



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

November 2023

A Letter to Help the Year End

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Dear Friends,

The last two years have been very difficult for Committee to Bridge the Gap. Victories that took years to accomplish – e.g., legally binding agreements to phase out the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant and to fully clean up the Santa Susana nuclear meltdown site and the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard – were eviscerated. A well-funded, aggressive, highly deceptive nuclear greenwashing campaign has been undertaken nationally, pushing to divert resources from renewables like solar and wind that are essential to addressing the climate threat.

More radioactive waste is piling up daily, dangerous for ten thousand generations, with no solution for its permanent disposal. Each additional year that a reactor like Diablo runs, enough plutonium for a hundred nuclear bombs is created. The new reactors pushed by the greenwashing forces, if ever actually built, would increase the amount of high-level radioactive waste while producing more weapons-usable nuclear material, worsening proliferation risks. The nuclear greenwashing campaign thus would worsen both of the primary existential threats facing the world – climate change and the risk of nuclear weapons use.

Any rational person working against these developments could be forgiven for moments of despair. I confess there are many nights when I listen, before lights out, to a recording of Paul Robeson singing the great Spiritual “There is a balm in Gilead,” with the lines:

**Sometimes I feel discouraged
and think my work's in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit
revives my soul again.**

Each of us may have a different conception of what “the Holy Spirit” refers to – for me it is what I sense deep within the beauty of the natural world and in human kindness – but we have all experienced profound discouragement, feeling our work is in vain, and then sought that which will revive our souls again. One lifts oneself up again after being knocked down, dusts oneself off, and keeps fighting.

That was certainly true of one of the great founders of the environmental movement, Rachel Carson. As CBG’s Board Chair Jack Miles writes in our annual newsletter, Carson was ferociously attacked by the chemical industry when she exposed the dangers of DDT and other pesticides in her monumental *Silent Spring*. What is not well known is that she was fighting cancer as she labored to finish the book, several times having to put it aside while she underwent debilitating radiation treatments. While defending herself from the assault by the chemical industry PR machine and lobbyists, she was having to find every remaining ounce of strength within her ailing body to fight back. She died not long after, but the good done by her bravery continues to echo to this day.

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I think of Carson's sacrifice and all that flowed from it as we acknowledge in the newsletter the courage of Dale Bridenbaugh, Pauline Saxon, and the late Jeanne Londe. Dale gave up his career in the nuclear industry in 1976 as a matter of conscience to raise safety concerns, with no confidence of how he would thereafter support his family. Now 92, he continues to aid in the fight to this day. Pauline Saxon, almost a hundred, did the hard work of making peace and trying to restrain the nuclear threat for decades. She has been active with CBG for more than half a century and remains very much our soul. Jeanne, who died recently at 102, helped form the Rocketdyne Cleanup Coalition and was testifying at government hearings on Santa Susana well into her 90s.

Bridge the Gap was founded fifty-three years ago to "bridge the generation gap" on issues like war and the environment. It is something of a miracle that we continue those fights, with a range of people of conscience, from their nineties to a fresh crop of CBG staff and volunteers in their twenties.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., drawing on words from abolitionist pastor Theodore Parker, famously said that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." I don't believe that is entirely true. As Liam Myers recently wrote in *The Catholic Worker* in a review of a book by Anya Stanger on people incarcerated for acts of resistance, "The universe does not bend towards justice without our active participation in bending it."

That is a powerful insight, and helps make clear why we must keep fighting, even at times when we seem to be losing. **The moral arc of the universe does not bend toward justice on its own; it has to be bent by people of commitment who are willing to make sacrifices.** Even when the arc seems to be curving in a destructive direction, one must keep trying to bend it back, because if not opposed, it will bend even further towards injustice.

So, sometimes we get discouraged, and think our work's in vain. But then we realize how much it matters, and are restored again. Help us if you can.

Peace, and other responsibilities,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dan Hirsch