At first glance, Lovejoy’s act of civil disobedience appeared solitary and isolated. His lone figure at the front of a courtroom battle further contributed to that impression. But a movement was afoot. Indeed, in the seven months between Lovejoy’s tower toppling and his acquittal, the town’s citizens learned that Montague Farm envisioned a multifaceted assault on the proposed nuke. Beyond Lovejoy’s bold move, the fight would take place across the local political scene. The communards and other antinuclear advocates began local organizing efforts to educate the community about the perils of nuclear power, and they rallied local political interest at the ballot box and the town meeting.

In fact, the fight against the Montague nuke had modestly begun a few months prior to Lovejoy’s action. Even before the formal proposal for the twin nukes went public, Ralph Nader’s Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group challenged Northeast Utilities (NU) secrecy over recent Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) safety studies. Meanwhile, Montague Farm and other local communes formed an umbrella antinuclear organization called Nuclear Objectors for a Pure Environment (NOPE). That group quickly advocated unqualified nuclear prohibition and established a grassroots education movement to garner local support.

With the bump in antinuclear attention following Lovejoy’s destruction of the tower, NOPE expanded into formal politics in 1974. The Nuclear Objectors Party (NO Party) forwarded a slate of candidates for Montague Town offices that May, including Montague Farm communards Anna Gyorgy—who had a degree in city planning—for selectperson and Lovejoy for town meeting member. Meanwhile, the NO Party placed a referendum on the Montague ballot, which asked whether twin nukes should be built in Montague. Electoral returns were
discouraging. NO Party candidates garnered a scant 6 percent of the local vote. The initiative in favor of construction passed by 3-to-1. Despite those meager results, the NO Party—composed primarily of Montague communards—had succeeded in publicizing its antinuclear agenda and considered its modest gains that spring to bode well for a prolonged antinuclear campaign.5

Having made progress in town, the communards ratcheted up their efforts across Franklin County. To that end, the Franklin County Alternative Energy Coalition (FCAEC) formed in June 1974. The organization's first goal focused on continuing electoral initiatives. By canvassing door to door, the FCAEC collected enough signatures to place a dual referendum on the Massachusetts Senate District ballot. The proposition asked the state senator to oppose the Montague plant and to sponsor a resolution to close and dismantle nuclear plants at Rowe, Massachusetts, and Vernon, Vermont. In November 1974—two months after Lovejoy's acquittal—47.5 percent of State Senate District voters opposed the Montague plant; in Montague alone, the number of voters who opposed the twin nukes rose by nearly 40 percent between the spring and fall elections. Shockingly, more than a third of voters actually voted to dismantle the existing plants at Rowe and Vernon. Nevertheless, the initiatives had been defeated.6

So early in the fight against NU, electoral gains were only a small part of the FCAEC's battle plan. Indeed, its primary goal was to raise voter education and awareness of nuclear energy and alternative power sources. Success in that regard proved difficult to gauge, but Gyorgy saw progress: "People began to realize that you didn't have to live on top of a nuke to be affected by it, and that you didn't have to be a physicist to understand the problems of nuclear power."7 With no nukes bumper stickers popping up around town, electoral support on the rise, and Lovejoy's acquittal in hand, the communards at Montague Farm were cautiously optimistic.

But they needed help. The commune's established self-sufficiency, core organic values, and history of Movement activism set it apart as a stable site from which to launch Franklin County's antinuclear fight. But the communards found it difficult to find activist types outside of the region's young and hip set of communal farmers. From Packer Corners, Marty Jezer observed the struggle of the Montague family to broaden the FCAEC's activist base: "It was able to break out of its freak/new left/counter-culture/communal base only to the extent that these new settlers began to blend in and work with other segments of the population. Which meant that though gains were made, it was still a small isolated radical group of hard core activists."8 Thus, it remained unclear whether the Montague farmers could expand on their modest electoral gains and