

A great and exhausting debate has been raging between those who question the safety of nuclear-power plants and those who defend them. The emotion generated by this discussion must not be allowed to conceal the essential facts of the situation. The nuclear industry has an outstanding record of safe operation. No other industry -- and this for obvious reasons -- has been as conscious of its obligations to protect its workers, the public and the environment itself. In a world in which everyone, every day, is exposed to innumerable hazards, we must keep a sense of proportion. Man would be foolish indeed to deny himself a source of energy that he sorely needs. This planet has yielded up the fossil fuels that permitted us to launch our industries. But fossil fuels cannot sustain us through the centuries, and I say this in the full realization that mankind may have to learn to limit its energy consumption. When we consider the risks of nuclear power, we must also weigh against them the risks that will arise if we turn away from nuclear power. Not only the risks that arise from the alternatives that we can temporarily employ -- coal, oil and gas -- but also the risks that would arise were the nations, facing a global shortage of energy, to come into conflict over the sharing of what was left.

I do not wish to be misunderstood on this question. I do not suggest that problems do not exist or that they are capable of simple solutions -- rather that they are capable of management at an acceptable cost if adequate resources are brought to bear.

Peace is more than the absence of war. To have peace we must build a world society in which man can express his personality and develop his potential without attacking his neighbour or coveting his goods. That is why nuclear fission has such a great contribution to make to the building of a peaceful world, and to the eradication of poverty. Substantial efforts have been made by the United Nations, by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and by individual countries in this great endeavour. My own country has played an important part by co-operating with developing countries in their own nuclear-power programs.

Perhaps it is well, however, to add a word of caution based upon our own experience. Nuclear energy is only a tool for economic development. It has its limitations. It is massively expensive. Only the richest and most highly-industrialized countries can afford the experimentation that is essential to the development of the technology.

For example, the production of electricity from nuclear reactors has now reached the state where it is possible to contemplate the building of large generating-stations wherever there is a demonstrable need for large amounts of electrical power, and where the power generated can be brought to bear effectively on the solution of existing problems. The question is: how many developing countries can meet these criteria?

We have all heard of the "agro-industrial complex", and particularly the project that is under study in India. This would involve the use of nuclear power to pump deep-underground water to the surface for irrigation. As I understand it, nuclear power would also be used for the local production of