



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

In a Nutshell: Why Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Cannot Do “Work the World Needs”

Much could be and has been said on this topic, but these two paragraphs by former Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) physicist Manuel Garcia, Jr., originally published by the *Santa Fe New Mexican* some years ago, are most concise.

The "brilliant minds" and "use[less] infrastructure" of the nuclear labs are incapable of "work the world needs." That these nuclear weapons playpens might be "useful" to civilian purposes is a great misconception widespread among the public. Certainly, some of the individuals in these labs could apply themselves to "useful" work, applying technical skill to improve social conditions, if they were placed in the right setting (and in rare cases, on their own as lone scientist-inventors). But, such people are the exception. The vast majority are unable to conceptualize actual social needs, and few have technical expertise that is applicable to "real world" problems. Most of these "brilliant minds" need massive high-tech resources to work on arcane details of exotic physical situations with no relation to the experiences and problems that face most of humanity. Also, most of these "brilliant minds" expect lots of money for their work, and would not be cost effective to projects aimed at improving social conditions. Just like an old battleship is useless for passenger or cargo or fishing or ocean research purposes, the nuclear weapons people are similarly useless outside their niche. The only way to make the battleship useful for peaceful ends is break it up for scrap metal. Similarly, the only way to get "usefulness" out of nuclear weapons experts is to put them into civilian occupations at an entry level, and let them start over in a new "peace" mode. Few will show themselves to be brilliant.

The waste of the labs is that they suck up national resources (money and graduates of technical schools) that would be better spent on projects for the solution of real social problems (e.g., clean water worldwide, renewable energy, public health, care of the environment, etc.) and the education of new young experts to man these projects. Just as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars suck money out of the federal budget and impoverish our society (lack of funding at state and local level for social programs), so do the nuclear labs act like little fiscal black holes of war, that suck up what could otherwise be useful investment in technical education and socially beneficial research. The labs cannot be reprogrammed, only melted down and recycled.