



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN
NUCLEAR DANGERS & A SAFE,
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

December 2016

A Letter to Be Candid About Despair

Dear Friends,

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This was supposed to be a letter reflecting on the culmination of decades of struggle, contributing to the extraordinary result of a soon-to-be-nuclear-free California. With Diablo Canyon now to be replaced with renewables by 2025, hard work that we began 37 years ago, after the Three Mile Island accident, has now largely come to fruition. Diablo phasing out; San Onofre permanently closed; the Santa Susana facility shut down; the proposed Ward Valley nuclear dump near the Colorado River blocked; the UCLA reactor decommissioned.

During those tough years we also played a major role in national and international accomplishments as well— the adoption of regulations requiring the end of use of weapons-grade uranium in research reactors, withdrawing scores of bombs' worth of highly enriched uranium from poorly protected sites here and abroad where it could be stolen or diverted; the international ban on dumping radioactive waste in the ocean; rules mandating protection against truck bombs at nuclear plants; blocking the use of orbiting nukes for “Star Wars” battle stations; and what gives me perhaps the most pride, although it cost me the most personally, the closure of the Hanford N-reactor, leading to the end of U.S. production of plutonium for nuclear weapons and Russia's as well.

I am now sixty-six years old, having labored with Bridge the Gap since it was founded in 1970 to try to help end the War in Indochina. I hope to have another 20 or more years working for peace and the environment. There is a lovely, productive fig tree in the clearing amidst the redwoods where I reside. I looked forward to writing this letter to you as a form of sitting under one's fig tree and appreciating for a moment the fruits of one's labor. But it was not to be.

On November 8, the world changed, in a way that could mean catastrophic and exceedingly long-lived damage to life on the planet. Despite the overwhelming scientific consensus of the crisis of climate change and the necessity of immediate significant action to keep it within some livable limits, a man is ascending to the Presidency on a climate denial platform and radical commitment to reverse all steps to bringing greenhouse gases under control. He has named as head of EPA an oil-industry and Koch-brothers funded climate denier who has repeatedly sued to block EPA from carrying out its mission. All the rest of EPA's key environmental protection duties, so long opposed by polluting industries, are now at risk as well. As I write this, it is reported that the leading candidate for Secretary of State, responsible among other things for international climate agreements is—the CEO of ExxonMobil. It is a government by and for oilmen, bankers and other billionaires. Most long-lived in terms of the potential damage, the Supreme Court appointment(s) will for a generation further restrict voting rights and open ever wider the floodgates of money to buy elections, making fixing any of these threats in the future vastly more difficult.

My parents grew up in Germany during the rise of Nazism. Every day of their subsequent lives in the U.S. they scanned the newspapers for signs that something like it could start

happening here. I can't imagine what they would feel with the top adviser to the incoming President being a leader of the white nationalist movement euphemistically called "alt-right." Or the meeting of that movement in a federal building three blocks from the White House shortly after the election shouting "Hail Trump!" and giving the Nazi salute.

One cannot help getting more and more depressed. A President whose mentor was Roy Cohn, the despicable top aide to Senator Joe McCarthy of McCarthy era infamy. One who fans the hatred of the stranger, the refugee, the non-white. The post-factual world we are now in, where "fake news" and outrageous falsehoods are the currency of power. And then there is the vastly increased risk of use of nuclear weapons his temperament and views brings.

One gets overwhelmed by despair. So much that people have struggled for looks like it will be erased. Civil rights. Voting rights. The environment. Restraints on the use of nuclear weapons. A basic civility. Some respect for truth and reason. And with control of essentially all institutions of government, and traditional fact-based news reporting replaced with outrageous tweets, there seems no lever with which to fight back.

And yet. And yet. Fight back one must. But without illusions. On the night before he was assassinated, Dr. King told us that he had been to the mountaintop, looked over and seen the Promised Land. "I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will make it to the Promised Land." But African-Americans didn't make it to the Promised Land. Indeed, many of the victories of the civil rights movement that people died for have been undone, and more are about to if we don't resist vigorously.

Gandhi and his compatriots struggled in a mighty non-violent endeavor to free India and her people, yet today the government of India is controlled by a party with ties to the group that assassinated him, and much of what Gandhi hoped for is not to be found in India. Mandela and his key ANC colleagues spent most of three decades in prison, and decades before that in struggle, for a liberated South Africa. He would, however, likely be ashamed of what the ANC in power is doing today.

And yet, much that the civil rights movement sacrificed to achieve continues; no longer are blacks relegated to the back of the bus, no longer are there 'whites only' restrooms and drinking fountains. Apartheid is dead in South Africa; British colonial rule is over in India. So there is the mystery. One can't bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, but one can make things better, reduce suffering, minimize damage to the environment, save lives. And failing to resist evil allows evil to triumph unrestrained.

That perhaps is the lesson from reflecting on the fruits of the hard work, with your support, for 46 years. In the midst of each of those struggles, we despaired deeply. It seemed that the Vietnam War would never end. Time and time again we thought we were beaten by the unequal forces on the other side when fighting the nuclear enterprise over unsafe projects. Yet we kept on. And the war ended; the UCLA reactor got shut; Santa Susana closed; San Onofre operates no more; Ward Valley was defeated. It looked bleak so many times. Yet we persevered, and won.

Times look very bleak now, I know. But there are really only two choices: to pursue justice, or to succumb to despair and allow the destruction to occur, abetted by one's inaction. So one gets back on one's feet and fights. In the end, there really is only one choice.

Peace,



Daniel Hirsch