



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## U.S. Anti-nuclear activists partially block establishment of nuclear power plant in Limerick, PA, 1977-82

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

December

1977

to: May

1982

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** Limerick, PA

**Location Description:** 21 miles NW of Philadelphia

### Goals:

The goals of the group were to indefinitely suspend the construction of two nuclear power plants in Limerick, PA.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 015. Group lobbying › Protestors lobbied against the Stockholder's meeting in Philadelphia
- 016. Picketing › A mass picket was held at the Federal Building in Philadelphia
- 016. Picketing › On April 5, 1979, protestors handed out leaflets and lemons in front of the PECO stockholders' meeting in downtown Philadelphia, chanting "PECOs investments have turned sour."
- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 036. Performances of plays and music › a GRASP affiliated day of music was held in protest
- 038. Marches › A "no-nukes" march and rally was held in D.C.
- 038. Marches › Over three days, 40 people marched 35 miles from PECO offices in Philadelphia, PA, to the Limerick, PA building sites, distributing leaflets along the way.
- 170. Nonviolent invasion
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 016. Picketing › On April 21-22, 1979, after the Three Mile Island disaster, thousands of demonstrators showed up at the Limerick site to protest its construction.
- 050. Teach-ins › A teach-in and skills sharing day at Haverford College was held to educate people on nonviolent resistance.

### **Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches › March was held for a "non-nuclear future"
- 050. Teach-ins

### **Methods in 4th segment:**

- 015. Group lobbying

### **Methods in 5th segment:**

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › 700 people assembled at a hearing in Bucks County to protest and heckle the plans to divert water from the Delaware River to cool the power plant

### **Methods in 6th segment:**

- 004. Signed public statements › Thousands of people wrote letters to the PUC asking for the construction on the Limerick, PA sites to be halted.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Dozens of protestors attended a public hearing and began a rally against officials demanding they stop construction of the plant

### **Notes on Methods:**

A lawsuit was filed jointly from seven environmental organizations at the Delaware County River Basin to prevent the water diversion project to the nuclear plant from the Delaware River, which certainly hurt the DCRB economically.

## **Classifications**

### **Classification:**

Defense

### **Cluster:**

Economic Justice

Environment

### **Group characterization:**

- Environmentalists
- and even hunters
- anti-nuclear activists
- residents of Bucks and Philadelphia County
- who all have their reasons for opposing the power plant.

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

### **Leaders:**

Keystone Alliance

### **Partners:**

Hal Lockwood, attorney for the various conservation groups looking to block plans for the plant

### **External allies:**

Dela-WARE Unlimited, Camden County Environmental Agency, Delaware Water Emergency Group

Philadelphia City Councilman John C. Anderson, U.S. Representative Bob Edgar (D, Delaware County)

Stephen Hershey, a Community Legal Services attorney

**Involvement of social elites:**

Philadelphia City Councilman John C. Anderson, U.S. Representative Bob Edgar (D, Delaware County)

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Brandywine Peace Group
- Keystone Alliance
- Movement for a New Society
- state consumer's advocate office

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

The EPA withdrew its request for a new study to be done to test the affects the plant would have on the town and surrounding area in 1981.

**Segment Length:** 9 months

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Philadelphia Electric Company (PECO), Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC), Army Corps of Engineers

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not known

**Repressive Violence:**

Arrests on several occasions. (Covert surveillance by PECO was also uncovered during judicial proceedings.)

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

3 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

One of the two plants was voted down and construction was abandoned. The campaign was part of a larger movement that

cancelled the construction of nearly 2000 nuclear power plants across the country in the following decade.

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In the early 1970s, the state of Pennsylvania proposed a plan for building a nuclear power plant in Limerick, PA, to provide power to residents in Montgomery County, PA. Around that time, the Environmental Protection Agency declared that the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) must conduct a study to determine the impact a nuclear power plant would have in the town of Limerick, and the surrounding county. Tests were done and results suggested that it would benefit the area, so the PUC began to fund their project. The owner of the new plant would be the Philadelphia Electric Company.

Consumer advocacy groups and anti-nuclear groups like Keystone Alliance led the movement against the construction of the plants. They argued that the potential meltdown impact, as well as the effect of diverting water from the Delaware River to cool the plant could have disastrous effects. (See [Pennsylvanians campaign against nuclear-related Delaware River pump \(Dump the Pump\), USA, 1982-1988](#) [3]). Furthermore, many residents in the area argued they did not need to build a nuclear power plant to provide energy to the area because they were already well served. If they were to upgrade their energy, they would choose to invest in greener sources, like wind or solar energy.

A Philadelphia-based activist group called Movement for a New Society headed the campaign, organizing teach-ins, pickets, public protests, and more. Movement for a New Society created the group that would lead the campaign, called the Keystone Alliance, which was made up of people in Movement for a New Society and many who were not. They demanded the halting of construction of the Limerick plants I and II.

The Keystone Alliance began its campaign in 1977, and started off with pickets and protests held in front of the Philadelphia Electric Company (PECO) building in downtown Philadelphia. The Keystone Alliance conducted many creative actions to protest the construction. In one picketing event, lemons were handed out along with leaflets saying, "Nuclear Power is an investment turned sour."

An all-day teach-in was conducted at Haverford College to educate and train people about the issues and actions surrounding the Limerick plant sites. Activists organized a day-long festival of music and arts with the theme of educating people and recruiting activists to help participate in the campaign. Keystone persuaded thousands in Philadelphia and surrounding suburbs to hand-write letters of protest to PECO.

In June 1978, forty people marched 35 miles from the PECO office building to the Limerick site, handing out leaflets along the way. The demonstration the next day consisted of about 300 people, with 14 arrested for trespassing after stepping over a chain-link fence. "We are going to plant squash and tomatoes to return this land to the farmland that all of this area should be," announced Mary Lou Finley, one of the protestors, before attempting to enter the Limerick plant grounds. Activists acted out skits and sang songs with anti-nuclear power themes.

Broadened political and legal support was announced by Keystone Alliance spokeswoman Marsha Pripstein: Philadelphia City Councilman John C. Anderson, U.S. Representative Bob Edgar (D, Delaware County), and Stephen Hershey, a Community Legal Services attorney. This added pressure on the PUC and PECO, as well as the Army Corps of Engineers, which was involved in the construction.

The dangerous meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant near Harrisburg, PA on 1 April 1979 intensified the Limerick campaign. Keystone Alliance members blocked entrances to the headquarters of PECO in Philadelphia; 11 people were arrested. A week later 2,500 protesters marched through downtown Philadelphia to PECO. Two weeks after that 6,000 protestors gathered at the plant in Limerick.

On the national level the response to the Three Mile Island meltdown included a 6 May protest rally of 100,000 in Washington, D.C. President Jimmy Carter came to Cheyney State College on 20 May to deliver its commencement address. Cheyney, a historically black college, is located not far from Limerick. Keystone Alliance members went to Cheyney to protest the lack of action on the part of the President, who had a professional background as an engineer.

In 1981 (starting date unclear), the Alliance filed suit against the Philadelphia Electric Company with the state Public Utility Commission. Attorneys for the Alliance stated that Philadelphia Electric allegedly used customer revenues to spy on protestors at rallies as well as to fund pro-nuclear advertisements. The final briefings were filed in late September 1982. The next year, the Public Utility Commission ruled that the companies' massive public relations spending – around \$6 million – did not benefit customers and should solely be paid by shareholders of PECO. The ruling also outlawed other expenditures such as contributions to lobbyists and bonuses to executives.

Although one of the two nuclear plants was by that time nearly 3/4 of the way through construction, the construction of the second plant was up in the air. The opposition's pressure forced the Philadelphia Electric Company and PUC to put the decision to a vote.

Eventually, the PUC voted 4-1 in favor of discontinuing the construction of the second plant. Despite all of the antagonism towards the plants, workers did complete construction on the first Limerick plant, Limerick I.

The success of the Keystone Alliance (and the Dump the Pump campaign) in limiting the project to one rather than two plants was significant. It was part of a national movement that forced cancellation of several hundred more planned nuclear power plants in what was perhaps the greatest victory of U.S. environmentalists in a forty-year period.

The grassroots insurgency faced a powerful coalition: utility companies, banks, construction companies, nuclear plant manufacturers such as General Electric, state governments, and the federal government itself, all of whom shared a vision of vastly increased nuclear capability. That vision was prevented by the grassroots "alliances" that proliferated around the U.S., in turn part of an international movement that opposed nuclear power. (See, for example, South Korea, Australia, Bulgaria, Scotland, Germany, Spain, Philippines in this database.)

## Research Notes

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John Pontillo, 24/03/2013, drawing on additional research by Matthew Turner

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**Links:**

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/anti-nuclear-power-movement-1960s-1980s>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/included-participation-more-one-social-class>

[3] <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/pennsylvanians-campaign-against-nuclear-related-delaware-river-pump-dump-pump-usa-1982-1988>