seeking integral community
in an ecological age . . .


The “Ecozoic Era” is a time of mutually enhancing relationships among humans and the larger community of life.

The “Great Work” is living the promise of the ecozoic.

In this issue: “Breaking the Tragic Spell, Stopping the Suicidal Momentum,” by Alice Loyd; “Taking the Next Step,” by Lib Hutchby; and “Clean Coal Is a Dirty Lie,” by Robert McGahey

Each of the articles in this issue is a personal reflection on the author’s decision to participate in a protest of a potential new coal-fired power plant in North Carolina. Two of the authors chose civil disobedience and arrest.

BREAKING THE TRAGIC SPELL, STOPPING THE SUICIDAL MOMENTUM

On April 20, 2009, I went to Charlotte, North Carolina, to march in a rally and civil disobedience action to protest the construction of Duke Energy’s new coal-fired power plant at Cliffside in Rutherford County. Several hundred people from the Stop Cliffside coalition attended, and 44 were arrested when they stepped across a line in front of the Duke Headquarters building. Crossing the line emphasized our request to speak in person with Jim Rogers, Duke’s Chairman and CEO, to ask him to sign the Call to Conscience statement and stop building this plant. The specific act of disobedience had been selected by coalition leaders working with police to assure that our protest was peaceful.

I marched, while close friends and colleagues chose to risk arrest, and succeeded one by one as they stepped forward. We had reached this point in our global warming advocacy after many months of educating lawmakers, public officials, utility company personnel and the public about the dangers of burning coal at this time in history. Dr. James Hansen, NASA’s chief climate scientist, and Dr. William Schlesinger, former dean of the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University, sharing scientific expertise matched by altruism, had been speaking and writing about this expressly for North Carolina audiences. Wendell Berry and Bill McKibben had led a civil disobedience action against a coal plant in Washington, D.C., in early March. It was time for us to step up the pressure against our own coal plant project.

I marched, and may risk arrest in the future, because this coal plant is a flagrant symbol of the suicidal momentum now driving collective human conduct. Cliffside is well-named in this respect, since burning coal is one of the most dangerous features of the pattern that has put us at the edge of the cliff. On “60 Minutes” on the Sunday following our march, Jim Rogers said we must stop burning coal in the way the
Cliffside plant will, but he had to provide coal-fired electricity that way for the next 40 years. On the same program, Jim Hansen called for an absolute, immediate worldwide moratorium on new plants including Cliffside, because, he argued, we can't wait for 40 years to bring emissions dramatically down.

Cliffside represents all the instances in which our society seems under a tragic spell—we know we’re living dangerously, but we assume we cannot, or don’t have to, stop yet. And it demonstrates that societal solutions—changes in public policy—are essential. As individuals, as much as we may try, we are not able to reduce the use of fossil fuels sufficiently to save life as we know it. Our efforts are ensnared by the thousand tentacles of the technical, industrial, commercial wonderworld that these fuels empower. While individual efforts are important as acts of conscience, these efforts are imperceptible in the larger pattern.

Yet individuals cannot be resigned to the suicidal pattern. My choice to march is an effort to obtain news coverage and thus to inform the citizenry, just as my choice to write and speak with lawmakers is an effort to inform our leaders. Hoping to raise awareness on the part of stockholders and again get a story or two in the papers, I will also be in Charlotte at Duke Energy’s annual shareholder meeting. Orderly public resistance to business-as-usual has always been a part of cultural transformation. Until the people move into non-ordinary non-cooperation with the way things are, those in power are not inclined to change direction.

Gathering around Cliffside is an appropriate way for North Carolinians to lead into a new era because

- Coal is the number one contributor to rising carbon dioxide emissions.
- Mountaintop removal coal mining devastates the landscape and the communities the land supports.
- Coal ash, the waste product of coal burning, is a toxic pollutant for groundwater and streams near disposal sites.
- Mercury emissions from this plant would exceed clean air standards because Cliffside has been excused from meeting them by North Carolina’s Department of Air Quality.
- Cliffside is not designed to take advantage of whatever technologies might be developed to improve carbon extraction or sequestration.
- The plant is not intended primarily for local power needs; it will expand Duke’s out-of-state distribution area.
- Applying energy efficiency improvements is a cheaper, healthier, quicker and more economy-enriching way to provide equivalent power to North Carolina homes, businesses and public buildings.
- Energy efficiency improvements could be offered through a new bill, NC SAVE$ ENERGY (H1050), now in the General Assembly, which would establish a public benefits fund using income-scaled ratepayer contributions to create an independent administrator of energy efficiency services—generating jobs and reducing carbon emissions without raising taxes.

There are many reasons to stop Cliffside now. The only reason to continue construction is to preserve a customary means of making money for a few people who either do not see or do not choose to take responsibility for the consequences. And these few are in fact now protected from at least the financial consequences that might be incurred if a moratorium or new federal rulings require old-style plants such as Cliffside to shut down. A recent change in state law engineered by Duke and other utilities means that North Carolina electricity ratepayers will pay for the plant even if it never opens.

Utilities hold such power because they spend that much of ratepayers’ money on influencing legislators’ votes. I think it is time for that kind of power to be replaced by the power of individuals and groups banded together to act for the public good. We have a vision of better ways to live. My conscience calls me to match my prayers with potentially uncomfortable action in the really public sphere of the sidewalks and the streets, and possibly the jails.

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**TAKING THE NEXT STEP**

**Participating in civil disobedience is a personal choice of conscience.** On April 20, 2009, I marched with over 300 people down the side-walks of Charlotte, NC, to the headquarters of Duke Energy, the third largest polluter in the country to protest the building of a coal-fired power plant at Cliffside, a small town near Charlotte. Duke Energy had painted a bright orange line designating the edge of their property and threatened arrest if we stepped over the line.

**Coal-fired power plants are emitting over 100 million tons of CO2 per year, while mountaintop removal has permanently ruined over 450 Appalachian mountains and destroyed 1200 miles of streams.** It’s easy to understand why so many people might feel so angry, depressed, frantic, desperate, sad, or overwhelmed. While Larry Gibson, Nina and Mickey McCoy experience explosions on their mountains daily, I’m busy making the connections between mountaintop removal and turning on the lights in my house. I used to think that CO2 was great for plant life; now I know that too much CO2 is killing humans and plant-life, as mercury and other toxins are spewed from coal plant emissions.

Willing to risk arrest through civil disobedience, 44 people stepped over the line, myself included, and were arrested and charged with trespassing. My conscience insisted that I participate in civil disobedience, as I took very seriously the steps I had taken and took responsibility for my actions. The police seemed surprised by the numbers of arrestees—Duke Energy rate-payers, residents of topless mountains, teachers, physicians, members of mining families, lawyers, ministers, executive directors, senior citizens, and students.

What happened next brought a different kind of personal awareness. The police ran out of metal handcuffs and began to use plastic handcuffs. My belongings were put in plastic zip lock bags, the van (paddy wagon) seats were aluminum, the benches in the holding cell were concrete. Each of us required booking (paper-work in triplicate), finger-printing (using new scanners), and photography equipment. Each of us was given a bag lunch of bologna and cheese (in plastic), four slices of bread (in plastic), three cookies (in plastic), a granola bar, and an orange drink in waxed carton. Of course, there were extra policemen and the sheriff’s department was called in to help process so many people.

I hadn’t been in the Mecklenburg County jail long before I experienced the expectation for quiet, serious, no-smiles application of justice. Only one policewoman smiled routinely and she was a rookie. By the time I was released, I’d been frisked twice, had no privacy for the duration, and decided that jail usually houses folks who have routinely experienced violence, might have been abused as children, and the attitudes of their “handlers” was seldom necessary to maintain order, especially if they had not been taught non-violence.

Realizing that taking the step of civil disobedience had been much more painful for others before me, I sat pondering the whole idea of spending money, time, and energy to try to stop poisoning while I felt as though I was contributing to poisoning by observing all the money made in making plastic, paper, and electricity on my behalf. While Jim Rogers, CEO of Duke Energy, has spent millions and borrowed millions more, he refuses to stop polluting. The same coal-fired power plants that gave energy to make the plastic handcuffs were also used by the factory that made the zip lock bags and kept the lights on all over the jail. Knowing that it takes 4-5 gallons of water to make one plastic water bottle, I sat wondering how much water it took to make 44 pairs of thick plastic handcuffs, 44 large, thick plastic bags for personal items, 132 small plastic sandwich bags, and all the paper required for documentation. Then I thought about the concrete plant proposed near Wilmington, North Carolina, and how mining there would poison the water with arsenic and pollute the air with another coal-fired plant. I thought about the prison industry and non-violence.

**What if all children were reared to be non-violent?** What if the power companies produced clean energy, and what if there was no need for plastic? What if everyone ate locally grown organic food and cleaned all the waters of the earth? Sitting still for hours offers noticeable opportunities to pray and ponder many questions.
Continuing to reflect, I find myself still asking the same questions: How can we make love as contagious as fear? Why do some humans seem to have a conscience and others do not? How many personal disasters does it take for humans to stop denying the truth about the human causes of global warming? Wouldn’t it be amazing if all the money now spent to poison could be redirected towards healthy energy? When will mountaintop removal stop? How do we convince all divisions of government that prevention saves money, creates jobs, and provides a healthier, happier human?

_Fear is not the answer._ Once again, experience has taught me that love really is far more powerful than fear. Understanding how to love, even those with whom I strongly disagree, even when they threaten my life, has proven much more challenging, of course, than reading about it. Back in my childhood days of listening to hell-fire and damnation sermons, I was partially scared into action, patiently taught that if one didn’t love (love being synonymous with obedience), one would burn eternally. Obeying my parents and other authorities was translated into “being good,” which often translated into “you’d better be loving or else.” My awareness and rebellion ripened.

Developing conscience takes time. It is difficult! Facing neighbors, friends, and family with my perception of truth has drawn criticism because “killing” is considered too strong a word. Humans killing humans is an obvious violation of any ethical code. Legalized for soldiers, killing is also experienced from corporations’ poisoning for profit, funded by cooperative banks, and encouraged by shareholders. Citizens demand for more products generates wealth. Soldiers are taught to kill, taught to despise the enemy, and are given weapons to destroy. Corporations are taught that money and language can persuade. Government is slow to reform or regulate. Scientists require time to confirm the truth. The slow ethical response to “killing” by poisoning the air, water, and land which all life depends upon, is simply considered “too strong a word.”

Life’s gifts are too precious to squander, worth every minute of life-giving attention. Following one’s conscience gets complicated; yet it is as simple as **taking the next step.**

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**CLEAN COAL IS A DIRTY LIE**

It would go a great way to caution and direct people in their use of the world, that they were better studied in the creation of it. For how could [they] find the confidence to abuse it, while they should see the Great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part thereof?  
- William Penn, 1693

With climate change from excess burning of carbon hovering like a sword of Damocles over our heads, the way we produce electricity, and how much we use, has become critical. Since it produces CO2 previously locked away from the active carbon cycle, burning fossil fuels is the most damaging way to get our power. The power we use in North Carolina comes chiefly from coal, and most of that coal comes from dynamiting mountaintops in neighboring states. This is a matter of grave injustice.

Though there are promising new technologies available that will gradually close the gap, we are going to still be burning coal for at least a generation, with nuclear and hydropower being the other chief sources of baseload power (available 24 hours a day). But any additional capacity built needs to be as close to carbon-neutral as possible, and building more coal-fired plants is simply suicidal. A study commissioned by the state legislature in 2006 showed that with conservation, efficiency, and a modest growth in renewable energy, we would not need any added capacity in North Carolina for ten years. Despite this finding, Duke Energy is building a mammoth coal-fired plant at Cliffside, near Shelby. Construction at Cliffside had been temporarily halted by federal court order, which cited, in particular, the mercury

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pollution it would produce. Duke, however, got around this without changing the plant design by simply reclassifying this 800-megawatt plant as a “minor” source of pollution. The North Carolina Utility Commission and Governor Perdue went along with this bald-faced lie. The truth is, there is no clean coal, and we must stop building new plants.

On April 20, I joined 350 folks in a well-organized march in Charlotte to protest the Cliffside plant. We carried a Call to Conscience urging Duke CEO Jim Rogers to cancel the project, which was read in front of Governor Perdue’s office and outside Duke Energy headquarters. Rogers has built a reputation as a “green” power executive, speaking articulately about the need to reduce CO2 in power production. Indeed, while we were reading the citizen’s injunction and Call to Conscience outside his headquarters, Rogers was on the West Coast addressing a conference on renewable energy. On many occasions he has touted the “grandchild test” by saying we must steward a world in which our grandchildren have as much chance for a healthy life as we have enjoyed. On Monday I carried a sign reading, “Jim Rogers, you flunked the grandchild test.”

I was among 42 citizens who committed trespass and were arrested at Duke headquarters last Monday. I felt it an honor to be in the Mecklenburg County Jail with grandmothers in their 80s, students from Appalachian State missing class to be in Charlotte, environmental leaders and clergy, and most of all, victims of mountaintop removal, the most “efficient” but devastating way to mine coal. After being unsuccessful at hearings and having court injunctions circumvented by procedural lies, it’s now in the hands of citizens to proclaim the truth, even if we risk arrest and jail time in the process.

Who is this being built for? Not for us, because if we follow the recommendations of the study mandated by our legislature and the fresh thinking in the executive branch of the federal government, we don’t need Cliffside. Duke is an international corporation, not a public utility answerable to the citizens of this state, and this additional capacity is being built to sell for profit elsewhere. But the truth I went to Duke headquarters to witness was not simply to expose an external enemy. Our own behavior as consumers is the key to reducing demand. Power companies are producing a useful product; they’re just pushed to produce too much of it, and, in the absence of legislation capping carbon emissions and fair public utility regulations, in the wrong ways.

This is a justice issue, justice for the poorest among us who are already most impacted by global climate change, and justice for the rest of creation, which we put at risk by our arrogance and foolishness. It is a stewardship issue, not just of Creation put into our care by a loving Creator, but stewardship of our own species. For if we don’t radically dampen the accelerating CO2 curve, we are virtually assuring our own extinction, along with countless other species. As far as we know, we are the only beings in the universe where the creature can look within and find the Creator staring back. This is a sacred trust indeed.

So let’s continue to pressure Duke to stop Cliffside and other new coal plants. Urge your Congress folk to support strong legislation to cap carbon emissions. And become aware of your own habits around power use. We could immediately reduce demand by a third simply by conservation and installing more efficient appliances and compact fluorescents. I’m not the only one on trial here.

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*The mission of CES is to offer a vision of an ecozoic society and contribute to its realization through research, education and the arts.*

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