

Trident II: a local nuisance

A neighborhood up in arms about the nuclear arms race

Phil McManus and Scott Kennedy

Like its counterparts in other communities, the county planning commission in Santa Cruz, a town of 40,000 people on the Pacific coast south of San Francisco, is not the kind of group that ordinarily plays to a packed house. Its meetings deal with the humdrum business of building permits, zoning variances, and street-widening projects.

And the Santa Cruz facility of Lockheed Missile & Aerospace Co., a nondescript factory and test site that employs about 300 workers in the redwood forested mountains to the north of town, is not the kind of place that ordinarily attracts much attention. For twenty-two years the plant has gone about its business of testing the engines that come from the big Lockheed factory across the mountains in Sunnyvale, little noticed except for the occasional roar of a rocket motor being tested on the ground.

So there was little reason to expect much excitement last year when Lockheed got ready to go to the planning commission. It wanted to put up some new buildings for which the county required a use permit.

The company eventually got its way — but not before the entire community had been turned on its ear and a determined band of citizens had shown that local land-use questions can be the appropriate forum for the most far-reaching global issues.

Phil McManus and Scott Kennedy are staff members at the Resource Center for Nonviolence and active in People for a Nuclear Free Future, Santa Cruz, California.

The Santa Cruz County Planning Commission came to be the scene of a local skirmish in the nuclear arms race — perhaps the harbinger of many in the United States. And the consequences of that were voiced by Commission Chairman Stanley Nielsen, for whom county planning may never be the same:

“If every little planning commission around the country stated what may or may not be done in the name of national defense, then we are in for serious problems.”

What set the stage for the Santa Cruz skirmish was the community’s emerging awareness — long after Lockheed came to the county — of its role in the nuclear arms race. It was an awareness kindled by the activities of the Pacific Life Community and of the Mid-Peninsula Conversion Project, both of which focused attention on the impact of the giant Lockheed plant on neighboring Santa Clara County; by the statewide campaign of the Abalone Alliance against nuclear power in California, and by growing national agitation among peace groups over development of the Navy’s submarine-launched Trident missile, for which Lockheed is the major contractor.

These stirrings had fallen on receptive ears among many in Santa Cruz County — the local religious Society of Friends, young people concerned about the threat to their futures, retired people worried about rising taxes fueled by the cost of military spending, members of the local Resource Center for Non-Violence.

The battle was triggered by the pur-

pose for which Lockheed sought the use permit. One of the new buildings was to be used for making “confined detonating fuses” — the explosive devices that separate a Trident II missile into fourteen independently targeted warheads, each one five times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

And what gave the opponents their standing before the county planning commission, as they saw it, was the illegality of the Trident missile under international law and a provision of the county zoning ordinance which says the purpose of county planning is “to promote and protect the public peace, health, safety, morals . . . and general welfare.”

Would Lockheed’s works violate international law? Would Lockheed’s “confined detonating fuse” serve the peace, health, safety, and morals of the people of Santa Cruz County? That was the question posed by some 600 citizens who crowded into the chambers of the planning commission when the Lockheed permit came up for a hearing last November.

They were there at the urging of People for a Nuclear Free Future (PNFF), a grass-roots anti-nuclear weapons and power group that had circulated stop-Trident literature, drafted a thirty-page statement of opposition to the Lockheed request, and primed the audience with knowledgeable witnesses.

The planning commission tried to restrict the testimony to conventional “land-use” questions, but witness