

Blowing hot air over Sellafield



Sellafield is a great vote winner for political parties come election time. It has got to be the single issue on which almost every person in Ireland agrees: Sellafield is bad and it should be shut down. So in the next months we can expect pickets of the British embassy, press conferences and the promises of European court cases as the parties vie for our vote.

This range of tactics may succeed – in convincing some to vote for one party rather than the other. But it's not going to shut Sellafield. Indeed all this 'activity' has the unfortunate consequence of stopping us considering what is actually required to shut Sellafield.

Lets be clear – it is possible for ordinary people to not only have an impact on nuclear power but to actually succeed in stopping the construction of nuclear plants and forcing governments to retreat from pro-nuclear projects. It was done right here in Ireland when massive protests over several years stopped the construction of a nuclear power plant at Carnsore.

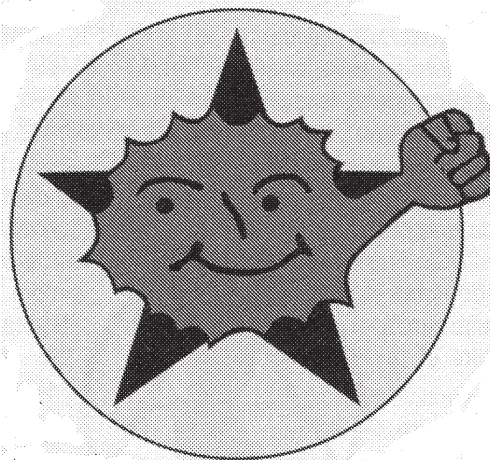
In Germany the government has been forced to retreat from and scale down their nuclear policy. While the politicians are eager to explain this in terms of the electoral success of the German Green party the reality is that it was the direct actions of tens of thousands of ordinary people that literally brought the nuclear trains to a halt.

Mass protests took place throughout the 1980's and 90's, involving hundreds of thousands of people. The German government has been forced to agree to phase out Nuclear power by 2025. Anti-nuclear activists quite rightly consider that this is not soon enough and continue to blockade trains carrying nuclear waste. In March of 2001 the government, which includes the Green Party, mobilised 20,000 police in an effort of force one such train through the blockades. Despite hundreds of arrests and a police riot the protesters succeeded in delaying the train for over a day.

Contrast this effective action with what has been happening here. Joe Jacobs – Minister of State for Public Enterprises promised that the government had begun a legal battle that would not cease until they saw the Sellafield plant closed down. The Government had begun "a long journey of legal initiatives from which we will not be diverted" he said. This is most re-

assuring coming from the same idiot who told the country on national airwaves that he had a national emergency plan in the case of a nuclear disaster in his hands – only for him to be later proven to be lying about this.

Since 1997 there has been press releases of discontent from Fianna Fail. They promised to give their backing to the people of Dundalk who were taking a case against BNFL which begun back in 1994. In March 2000 our brave government



lined up with Denmark to once again be strongly critical of the plan to expand and develop a second plant. As quoted in the Irish Times at that time "The Taoiseach emphasised to Mr. Auken (Danish Minister) that the closure of Sellafield's reprocessing plant was high on the Irish Political agenda, a Government spokesman said, and Mr. Ahern had made it clear to the British Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, at their recent meeting in Lisbon."

This frankly is bullshit. The Irish government knows that supporting Nuclear power is a central policy of many European governments. France and Lithuania get around three-quarters of their power from nuclear energy, while Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovenia and Ukraine get 35% or more. In that context neither the Euro-

pean Union nor a European court is likely to make the sort of strong anti-nuclear decision that could shut Sellafield.

Yet stopping the opening of the MOX plant in Sellafield had been "High" on the Irish Political agenda for the last two years and the politicians utterly failed to stop that plant opening. Pathetically Fianna Fail even took out a full-page critical advertisement against Sellafield in the Times of London newspaper thus neatly illustrating the incapacity of the Irish government to act or do anything meaningful about this issue.

So what can be done? We must take a lesson from our own past (Carnsore) and from the highly successful anti-nuclear movement in Germany. We must recognise that the British government, far from being willing to consider closing Sellafield, wish to expand it. The only way they will be forced to retreat from this position is, if like the German protesters, we push the political and economic costs of keeping Sellafield open way up.

This requires a very different approach to the one adopted to date. We need to start off by recognising that without a huge level of active support and solidarity from ordinary people in Britain we will get nowhere. An accident at Sellafield after all would not just devastate parts of Ireland but also huge sections of England, Wales and probably Scotland.

We need a movement in Ireland and Britain that will seek to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people to not just protest against Sellafield but also take direct action against the nuclear industry. Of course this needs to be level headed – we wouldn't want to cause a nuclear accident! But the German example shows that direct action can safely be taken against this industry by blockading nuclear transports, mass invasions of parts of nuclear plants and occupations of sites where construction of new plants is going on. If such a movement emerges the British government will be forced not only to halt further expansion but also to start to decommission the entire industry.