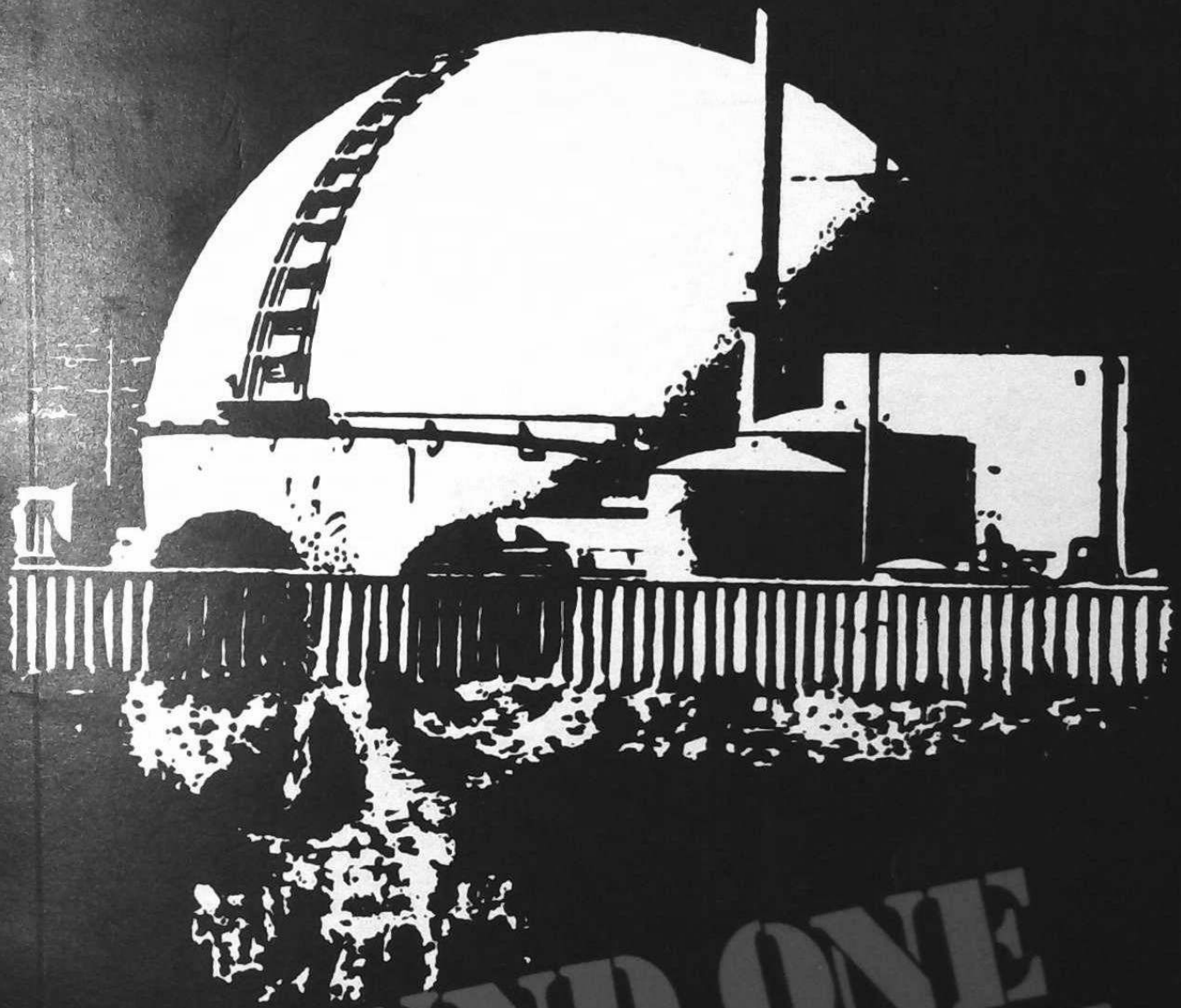


# PLACOFF ?



## ROUND ONE FOR SURVIVAL

# agenor 80

PEOPLE'S  
STRUGGLES

## Why not join ...

The agenor cooperative, which publishes this magazine, has members throughout western Europe. They take part in the discussion of texts for publication. They also act as an informal network helping to promote contact across frontiers (political frontiers, linguistic frontiers, ideological frontiers) among people and groups in the progressive camp.

Other agenor activities include :

- organising trans-national discussion sessions, the results of which are published in several languages as well as in agenor. In this we work together with a growing circle of political or trade union groups, foundations, etc. These include : the study foundation of the Dutch Radical Party ; Werkgroep 2000, a team concerned with citizen participation ; the Socialist Environment and Resources Association, affiliated to the UK Labour party ; the Fondation André Renard in Belgium ...
- evening discussion meetings in Brussels.

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éditeur responsable : joanna tachmintzis, 13 rue hobbema, 1040 brussels

# plogoff : round one for survival



2.5  
a report on the struggle  
of the people of plogoff  
to prevent the construction  
of a nuclear power station

Wyhl, Brokdorf, Malville, Kalkar... Plogoff. Another landmark in the struggle of the people of western Europe against the menace of nuclear power. In January and February 1980, for forty days, the fishermen's and sailor's wives of this Brittany village harassed riot police and paratroopers sent to enforce a "public enquiry" into plans long since decided. At Whitsun 1980, 150,000 people from all over France and beyond arrived to demonstrate their solidarity.

The Plogoff story is worth telling. Because Plogoff has become a new symbol of the anti-nuclear struggle. Because of the way the people fought their own battle, and of the links and parallels with the nine-year-old conflict between the Larzac sheep-farmers and the French army.

But it is also a chance to assess the state of the game. Plogoff may be a landmark, but it is no turning-point. France is thrusting into the nuclear society, and into the plutonium era, with none of the hesitations shown elsewhere in western Europe, and regardless of the concern of many of its citizens.

Uranium mining is expanding in many parts of the country, nuclear power stations at Le Pellerin, at Flamanville, at Cattenom, at Chooz... are being steam-rolled through, despite local opposition or technical difficulties; the monstrous fast breeder at Creys-Malville is on the way to completion; efforts to reprocess nuclear fuel on a large scale continue at La Hague despite the danger to workers, and a near-miss catastrophic accident...

Whatever the outcome at Plogoff, the chances of halting this trend seem slight. The aim of this pamphlet is to spread the story of the Plogoff struggle, and the lessons to be learned from it; but also to

put it in its broader context. And that means assessing the state of the anti-nuclear movement in France, and the consequences of its decision to move into the party political arena.

The narrative part of the text owes much to the excellent coverage in *Libération*, and the English version of the story was written by Alatheia Andersohn. The analytical text would not have been possible without the regular coverage of developments in the antinuclear and soft energy movement by WISE (the World Information Service on Energy) in Amsterdam; as usual, the conclusions are the result of discussions within the *agenor* group.

## Nuclear power stations will not be imposed...

It was in 1974 that plans to build a nuclear power station in Plogoff were first mooted, and that local opposition first began. But it was not until the "public utility enquiry" in February and March 1980 that the fight to stop the power station became headline news with daily clashes between police and demonstrators.

It was learnt in December 1974 that a number of sites all over France were being considered for the nuclear energy plan. Four of these sites were in Brittany. At the end of 1975 the inhabitants of Plogoff learnt that their village had been chosen. The 5200 MW power station (which means four nuclear reactors) would cover an area of 180 hectares and work would start in 1983.

Plogoff: in the far west of Brittany, in the area known as Cap Sizun in the south of the department of Finistère. A windswept fishing village, where the men are fishermen, merchant seamen, or sailors in the French navy, where the women are used to taking responsibility - as they have shown in the opposition to the nuclear power station. Some 2,500 inhabitants who do not look forward to the arrival of 2,500 workmen and their families over the 8 years that the power station would take to build; who have seen enough damage done to their coasts by the regular oil slicks that hit the Breton coast and have become sufficiently cynical to doubt the assurance that fishing will not be affected by the surplus heat or the radio-active waste from the power station.

They have been promised that the power station will create new jobs, that Plogoff will acquire a new school, a gymnasium, a cultural and community centre, a drycleaner's, a hairdresser's, laundrette, a new bank, a post office...

They have been told that it is their duty to accept the nuclear power station in the interests of Brittany, which is supposedly a net importer of energy: but this assertion rests on the fact that Nantes, with its two big power stations and historically part of

Brittany, has been left outside the borders of the region as defined by the latest French administrative boundaries. For those who consider Nantes part of Brittany, there is now a net excess of energy in the region... (In 1974 EDF (Electricité de France) cancelled a plan for a 2 X 600 MW Station in Brest, on the grounds that Brittany did not need it). The 5200 MW power station (which means four nuclear reactors) would cover an area of 180 hectares and work would start in 1983.

### The early days of resistance

When it was made known that four sites in Brittany were being considered for nuclear power stations, first resistance came from the site at Erdeven. In Plogoff too a small committee was set up in December 1974 and the following month a meeting was held with the Erdeven campaigners. Over the next four months a series of information meetings were held throughout Cap Sizun. The original committee was small and faced the problems involved in dealing with a complicated technical and scientific subject, as well as the suspicion with which the members, as outsiders to the area, were regarded.

In March 1975 the Plogoff local council stated its opposition to the nuclear project. A by-law was passed forbidding the use of heavy lorries within the territory of the commune. It was decided to organise a demonstration in July 1975 : 6,000 people turned up.

The association *Evid Buhez ar C'hap* ("For the life of the Cape") was set out, growing out of the opposition to nuclear power to deal with other subjects as well : the oil pollution with which Brittany has become so familiar, problems of water supply and water pollution which are also serious in Brittany. Information work went on throughout the winter with public meetings and market stands.

A defence committee was also created, and has met every month since. It has invited speakers from the Larzac (where opposition to the French army's plans to extend a military camp has been going on for 10 years), from the areas affected by the nuclear plants of Flamanville, Creys-Malville, Gravelines... Each time these speakers, accustomed only too often to addressing meetings of between 30 and 40 people, found audiences of between 400 and 500.

Annie Carval, president of the Defence Committee : *"We thought it was odd when they promised us an industry that would do everything for the region, create jobs... we were suspicious and we started trying to find things out. We read books, scientific and*

*general ones... To start with, we were only concerned about Plogoff, we didn't look any further than the ends of our noses. Then as we found out more we started questioning the nuclear programme as a whole".*

People from Plogoff went to visit Chinon and Saint-Laurent-des-Eaux, where nuclear power stations of a different type to that planned for Plogoff had been built. Jean-Marie Kerloch, mayor of Plogoff : *"The people who went were farmers, they didn't know what to think about nuclear energy : they wanted to talk to the farmers living near the other power stations : and they all came back anti-nuclear!"* They were horrified by the idea of regular checks for radioactivity on everything - milk, grass, meat, etc - after which either farmers were told that they could go ahead and sell their produce, or else the milk would be collected and paid for but not marketed, with no explanations given.

At the end of 1975 the Economic and Social Council, at the national level and the Regional Council (in Brittany) agreed in principle to the construction of a nuclear power station in Brittany.

### First barricades at Plogoff

In June 1976 engineers from EDF (French Electricity) came to take soundings in the Plogoff site. The approach roads to the site were blocked and after four days the engineers had to go back with their task unaccomplished.

After this there was talk of another site being chosen and the anti-nuclear struggle went into semi-hibernation for a while. But after the Amoco Cadiz disaster and the furious reactions which it unleashed in the north of Finistère, it became clear that attempts to impose a nuclear power station in the same area could meet serious opposition from the local population. In September 1978 the Economic and Social Council opted for Plogoff. Within days 5,000 people marched on the site to protest and a week later 15,000 demonstrated in Brest. The "Orsec-Rad" plan, with instructions for what to do in the event of a nuclear accident - stay indoors, close doors and windows, eat and drink nothing which might be contaminated, wait to be evacuated and have some belongings ready in a plastic bag to take with you - was read out, and the demonstrators "lay down dead" in the streets. - The emergency plan has still not been published officially.

In November 78 the Finistère General Council voted on the choice of a nuclear site. They invited representatives from EDF, the

Ministry of Industry, ecologists and the association *Evid Buhez ar C'hap*. The latter had little hope that their views would be taken into account, but they went along with the democratic process, suggesting that the public enquiry be postponed for 2 years to allow for research into alternatives to nuclear power in Brittany. The suggestion was turned down and the General Council also opted for Plogoff. Annie Carval: *"During the discussions in the General Council, some of the members were asleep and had to be shaken to wake up for the vote..."*: This time the demonstration in Quimper (the main town of southern Finistère) brought out between 8,000 and 10,000 marchers and a record 2000 police.

#### The "Groupement Foncier Agricole"

A cooperative form of land-holding, known as "Groupement Foncier Agricole", is encouraged by the French government: but it can also be used to frustrate the application of government decisions. Instead of compulsorily purchasing, putting pressure on single owners to sell their land, or taking them to court in they remain unwilling, a public authority wanting land held by a GFA is in theory obliged to buy out each of the many shareholders individually. There is also the effect of solidarity making it easier for each one to refuse, rather than allow themselves to be persuaded, which is more likely to happen if each stands alone. In the Larzac a GFA had been created and a sheep farm created, with the buildings put up in defiance of the refusal to give planning permission.

Plogoff too now has its GFA and its sheepfarm, also in defiance of planning orders. The scheme was adopted in 1978 after the Economic and Social Council decided on Plogoff. The GFA owns 15 hectares of land which once belonged to 5 or 6 farmers, covering part of the site of the proposed power station: there are 2500 shareholders, all joint owners, not only in France but abroad. In theory each 100 F share represents 100 m<sup>2</sup> of land... A further 50 hectares will be leased.

In February 1979, the boat belonging to the CNEXO (National Centre for Studying the Use of the Oceans) was occupied from 7.30 am to midday when it came to carry out tests in Plogoff.

In 1978 and 1979 a series of elections helped to delay the project, the authorities not being prepared to risk a loss of votes for government candidates because it was being pushed through. At the national legislative elections in 1978 none of the candidates

To support the GFA, contact PERMANENCE GFA, Madame CARVAL, Triguen - 29153 Plogoff.

were willing to commit themselves in favour of nuclear power, though none took a firm anti-nuclear stance. At the cantonal elections later the same year, to send representatives to the General Council of the *department*, there were five candidates: UDF (Giscardiens), RPR (Gaullists), socialists, communists and PSU (left-wing socialist), but as usual in Brittany only the two from the right were in the running. The incumbent RPR councillor, openly pro-nuclear, was defeated by a Gaullist candidate reputed to have anti-nuclear sympathies, and this was interpreted as a victory for opposition to the project. The third in the series was the European elections, in June; but already, the accent had shifted back to local demonstrations.

The Whitsun weekend saw a demonstration on the site. The first stone of the farm building was laid, in the presence of 15,000 demonstrators.

In July work started on fencing the sheep enclosures: about 200 people came along on the weekend of the 14th July to help erect some 2 kilometres of fencing.

On 31 July the town hall in Plogoff received the preliminary "public utility" file from EDF. Instead of defusing popular opposition, the fact that for the first time the precise scale of the project was known brought out increased numbers of helpers throughout August to work on the sheepfarm. At first the progress of the work was watched by a helicopter, until it was pointed out to the prefect of the Finistère department that it would save energy if the helicopter stayed on the ground and a phonecall was put through to the town hall in Plogoff once in a while to find out how work was going on. After that the helicopter stayed on the ground.

The local press gave continued publicity to the work, and the "official opening" of the sheep farm at the end of August was attended by between 8000 and 10,000 people, even though no posters had been put up announcing it. During this period Alain-Pierre Condette, Breton by origin, returned to the area after losing his job as a farm worker in the south of France, and offered his services to the GFA. He was officially installed in his job on 3 February 1980 with the first 15 sheep, in the presence of between 20,000 and 30,000 demonstrators (depending whether you accept the figures advanced by the authorities or by the Plogoff Defence Committee). Now, it was planned to put up a second building with space for 240. A small windmill has already been built to provide enough power for the farm.

## ... on populations which reject them...

In his election campaign in 1974 Giscard d'Estaing himself declared that "Nuclear power stations will not be imposed on populations which reject them". This has not prevented the construction of such stations at Braud-et-Saint-Louis (Gironde) despite a petition opposing the station signed by 35,000 of the local inhabitants; at Nogent-sur-Seine (Aube) despite the opposition of 45,000 : or, at Golfech (Tarn-et-Garonne) where several thousand demonstrated in opposition and the General Council voted against the station, but Electricité de France has declared that the station will go ahead. In some cases (Flamanville and Creys-Malville) work started on the site even before the prime minister declared the project to be in the public interest.

The people of Plogoff not only doubt whether their views will count for anything. They have also lost faith in elected representatives. In the spring of 1977 the local member of regional Council, M. Guerneur, declared, "If you don't want the nuclear power station, you can count on my support". His words were remembered; so it was with great surprise that Plogoff discovered, when the project was voted on in the Regional Council, that the rapporteur was the same M. Guerneur. Contrary to his promise, he favoured Plogoff as the site for the nuclear power station.

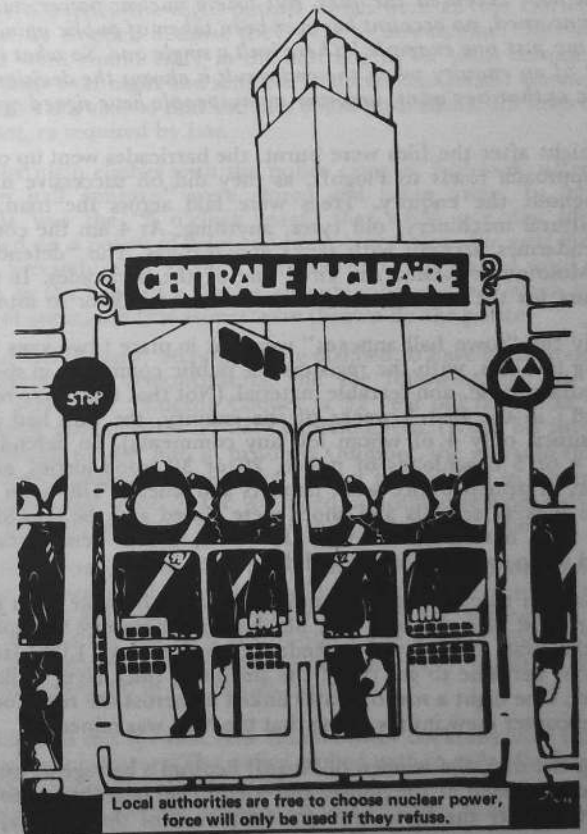
The French "public interest enquiry" (Enquête d'Utilité Publique) should not be confused with a public hearing. It is a process whereby the files relating to a project - plans, impact studies, etc - are displayed in public for a period of 6 weeks, and the public given an opportunity to write their comments in registers. Theoretically the views expressed are taken into account in making the final decision, but in practice the enquiry is invariably followed by the prime Minister's decision that whatever plan is concerned is in the public interest.

The public utility files are supposed to be displayed in the town hall. But the mayor of Plogoff and those of the 3 other villages concerned - Goulien, Primevel and Cléden - refused to display the files, and even to have the notices announcing the opening of the

"enquiry" put up in the villages. So the week before the enquiry opened, the sub-prefect arrived in Plogoff in the early hours of the morning with 9 lorry-loads of gendarmes to post the notices up. They were torn down the same day.

On 30 January the files were received by the town hall. That afternoon, they were burnt ceremonially in the presence of a large crowd, led by the four mayors : Jean-Marie Kerloch of Plogoff, and those of the three other villages.

On the same day the EDF headquarters in Brest were occupied.



The town hall remained closed throughout the enquiry, with the French flag at half-mast, and the Breton "*Gwen a Du*" flying triumphantly above it.

#### No guarantees

Jean-Marie Kerloch : *"Some people have asked why I did not open the town hall for the files to be displayed. I have told them that if there was a guarantee that the project would be abandoned if public opinion were against it (which is logical in a democracy), I would have accepted the files. But where nuclear power stations are concerned, no account has ever been taken of public opinion... Give me just one example ! There isn't a single one. So what is the point of an enquiry when the end result is always the decision the public authorities want, however many people have signed against it ?"*

The night after the files were burnt, the barricades went up on all the approach roads to Plogoff, as they did on successive nights throughout the enquiry. Trees were laid across the road, old agricultural machinery, old tyres, anything. At 4 am the convoy of gendarmes arrived, with tanks and tear-gas. The "defenders" had Molotov cocktails, and fired one of the barricades. It took 4 hours for the convoy to cover the mile and half or so into the town.

Finally the "town hall annexes" were put in place : two vans containing the files, with the registers for public comments in special non-inflammable, non-tearable material. (Not that they were really needed : in the first 3 weeks of the enquiry, the vans had only 27 visitors, only 4 of whom left any comments). To defend the vans, 4 or 5 coachloads of police, 20 or 30 troop lorries, and a cordon of armed police with helmets and shields. The town hall stayed locked, schools and shops were closed and the Cap Sizun went into mourning. In the afternoon, 3,000 demonstrators turned up to show solidarity with Plogoff.

The pattern throughout the enquiry remained the same from then on. At night, access roads were blocked, oil or manure was spread over the road. One day the gendarmes had to buy 1,000 francs worth of perfume to get rid of the smell of a thick layer of liquid manure. One night a row of plates linked up across the road fooled the helicopter crew into warning that the road was mined...

During the day, the women of Plogoff kept up a barrage of insults and taunts aimed at the police, and tried to get past them into the vans to destroy the files. After the first week of the enquiry, the

newspaper "Ouest-France" reported that "for the past week the police have been subject to psychological treatment by the population of Plogoff which they are certainly not used to" and noted that police nerves were visibly fraying.

#### Psychological warfare

One of their first victories was to have the vans moved from their original position, in which they blocked the entry to a chapel. A bailiff was called to verify that the entry was blocked, the vans were moved and the women went into the chapel to sing Breton hymns. Similarly the night patrols which were at first carried out had to be stopped because they were so unwelcome. Instead the police went round early in the morning to see what damage had been done over night and send for whatever equipment was needed to clear the road, so that the files could be available for inspection at 9 am, as required by law.

But the main clashes with the police came at 5 o'clock, when the "town hall annexes" were closed and taken away. In fact so regular was the "5 o'clock mass" that when one day Plogoff decided on a policy of calm and non-provocation, the vans did not leave precisely at 5 as they normally did, but waited until after 5 pm in the hope of a display of public opposition. When it still did not come, the first stones were thrown by the police.

On the 8 February, 16 police were claimed to have been wounded in clashes with demonstrators, and the following day the first arrest was made : Eugene Coquet, a 32 year old fisherman, subsequently sentenced to 45 days imprisonment. (When his sister-in-law arrived to visit him in prison in Quimper, she was told that he had been transferred to Rennes. In fact he was still in Quimper). The same day some of the wounded policemen reappeared - one with a bandaged finger, another with a plaster on his cheek.

On 10 February, more than 1300 out of the 1900 inhabitants of voting age signed the petition calling for the police to be withdrawn. The explanation for the other 600 not signing was that they were at sea - in fact, out of 600 households in Plogoff, there are 350 in which the man is in the merchant navy, about 30 fishermen and about 50 in the French marine.

February 16 was the first time that molotov cocktails were thrown by the demonstrators. The police replied with so-called "offensive" grenades, which produce a violent explosion.

February 19 saw the arrest of Clet Ansquer, a retired prison



warder. Soon after, one woman told a journalist, "It makes no difference that he used to work for the state, he's still opposed to the power station. It's the same with me. My husband is a professional soldier and I can tell you that with all the provocation we get from the military here, we're all becoming anti-military, even the soldiers". It was alleged that Clet Ansquer had been preparing to throw a molotov cocktail, but film taken by a German camera crew showed it to have been an empty beer bottle that he was carrying. He admitted in court to having thrown "one or two pebbles" but vehemently denied that he had ever used a catapult: "I've never carried one, but it's true that I've been almost every day at the demonstration with the others. I'm opposed to nuclear power, it's my duty to be there".

It was only the violence surrounding the public enquiry that drew media interest to Plogoff, and most papers preferred to imply the violence was caused by outside agitators. Jean Moalic, manager of the GFA and founder of *Evid Buhez ar C'hap*: "They try to convince the public that the people of Plogoff are sitting quietly at home and don't feel concerned. Whereas in fact it is the whole of the population here which is mobilised, and opposed both to the way in which the public utility enquiry is proceeding and to the plan for a nuclear power station". And at the trial of Clet Ansquer, the mayor declared, "They should be trying 2300 inhabitants of Plogoff; if they want to restore quiet in Plogoff they'll have to deport the whole population. Clet Ansquer is an honest man, he's defending the place he has inherited from his ancestors. If he were not, he ought to be ashamed of himself". Meanwhile a demonstration of 3000 people outside was charged by the CRS (riot police).

#### Lawyer charged

February 29 was "Black Friday": in a vast police operation, 11 arrests were made and a dozen demonstrators injured. The Defence Committee sent the following telegram to the President and the Minister of the Interior: "*Population Plogoff and Cap Sizun demand immediate stop commando operations and acts of violence against men, women, children. Dramatic situation in Plogoff, 29 February, 17.00 hours*".

That night was the second night the barricades went up. Three people were taken for questioning. The barricades went up again on the night of 2 March and the following morning 7 people were taken for questioning, suspected of having attacked a member of the police outside a dance hall.

On the 6th March, about 100 inhabitants of Plogoff, led by the mayor and his deputies, demonstrated outside the Prefecture in Quimper with catapults, in the hope of getting themselves arrested, during the trial of those arrested on 29 February. A crowd inside the court was charged by the CRS. Then the defending lawyer was charged on the spot, in the midst of the trial, under the arbitrary procedures that can be used against those disturbing law and order, and was barred from appearing in court for 10 days. This patent discrimination aroused widespread protests from the legal profession.

The following day legal staff in Quimper and Nantes decided to strike in sympathy, and similar decisions were taken elsewhere in France. The trial of the 9 was postponed to 17 March.

- A football match in solidarity with the people in prison took place on 9 March and attracted a record crowd for Plogoff, of 2,000 supporters! The same day 2 of those arrested on 29 February, who had been released on the meantime, started a hunger strike in Quimper cathedral.

On 10 March the demonstrators in Plogoff were led by doctors and health workers from Cap Sizun, under a banner proclaiming "People of Cap Sizun, your doctors say no to the power station". (*Gens du Cap Sizun, vos médecins disent non à la centrale*). During the night the barricades went up again to block the entry of the three enquiry commissioners on the following day. They were due to remain in the town hall annexes for the last 4 days of the enquiry.

To quote one of the commissioners, 73-year-old Admiral Georgetin: "It is a complicated affair but we are open to any discussion. We are not afraid of our responsibilities and we can understand that the people of Plogoff are defending their own interests. It is only human and we know that a power station is a traumatic affair for a small village. They're defending their little bit of land. But it shouldn't be forgotten that EDF offers substantial financial compensation". As proof that they were taking their duties seriously, the Admiral showed journalist Yann Kermor (of "Libération") his copy of the little book on nuclear power stations in the "Que sais-je?" series (a series devoted to "basic facts" on every subject under the sun). But in the town hall annex in Goulien, another of the commissioners said, with no illusions, "Three poor fools like us aren't going to change EDF's mind".

Goulien celebrated a mock funeral to mark the arrival of the commissioner. Men and women in mourning and a coffin marked

"Goulien - dead because it wanted to live" were refused entry to the cemetery by a cordon of police, though nobody could stop them singing hymns and chanting a requiem for the souls of the police and the commissioners.

But one of the most embarrassing incidents for the authorities came on the day before the enquiry ended, when the veterans of two world wars demonstrated, led by their oldest comrade-in-arms - 84 years old - bearing the French flag. On the one side the police and paratroopers (back from the Lebanon and sent in early in the enquiry), on the other the flag of the French Republic, medal-bedecked veterans singing the *Marseillaise*, or hurling challenges such as "We liberated the country in 45. We shall liberate it again".

All over Brittany various demonstrations of support for the struggle in Plogoff took place throughout the period of the enquiry: but the most active support was from other seamen. Those of the neighbouring Bigouden region picketed the police returning from Plogoff every evening to a former convent at Saint-Guénolé-Penmac'h. As one of the members of the "Bigouden marine environment anti-nuclear committee" explained, "Here most people live by fishing and it is essential for us that Plogoff doesn't become a nuclear power station. So we demonstrate our rejection of the plan by holding a little reception committee every evening for the gendarmes coming back from Plogoff. Alongside this we are going to undertake a campaign of information in collaboration with various scientists, because at present not all the 2200 fishermen of the Bigouden region are aware of the connection between fishing and the power station, and they do not realise that the two cannot coexist".

#### Critical scientists

Some of those who have denounced the enquiry are the very scientists whose work has formed the basis of EDF's files. As long ago as September 1978, the CFDT (the progressive socialist) branch at the National Centre for studying the use of the Oceans - CNEXO) sent an open letter to members of the Breton Regional Council, making the following points:

- EDF was wrong to claim that the scientific research on which it based its conclusions was independent: CNEXO is linked to EDF by commercial contracts, (one condition of which is to impose secrecy on scientists involved in the research). Thus EDF is in a position to decide which subjects will or will not be studied, and can protect itself against public discussion of the conclusions reached.

- Studies made of the present state of the site were used by EDF to predict the impact of the power station, "although all scientists recognise that we are not at present able to make such predictions".

- EDF conveniently forgot to mention the scientists' note that knowledge concerning the 5 possible sites was limited or the fact that at a meeting on thermoeology organised by EDF in November 1976 scientists refused to give preference to one site rather than another. Similarly EDF has refused to publish in full the CNEXO studies about each of the sites concerned, preferring instead to pick and choose bits from each to support the decision in favour of Plogoff.

- EDF omitted to mention that certain predictions were their own rather than those of other research bodies.

The open letter finished:

"Will the elected representatives choose a site on the basis of partial studies which have been distorted, twisted or shortened?"

Will the regional councillors accept, on behalf of the population, any nuclear project, wherever it is to be sited, when no-one is at present capable of foreseeing all the effects and when the scientists working on the different sites state that their knowledge of them is still very limited?"

An appeal signed by 80 Breton scientists denounced the process of the public enquiry, accusing the authors of EDF's reports of re-interpreting data and of basing calculations on false hypotheses, of ignoring the objections raised by researchers, underestimating certain problems (the "red water" caused by the proliferation under certain conditions of a certain marine microorganism, which happens to exist in large quantities off Plogoff) and completely ignoring others (pollution of the marine environment by radioelements, geological structure of the site).

They called for the enquiry to be cancelled for lack of information about the true impact of a 5200 MW power station in Plogoff, and for a wide-ranging discussion on the French programme to be launched (The French nuclear programme has never been discussed in Parliament).

Even without the scientists' concern, the people of Plogoff know enough about the sea to question some of EDF's claims. For example they know that the currents wash the drowned bodies of fishermen inshore to Plogoff even from miles out at sea, and they suspect that pollution would also be carried shorewards.

It is not simply a matter of objection to the nuclear power station or the nuclear programme in general: there is also the matter of

local pride, the resentment of the image of naive provincials spread around by the media, and of the contempt shown for them by the central government authorities. The strength of their resistance has not only drawn the inhabitants far closer together than before the threat of the power station, it has given them a sense of pride. As one woman put it, "At school I used to be ashamed of being Breton, now I'm proud of it".

The preliminary studies for any major project include an assessment of the local population's reaction. In the case of Plogoff, the locals were summed up as "backward and gullible". They have eloquently disproved this. It can only be hoped that assessments of the effects of nuclear power are not equally far off target.

Though the public enquiry closed on 16 March, Plogoff has not given up yet. The Whitsun weekend was marked throughout the area by demonstrations, attended by representatives from the Larzac as well as 100,000 demonstrators.

There is little possibility of further legal appeal: on the one occasion in the past when the "Tribunal Administratif" (court of appeal against administrative decisions) ordered work to be stopped on a nuclear plant, no notice was taken of the order (Bolleville in 1979).

## ...provided they succeed in blocking them.

The experience of recent years has shown that for a group of citizens to be successful in resisting the plans of national authorities or powerful economic forces, a lot of factors have to be present: people who are deeply attached to their land or their place of work; who are aware that they are fighting for their livelihood; and who organise their own struggle, in their own way, responding with imagination to each new challenge; and at the same time massive support from outside, that can be mobilised when needed. At Plogoff, these elements were present in the right mix for the first time in an anti-nuclear struggle in France.

So it is not surprising that there are parallels (and direct links, too) with Wyhl and with the Larzac. At Wyhl, on the banks of the Rhine, the wine-growers of the Kaisersstuhl area have so far succeeded in blocking the construction of the biggest nuclear power station ever planned in the Federal Republic. The people of that area are traditionally conservative, but there is an old tradition of resistance to outside domination. They had their apprenticeship helping farmers across the Rhine at Marckolsheim block plans for a dangerous lead factory. Their first concern about the nuclear power plant was the threat to their livelihood through a change of local climate; later, they came to understand the other dangers. They were prepared to occupy the site, night and day for seven months, with the women playing a leading role and bearing the heaviest burden (See the detailed account in *agenor*, *Nuclear Power - Stop : Wyhl, Brokdorf, Malville*).

The resistance of the Larzac sheep farmers to the extension of a military training camp on a plateau in the south of France is more widely known (See the detailed story in *agenor* nos 52 and 72). Again, these were people fighting above all for their livelihood, and for a way of life they were attached to. Over the course of the years, they have realised the many political dimensions of their struggle, and emphasised them with symbolic actions - like the collective ploughing, by farmers from the whole region who support them, of land already sold to the Army, ready for planting with a crop which would be harvested and sent to the hungry of

the third world. Central to the Larzac story was the building of an illegal sheep-farm, on army land within the planned extension: hundreds of supporters helped with the building, hundreds of others have become joint owners of land bought up (under the GFA scheme) to keep it from the army.

Many of these elements are to be found in the Plogoff story: fact that the women bore the brunt of the struggle; the building of the sheep-farm on the site; the use of the GFA formula enabling supporters to have a direct involvement. The vast gathering of well over 100,000 people at Whitsun 1980 was an echo of the pilgrimages of similar numbers to the Larzac plateau at the height of the clash with the army.

#### A sobering context

In short, what has happened at Plogoff so far confirms many of the lessons learned at the Larzac. And it is certainly important that there should be an anti-nuclear struggle so solidly rooted in local traditions and so widely supported. But there the reasons for rejoicing end. To put the events at Plogoff in their broader context is a sobering exercise.

First, as regards Plogoff itself, what happened in the first half of 1980 was at best a defensive victory — a demonstration of the determination of the people of the Cape Sizun area, and of the support they can mobilise. But the way it was handled by the French authorities, with intentionally aggressive tactics, and more violence than has even been used against the farmers of the Larzac, was significant of the determination on their side. There has yet to be a nuclear power station project in France blocked by local opposition, in the way the Wyhl power station or the Larzac camp extension were headed off. The French government is heavily committed to the nuclear option and to give way to opposition in Brittany would give a boost to local groups opposing other projects. Nor should there be any illusions about the means that the French government can employ in terms of a repressive legal system. In purely practical terms, keeping contractors from starting work on a particular site is quite another matter from holding into a large area of land that is being farmed — as demonstrators in various parts of Europe have already discovered. After the successful movement at Wyhl, the Brokdorf site was occupied by the German authorities at dead of night to enable construction to start behind a moat and massive fortifications.

On the other hand, it is pointless to try to predict the course of events, or the forms that local opposition could take, during the four or more years that the plant will take to build.

Whatever the outcome at Plogoff, it is important to put it into the broader context of the development of the nuclear industry as a whole. Blocking a particular nuclear power station is of course vital for the people of the area, but will never hold up the expansion of nuclear power as a whole (save in cases where it is a first project, setting a precedent, as happened with the demonstrators against the first two planned plants in Denmark, against the Carnsore Point scheme in Ireland, and with the "No" in the referendum about Zwentendorf in Austria). The Point du Raz site may be saved by the people of Plogoff and the surrounding villages, with broad popular backing: but other power stations are going up despite local opposition at Cattenom, at Flamanville, at Le Pellerin; the plant at Gravelines was brought into operation despite the danger from cracks in the reactor vessel; opposition to an additional plant at Chooz on the Belgian frontier looks to have less chance of succeeding than that at Plogoff (unless official protests from Belgium, which was not consulted, carry any weight in Paris). Worse, the most dangerous and irresponsible scheme of all, for the 1300 MW fast breeder at Creys-Malville, advances towards completion. And the re-processing plant at La Hague continues to operate despite the growing evidence that the process is unworkable, despite the growing danger to the health of workers, and despite the risk of a major accident (such as almost occurred in April 1980).

#### Sweeping option

France has made perhaps the most sweeping nuclear option in western Europe, including above all the double risky bet on the illmastered technologies of waste re-processing and the fast breeder reactor. Both these links in the chain are already out of the reach of local opposition.

It is true that the practical failure of the La Hague plant to re-process enough used fuel to provide the necessary plutonium could well turn the Super-Phénix at Creys-Malville into the great white elephant of French technology. But otherwise, short of desperate action by workers at La Hague, or the disastrous eventuality of a major accident at one or other site, only a change of national policy could halt the French nuclear adventure. Such a change of policy is not even on the political horizon. It is inconceivable for either of the parties of the ruling coalition: and even were an opposition victory a political likelihood — which it is not given the deep split between socialists and communists — neither of these parties has a clear anti-nuclear platform. The Communists remain committed to the whole of the French programme, as a means to national "independence". The socialists are hesitant and

divided, their credibility weakened by a formal commitment to French nuclear weaponry.

The support for Plogoff from all over France is not one action of an organised anti-nuclear movement, also opposing all the other facets of the nuclear programme (prospection, mining, transport, enrichment, re-processing, fast breeders, waste disposal) which are going ahead challenged only by isolated local or regional groups. It is a spontaneous reaction to a local conflict that happened to catch the imagination : exactly parallel opposition to a public interest enquiry at Chooz, some months later, found no such national echo; a manifestation at La Hague brought only a fraction of those who attended the Plogoff gathering.

#### Into politics

Instead of a country-wide link-up of anti-nuclear groups, perhaps working out a strategy, France now has an ecological movement that has become deeply involved in the electoral game, with a candidate for the presidential elections of March 1982 already chosen, and the inevitable absorption of limited energy and resources into electoral campaigning. Ecological candidates, whether in the presidential or the legislative elections, offer no prospect of arriving in power to change France's national policies – nor indeed of achieving significant representation in Parliament in order to exert political influence on the main parties. And it is questionable whether the anti-nuclear movement, deprived of the resources poured into electoral activities, can achieve the degree of organisation that would enable it either to provide effective back-up for local struggles (at Plogoff and elsewhere) or to develop a massive campaign to inform public opinion.

It is perhaps instructive to compare the French experience with that of two other countries. In the Netherlands, the anti-nuclear and ecological movement has always steadily resisted being drawn into the party political area : instead it has attracted backing from members or supporters of all parties, has in its turn influenced party policies, and has also been able to mobilise strongly to support particular struggles. In Denmark, the OOA (Organisation for Information about Atomic Energy) has concentrated for the five years of its existence on information aimed at the citizen, and has succeeded in ensuring a level of information about the dangers of nuclear power that finally dissuaded the social-democrat government from risking holding a referendum to obtain a mandate to go nuclear.

The struggle at Plogoff will be long and hard. Hopefully, the local people and those who support them may even win it. But they are on their own, in a context where there is less chance of stopping the nuclear folly than anywhere else in western Europe.

**agenor** is a transnational socialist group, with members all over western Europe. It is organised as an open cooperative, and financed by regular contributions from members. Its aim is to help break down the barriers to understanding and active solidarity among the forces of the progressive left in Europe.

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