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■ ANTINUCLEAR SELLOUT

The Co-opting Of CASE

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Only fifty miles southwest of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolis sits the Comanche Peak nuclear power station, waiting to go on-line after fifteen years of construction. One engineer who worked on the plant calls it a "completely unsafe nuclear facility with a great potential for killing or injuring millions of people." Despite such warnings, as well as a history of opposition by local citizens and stinging rebukes by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Texas Utilities (T.U.), Comanche Peak's owner, is moving to apply for a low-power operating license, the penultimate step before commercial operation.

Ironically, Comanche Peak was put on the fast track to operation by the very citizens' group that, over the past decade, was most responsible for uncovering its chronic safety and quality-control problems. In July 1988, in an unprecedented agreement, the Citizens' Association for Sound Energy (CASE) suddenly withdrew its opposition to the plant's license, triggering the dissolution of the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, which was created by the N.R.C. in 1979 to monitor the plant's safety and design. In return, CASE was awarded a seat on a company-controlled oversight committee and a secret \$10 million cash payment. For the nuclear industry, eager to defuse popular resistance to the next generation of power plants, Comanche Peak's ability to co-opt its opponents and short-circuit essential public oversight establishes an encouraging precedent. For opponents, the story of CASE should stand as a warning.

Juanita Ellis, a church secretary, formed CASE soon after Comanche Peak broke ground in the mid-1970s. In cooperation with a number of plant employees, CASE developed a critique of the plant's design and construction and took it before the licensing board. The campaign against Comanche Peak received its first dividend in 1983, when the board refused to approve an operating license for the plant. Instead it rebuked the N.R.C. staff for "acquiescing" in T.U.'s sloppy design and construction and ordered the utility to undertake reinspection and reconstruction of the entire project.

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