

Opinion/Commentary/Letters

# British nuclear caution urged

By BRYAN SILCOCK  
LONDON — Foes of nuclear energy here, unlike those in the United States and elsewhere, have made virtually no headway since the first British atomic power plant was built two decades ago. But now the anti-nuclear lobby is receiving support from an unexpected source — the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.

Royal Commissions are government-appointed bodies created to examine various fields. And, as their august title implies, they tend to be composed of establishment figures with conservative views. Thus it was surprising that the report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, recently published after two years of investigation, should have reached relatively radical conclusions.

The Commission did not flatly condemn nuclear energy, but reluctantly conceded that there may ultimately be no alternative. Yet it spelled out the dangers of atomic power in terms that prompted spokesmen for the nuclear industry to charge that it expressed "exaggerated fears."

These fears do not include doubts about reactor safety. On the contrary, the Commission minimized

the risk of serious mishaps, saying that their consequences would not differ in scale or substance from other industrial accidents. Therefore, the report stated, nuclear power should not be abandoned for this reason alone.

But the Commission emphasized other concerns — the accumulation of intensely radioactive waste that will have to be stored for centuries, the threat that terrorists might hijack plutonium shipments and manufacture crude atomic weapons, and the prospect of nuclear proliferation. It also voiced the hope, rather forlornly, that another strategy could be found to replace a large nuclear program based on fast reactors.

This hope has touched a sensitive nerve here, since the British government is currently contemplating the idea of moving forward with a demonstration commercial fast breeder reactor.

There are compelling economic and technological motives for pushing ahead with fast breeders. They can extract about 60 times more energy than a conventional reactor from a given quantity of uranium. With uranium prices already soaring — and with the prospect of acute shortages rising if fast breeders are not developed — this is a

key consideration for a country like Britain.

But a commitment to fast breeders means a commitment to plutonium, one of the most toxic substances known to man.

Can this material, which does not occur in nature, be handled safely on an industrial scale? Can it be kept out of the wrong hands?

The case against the fast breeder, consequently, is strong — and it is being argued strenuously by Britain's anti-nuclear lobby.

My guess, however, is that it will not deter the British government from continuing to pursue an energy policy whose main lines were laid down more than 20 years ago, when work began on a small, experimental breeder reactor in northern Scotland.

So, after a decent interval in which additional funds are allocated to research other ways of mobilizing energy in accordance with the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the project to construct the fast breeder reactor will probably get the green light.

Nevertheless, the anti-nuclear lobby ought not to be written off. It may lack the influence to halt the fast breeder program, but its efforts to alert the public to the hazards of radioactive waste has triggered a response. After years of struggle, therefore, the lobby is finally beginning to meet with success.

The anti-nuclear lobbyists are also making some gains in their efforts to block a \$1 billion project to enlarge a major reprocessing plant at Windscale, in northwest Britain. Their cause was recently aided by the discovery of radioactive leaks at the plant.

The Royal Commission has indirectly aided the adversaries on nuclear programs by warning that big atomic projects should not be initiated before the means to deal safely with radioactive waste are in place.

The fight between the partisans and enemies of nuclear power is still unresolved in Britain. But the debate so far has at least raised the question of precautions — and that is crucial, both here and elsewhere in the world, if the development of nuclear energy is going to move forward.

(Silcock writes on science and technology for the London Sunday Times.)

Slouch

by Jim Earle



"THE CAMPAIGN TO CONSERVE ENERGY DIDN'T INCLUDE THIS KIND OF ENERGY!"

## Is bureaucratic inefficiency inherent?

By Martha D. Watts

During the week of registration I came to the rude awakening that everyone on campus spends seemingly endless hours just standing in various lines. Waiting in one line for 30 minutes might be reasonable except once you reach the end you are then instructed to proceed to another location (usually across campus) only to stand in another line for at least the same amount of time as the first.

Why does this system of infinite paper work highly resemble all other bureaucracies in that they take so much of one's valuable time and appear to be extremely unorganized? Unfortunately, for every piece of relatively significant information that is recorded on paper it must be copied and sent to other locations for future reference.

On the A&M campus if a student decides to change majors he must first obtain the records from the original major department and take them to the department of his new major. Then during the registration

period the card packet must be sought out and taken to the new department. However, after all of this has taken place, the student may find that he is still given the heading of the old major on his tuition receipt.

In the business world people may find the same degree of difficulty in correcting an account which was

## Readers' Forum

fouled up by a central company computer. This could, however, take even more time due to the fact that there are so many people who handle one account for various different reasons. Therefore, lines of communication stand a much greater chance for becoming crossed.

Is there an answer in sight to this omnipresent problem? Currently a committee has been formed and given one year in which to devise a plan for easing some of the problems faced by A&M students from the time they first enroll to the time they graduate. This is a step in the right direction and hopefully other bureaucratic systems will also be developing ways to clear up their red tape.

## Farmers unappreciated

Editor:  
I was appalled to hear two women in the Commons last Thursday afternoon complaining of the high price of food and loudly blaming the American farmer for the inflationary spiral. Granted, everyone feels the wallet growing thin as they approach the grocery check-out aisle, but heavy criticism of the farmer is inaccurate and shortsighted.

The truth is that your food is amazingly cheap. Americans as a whole spend only 20.7 per cent of their income on food compared to the Asians' 85 per cent. If we applied the same per cent of income to the food prices of 1957 as we have to the average hourly wage, a pound of hamburger would cost today over \$2, a steak well over \$3, and a quart of milk would be unaffordable at a dollar a quart.

Consumers should be well aware that when we began as a nation, we

were a nation of farmers, 50 per cent of the population worked the soil as compared to the five per cent today. One farmer feeds 50 on ten per cent less acreage. Agricultural producers of this country produce twice as efficiently as the rest of the world combined, allowing the U.S. to enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. Each of us is a part of a massive agri-business complex through direct consumption of one of the twenty American products every hundred that work in the industry.

So the next time you see that pound of hamburger or potatoes, instead of cursing the farmer, raise a toast of gratitude to his thankless production. A toast to the American farmer, the agricultural production that makes your choice of food possible.

—Mark G. Fox

## P.E. signup system needs change

Editor:  
The system of signing up for Physical Education is in dire need of improvement.

I am a transfer student and have just experienced for the first time the confusion, inconvenience, and disappointment that characterizes P.E. registration.

After standing in a seemingly endless line to get my "little orange cards," I had to stand in another line only to find the activity I wanted had only two sections. One of the times was in conflict with my schedule, so I took the only section left.

I didn't like the time I got with. However, the possibility of another activity were worked would also mean another stand in line.

Why can't the P.E. Department list particular activities and times in the schedule of classes? Then the students might have a chance of getting a convenient class.

The college I transferred from had this. It worked very smoothly with a large number of students required to take P.E.

—Julie Speig

## Upperclassmen want dorm space

Editor:  
After having read the letters from your Jan. 27 issue, we would also like to express our opinion concerning the new dormitory policy at Texas A&M.

It is ridiculous to allot any dormitory space to the Freshmen of 1977 before giving rooms to those who are now students at the University and have been waiting patiently for months to get a dorm assignment and end the hassles of off-campus life. These hassles include the following: (1) often having to wait for long periods of time in terrible weather to get to school due to inefficient shuttle bus service, (2) having to spend time each day fixing one's own food instead of studying, (3) being away from all on-campus activities, and (4) paying outrageous sums for rent at local apartment complexes.

The enrollment at Texas A&M has far outgrown the University's housing capacity, causing a tremendous demand for the limited dormitory space made available each year. Yet giving such priority to incoming Freshmen is a grossly unfair and humiliating to those of us who are waiting to move into a dorm.

—Tommy Adams  
—Ed  
—Colleen  
—Christine  
—Anna  
—Debbie  
—Wayne

## Readers' forum

Guest viewpoints, in addition to Letters to the Editor, are welcome. All pieces submitted to the forum should be:

- Typed triple space
- Limited to 60 characters per line
- Limited to 100 lines

Submit articles to: The Editor, The Battalion, Room 216, Reed McDonald Building, College Station, Texas 77843. Author's name and phone number must accompany all submissions.

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