

Nuclear Power

We must look into the question of nuclear waste management, both the disposal of it and the reprocessing of it, to get the utmost value from the ores and metals produced in Canada. As I understand it, reprocessing is an expensive proposition and is not undertaken in this country at the present time. That does not mean to say we cannot look forward to the day when we will be able to undertake reprocessing in Canada.

The parliamentary secretary briefly addressed the question of nuclear waste disposal and the various methods which might be adopted to safely dispose of nuclear waste in the long term. He mentioned particularly underground burial in areas of stable rock and granitic plutons in the Canadian shield. He referred to the work that has been done close to Whiteshell in Manitoba in this respect. If I have any criticism it would probably be that insufficient finances have been made available to the underground laboratories in that area. If the Minister of State for Mines (Mrs. Erola) is listening perhaps she could put that on her list of priorities for additional funding. I know she has a great many areas which quite deservedly should be priorities on her list and it must be very difficult for her to prioritize them.

The safety of the industry has been demonstrated. In his presentation the parliamentary secretary said he knew of no one who had ever been adversely affected by the operation of a nuclear power plant. If we look at the accident statistics in the nuclear industry, as compared with other forms of energy generating industries, we will find they are comparable and in a good many cases probably the number and severity of accidents are less in the nuclear industry for instance than in the generation of electricity by the use of coal.

In total, the generation of electricity by the use of uranium probably is safer than the generation of electricity by the use of coal. He referred to the general levels of radiation, the radiation to which all people are subject; natural radiation and cosmic radiation. One he did not mention was the application of fertilizers to farmers' field, potash, for instance, which to a limited extent is radio-active. It is spread over a large area and eventually finds its way into waterways. Radioactivity brought about by the application of fertilizers to the arable land of this country, in total, is much greater than radiation caused by the mining and utilization of uranium.

Finally, I want to look at the proposal for a moratorium which is before us—a public inquiry to be followed by a referendum. I wonder if the hon. member who proposed this has really thought about the effect a moratorium would have on the existing industry in Canada. What would it do to the people on the exploration side of the industry. What would it do to the people who work in the uranium mines in Saskatchewan, Ontario and in other provinces in Canada who would suddenly find themselves out of work? What would it do to the electricity supply? What would it do to our export markets? We would be making a dreadful mistake if we were to follow the recommendation of the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill. I think we have just about had a stomach full of public inquiries into the uranium industry. We have had them in Saskatchewan and we have had them in British Columbia. We

have had any amount of them. That is not to say that some good did not come out of them. There were some good recommendations made in Saskatchewan.

● (1650)

Only recently, the legislature of the Northwest Territories publicly debated this matter in Committee of the Whole. They heard various experts. They did not go so far as to suggest a moratorium, but the exercise was useful in that experts in the field were able to present their views, and members of the general public were able to find out the various viewpoints and come to their own conclusions. However, I think we have already had enough inquiries into this. We know what we must do. The matter has just about been studied to death.

In so doing we have found out the areas in which further research is required. These have been identified, and what we probably want now is both private funding—I am always in favour of private funding, because that does not cost the public purse anything—and maybe even some public funding into these areas of concern and research which have already been identified.

With respect to the proposed referendum, I do not really want to say anything more. Ideas of referendum have been debated ad infinitum. They have been debated to death in this House over the last few weeks. However, probably the most sensible ideas on referenda expressed recently in the last few weeks were those expressed only the other day by the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen). Instead of repeating what he said, I would advise hon. members who are interested to look at *Hansard* and find out what the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton said on this matter.

Mr. Knowles: He's our Edmund Burke.

Mr. Nickerson: In conclusion, I would submit that the decision as to whether we are to proceed into the nuclear age has already been made.

An hon. Member: That's the point.

Mr. Nickerson: What the hon. member is trying to do now is engage in a last effort in futility. I think it would be wrong and disastrous to the Canadian economy and disastrous to the Canadian future.

What we should do, as Canadians, is go ahead to the nuclear age with confidence.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, I expect most people would agree that we should indeed go slow on nuclear until we have solved waste problems. The importance of dealing with management, storage and ultimate disposal of used nuclear fuel is an issue which concerns many thoughtful people, and this is recognized in the National Energy Program which includes a statement, and I quote:

If we make the right decisions today about all of our energy opportunities, we can move quickly off world oil, while still giving ourselves the time to analyse