



Paul Azevedo

## The Reactor

### Paying the Price

It takes guts and principles to deliberately plan to get arrested as a way of making a political statement. Setting yourself up to get fined or jailed demonstrates admirable sincerity and concern in a rather dramatic fashion.

So I think it's safe to say that Pacificans Ethel Kirk, Bev Ramsay, Helen Matthews and the mother-daughter team of Diane and Kelly Evans are to be admired for courage and sincerity.

These Pacificans were part of a crowd which blocked the entrance to the Lawrence-Livermore lab to generate publicity against nuclear proliferation.

Going to jail for its own sake is a useless exercise. It's like beating yourself over the head with a hammer. But when good citizens court arrest to get attention, it gets attention. In fact, the whole purpose of the Lawrence blockage was to create a media event. No media, no reason to blockade.

If newspapers printed nothing, if TV cameras stayed away, if radio stations said nothing, events like Livermore would quickly fade away. In the U.S.S.R. they would ignore the happening and punish the

participants severely. So... no protests there.

There wouldn't be many Livermore protesters either, if the punishment was death. The people at Livermore expected good media coverage and a sentence they could live with. They didn't like the idea of two years probation. There was talk about that being a violation of First Amendment rights. A phony issue. You can't wrap the First Amendment around a crime, such as the crime of blocking access to a nuclear facility, and expect to have your violation of the law protected just because you were using that violation to get attention. If you deliberately insist on violating the law to get attention, you must expect conviction and punishment. Personally I think it's a high price to pay to get on TV.

The Livermore protests, and similar events, are not so much an exercise of First Amendment rights of free speech as a way of insisting that the rest of us, those not so deeply committed, must listen. But the right not to listen is at least as fundamental as the right to speak freely.

The nuclear protesters are sincere, well-motivated people. There is a substantial possibility that their way is the only way to keep Americans and Russians from mutual annihilation. Unfortunately, only a nuclear war will prove them right, or perhaps, wrong.

If the administration is right, and it may be, then the protesters are doing us tremendous harm by weakening our defense.

I wish I were certain who is right. I don't know. I doubt if you do either.

However, I do know that it is no excuse, when a law is violated, to say: "I did it to get your attention." And if you set out to be a martyr, you have no right to complain when the lion's teeth are sharper than you expected.

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