed of a loosely knit collection of smaller affinity groups supporting the Alliance. These groups were diverse and included students from the University of Tulsa as well as professors, musicians, artists, Native American groups, and professionals. The Alliance was based on theories of nonviolent civil disobedience and the members all had to participate in a seven-hour training session before becoming involved with the direct action. All members of the affinity groups had to pledge to cause no damage or destruction to PSO property, not run, not bring dogs, not use drugs or alcohol, not use weapons, not break police lines, and not engage in verbal abuse.

Bolstered by the outrage generated by the accident at Three Mile Island, the Sunbelt Alliance and other groups engaged in a nonviolent occupation of Black Fox on June 2, 1979, to coincide with the International Days of Protest. The protest was planned by Kyle Cline, Kathryn Greene, and Elizabeth Barlow and involved about 500 people camping out in the nearby State Park to prevent further construction of the nuclear reactor. The protesters were quickly arrested, including many reporters attempting to

document the protest.

This nonviolent action was set up primarily to draw attention to the cause and pique public interest while Dickerson and her group CASE continued to work through legal channels to stall any building. In 1980 Dickerson received the Community of John the 23rd award for her peaceful campaign against the power plant.

By late 1980, PSO was forced to ask the Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC) for a rate increase. In 1981, the OCC held hearings on the high electric rates that consumers would have to pay if Black Fox was built. After listening to testimonies from Dickerson and others, the OCC found that Black Fox was no longer economically viable and consumers should not have to pay for the huge construction costs. On February 16, 1982, PSO officially canceled the Black Fox project due to the opposition from the community, cost overruns, and the huge rate increase that would hurt customers.

The Sunbelt Alliance dissolved after the success at Black Fox in 1982, citing that the closing of Black Fox was the group's major goal and purpose.

No reactor ordered since 1973, the beginning of this campaign, has been completed in the United States. It is estimated that about \$550,000 was spent in the campaign against Black Fox, with approximately \$200,000 coming from Dickerson. Carrie Barefoot Dickerson would go on to found the Carrie Dickerson Foundation to educate civilians about the dangers of nuclear energy. She also wrote a book about her experience called Aunt Carrie's War Against Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant.

Research Notes

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Additional Notes:

For more information on the anti-nuclear movement see Bill Moyer. Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001.

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