

ANOTHER FORK IN THE ROAD

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It has been about a year now since three Fort Covington women first stood in front of Power Authority mega-machinery and blocked its entrance to the Black farm. Their decision to confront PASNY was not reached casually or without great trepidation.

After several months of occasional consideration of civil disobedience as a tactic, we sat one evening in a home in Fort Covington faced with the certainty that the time had come to make a decision. The living room was filled with the Fort Covington-Bombay landowners and a few of us from St. Lawrence County. There was a fire going in the fireplace; it was cold and snowy outside. PASNY had their injunction and intended to get into the Black's apple orchard.

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No one said, "We must block. We must risk arrest and jail." Rather, we hedged around for awhile, sometimes talking abstractly about the consequences of getting arrested, about the inevitable anxieties over doing something one has never done before.

"What about the children and the farm. Who will take care of them?" wondered one woman. Others replied that there would be support, that people would help out.

"Kids in school will make fun of the children because their parents are criminals," worried one father.

"My father took a lot of abuse and ridicule because he stood up for what he believed in, and I always respected him for it."

"I would rather have my children suffer a little teasing in school now than have them grow up knowing their parents didn't have the fiber to stand up and fight for their beliefs," said another father.

And so it went until late that night—talking about arrests, tactics, what PASNY might be planning. No apparent decision was reached but a couple of days later, when PASNY tried to enter the orchard, it was clear that some individuals had looked inside themselves and found the strength to wade into unfamiliar waters.

At that time, one year ago, we were faced with a rapidly changing situation and had to deal with the necessity for new strategies, new commitments. It was easier that evening to talk about legal suits, or petition campaigns, or any other tactic that had been used and that we felt comfortable with and accustomed to.

I sit here now reflecting on our history for two reasons.

The past is naturally more comfortable and less threatening than the future. We have seen the tactic of landowners and their supporters blocking construction and getting arrested become an almost monthly occurrence during 1977. We could still follow that path in our effort to slow down

and stop PASNY, but this step no longer has the impact on us, on our community, or on the progress of the power line that the first step into those icy waters had.

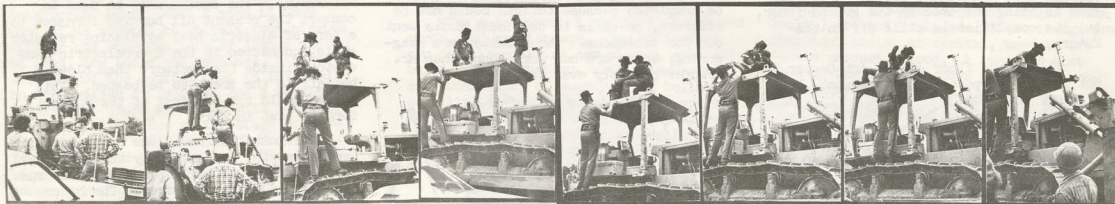
I look to that evening in Fort Covington for inspiration and courage. Everyone is asking the same question: "What do we do now?"

One thing is clear. Towers are going up at the north and south ends of the line. The towers are as terrible as we claimed they'd be; the towers will support 765,000 volts of electricity and an electro-magnetic field whose effect on people and the environment no one really understands; the towers will disrupt peoples' lives and farming operations; the towers will support a line destined to carry power from very large centralized generating stations, fueled either by James Bay hydropower, uranium, or coal.

We really have only two choices.

We can accept the line and let it go through unheeded now. We can comfort ourselves by reviewing a really solid history of effort and some victories along the way. We can send a telegram of support to the communities downstate that are just gearing up for their fight against comparable lines. And then we can go home and catch up on the unattended fences, the disorganized pantry, and the trip to Upper Canada Village we've been promising the children.

Or, we can clench our teeth and keep fighting: in the courts, in the PSC; in the legislature, and in the meadows.



A NORTH COUNTRY WOMAN PROTECTS HER FARM.

WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR?

- * We have all learned a lot about energy-related issues.
- * Everyone in the North Country knows about 765 kV lines; we have also spread the word over much of NYS and other parts of the country.
- * We have gotten the powerline issue covered favorably by national news media, including CBS-TV, The New York Times, and The Washington Post.
- * We have gotten county legislatures to pass resolutions against the line and to fund efforts to re-route the lines; we have gotten many community and professional organizations to pass similar resolutions.
- * We have slowed down construction of the line for at least a year with the PSC hearings and direct action efforts.
- * We have obtained an injunction against PASNY for the first time in its history.
- * We were instrumental in getting Lt. Governor Mary Anne Krupak to issue a statement calling for an immediate halt to construction until the health and safety issues of UHV lines are resolved.
- * As intervenors at the PSC hearings, we influenced the PSC staff in their decision to ask for a wider right-of-way and have won back a few acres of farmlands for the Edwards area.
- * We have helped initiate state legislation designed to reform PASNY.
- * We have formed a statewide KV alliance focused on resisting UHV lines everywhere in New York State.
- * We've met and worked with each other and formed a community alliance in order to protect ourselves from unacceptable government and utility plans for the North Country; we've taken the responsibility for our lives back into our own hands.

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WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE?

- *We must fight PASNY's appeal of the New York State Supreme Court injunction against them. If we win, no power project in the future may be certified before all PSC hearings are completed. This is a potential statewide victory and the effort needs money.
- *The PSC will probably grant final certification of the Ft. Covington-Marcy 765 kV line sometime in February or March. Do we want to appeal that decision? The effort requires research, secretarial skills, and money.
- *Once the PSC hearings are complete, we have an open door for a federal suit if there is a viable angle for such a suit. Do we want to pursue such a suit? The effort requires research, secretarial skills, and money.
- *More and more people are looking to us for information, literature, and speakers on the line issue. Do we want to provide this service for other communities? The effort requires mostly time and energy.
- *What tactics can now be used to stop the Fort Covington-Marcy 765 line? Should we consider an action of mass civil disobedience involving hundreds or thousands of people? What other tactics are still open to us? We need imagination, time and energy.
- *PASNY reform legislation will be re-introduced in the next state legislative session. We must mount massive letter-writing campaigns to see it pass, and support the Safe Energy Coalition's lobbying efforts. This requires talking to everyone you know and convincing them that it is worth 5 minutes of their time to write a letter.
- *Work on local development of acceptable sources of energy including wood, wind, sun and a broad range of conservation measures. This involves supporting positive County Planning Board suggestions, helping friends and neighbors who wish to invest in such measures for themselves, writing to state and federal officials. Remember: nuclear power and 765's are obsolete, let's not allow bureaucracy to resist the change to solar and conservation.
- *We always need money. We need some creative thinkers to come up with new ways of finding funds for all of our efforts.
- *Remain determined. If we can't effect change now, we may never have another chance.