

Nuclear power a folly

by Michael Greenfield

When Walter Patterson was growing up in Manitoba every farm had 2 windmills, one that ran the pumping system and another that provided electricity. Nowadays the power company is using a lot of energy trying to prevent the electric

lines from being blown down by the strong winds.

Last Wednesday Mr. Patterson spent 1 and 1/2 hours illustrating the folly of present energy management and the inadequacy of nuclear power as the answer to our problems.



Walt Patterson says nuclear power is wasteful and not at all what it's cracked up to be. Michael Walsh / Dal Photo.

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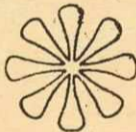
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Many Canadians falsely pride themselves on Canada's supposed development of peaceful uses for nuclear energy. However, as Mr. Patterson pointed out, nuclear energy has always been a military concern whether in Canada or elsewhere. The plutonium that Canada mines goes to the U.S. and European countries for weapons use. It is highly likely that the French bomb blasts in the Pacific were caused by Canadian plutonium. The AECL has no ethical qualms about selling nuclear technology to countries that cannot justify their needs in a civil context. If Canada is so peace-loving why are we willing to sell nuclear ability to a country like South Korea that has publicly expressed the desire to obtain nuclear weapons capabilities?

However even the peaceful uses of the atom poses a danger to man. The arguments against nuclear power that Mr. Patterson was most interested in the ethical arguments. Nuclear waste is a totally alien substance. It has been synthesized only recently by man and is the most toxic substance on earth; it will remain toxic for thousands of years. No one can guarantee that these wastes can be totally sealed away for the necessary period of time. The question Mr. Patterson poses is, "Do we take the risk of poisoning this planet for ever?"

Especially when the use of nuclear power is so easy to avoid. Most of the electricity produced is needed to heat private homes. Walter Patterson calls it "thermodynamic lunacy" to use heat to turn the turbines that produce the electricity, then spread the electricity to the needed location and convert the electricity back to heat. One plant out in California is using natural gas to run the turbines!

Inefficient, narrow, and just plain stupid uses of our available resources are easier to correct than one might have been led to believe. We assume that only through progress in technology can we cope with our energy needs. A technocracy with its unquestionable experts have blinded many of us to the more practical and simple solutions.

Not everyone has been so impractical. Many sewage treatment plants especially in Britain run on the methane produced by the

decomposing sewage. In the Middle East almost every house has its own solar water heater. Holland is undergoing a study for optimum windmill placement sites. One person attending Mr. Patterson's talk was interested in setting up his own windmill. In the face of a dangerous and expensive nuclear technology some people are turning toward practicality.

There is also a myth going around that nuclear power is cheaper, provided more jobs. Mr. Patterson was particularly concerned with these points. He pointed out that original estimated costs have always been far below the end total. Point Lepreau was originally estimated to cost \$250 million but the figure is now close to a billion dollars. As to providing more jobs, Mr. Patterson pointed out that, probably more jobs would be created by diffusing the area of labor, instead of one big nuclear plant, more smaller plants would undoubtedly require more labour.

In a way Mr. Patterson's speech was like having a blinder torn away from one's eyes. The Canadian people have unquestioningly believed the experts or the government. Fortunately there are people like Mr. Patterson who have started to question. And it's about time the Canadian people begin to question and judge the actions of the Canadian government and the AECL.

Image

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Dalhousie compares favorably with the other universities in the metro area, though Dalhousie is often criticized for not doing as much in that field as their counterparts, notably St. Mary's University.

University planning, financing, the sports complex and student housing were all subjects touched upon at the meetings. From the press point of view Dalhousie often seems like an enormous, incomprehensible institution with little of news interest going on, at least that's how some of the press seemed to view it. Hopefully this will change as a better rapport is established between the university and the media. Certainly the discussions proved useful to the Gazette and provided ideas for future feature stories, if not hard news stories.