

flaw in it if it were not to take into account the reality of nuclear power and the difficulty of the questions which that particular source of energy raises for us. I find this to be a topic which is often left out of energy discussions, almost as if it is something one does not mention. We talk about off-oil policies, for instance, but we act as if everyone knows what we mean by 'switching to other sources'. We do not really want to talk about it. The words "nuclear power" almost carry, the same stigma as cancer had 20 years ago. It is almost unmentionable.

Today we want to mention it within the context of the obvious commitment of this government to nuclear power as an integral part of the energy strategy for Canada. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. MacLaren), with whom I have debated in the past, particularly over the experimental vault which they are using to study the effect of long-term radioactive waste disposal in Lac du Bonnet gave on the late show one night what I considered to be a most uncritical description of the role of nuclear power in Canada. It was really disgraceful to hear a member of the government coming out with such a naive innocent view of nuclear power. He did not even acknowledge there were any serious questions attending the subject of nuclear power. I think that is bad.

My contention this evening is that nuclear power should be the subject in this country of a genuine political debate. It is too important an issue to be pursued uncritically by this or any other government, dependent upon the advice and, more important, the world view of the people who are involved in the nuclear industry. Nuclear power is not just a technical question, it involves a way of seeing the world and understanding how we want to move into the future. Topics of these kinds are appropriate subjects for political debate and this is what I wish to suggest this evening to the House of Commons. If we want to do our job properly, and if the government wants to enable us to do it properly, then somehow, in some context, the subject of nuclear power should come before the House for open and intelligent debate.

My colleagues to the right, the Progressive Conservatives, when they were in power were willing to hold a parliamentary inquiry. We would prefer a public inquiry—a much larger exercise into the whole question of nuclear power—but at least, as the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway said earlier, they were willing to acknowledge that there was dissension and concern about this particular subject. I give them credit for that. It may have been the case—as I suspected at the time—that the committee would have been force-fed with documents from Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. It would not really have come to any startling conclusions, but nevertheless there was the acknowledgment there of the issue.

We in the NDP are in favour of a moratorium on the construction of further nuclear reactors until such time as a real debate can take place. We feel that without such a debate the Canadian people will be led down a particular energy path they would not wish to follow if they had the opportunity to really think about the matter in any great depth. I prefer—and

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as an individual member of Parliament I will have a private member's bill coming before the House to this effect—that we have a referendum on the use of nuclear power. At least if there were a referendum there would be a conscious choice to be made. The Canadian people would have the opportunity to choose whether or not they wish to have a nuclear future. I know the subject of referenda is quite controversial these days, but I nevertheless personally support such a course in this case.

In the debate on metrication in this House, I said that one of the things which needed to happen if politics was to continue to be an alive and vital process in this country, was that the parameters of political debate needed to be expanded; more and more of the decisions which have traditionally been made by the bureaucracy have to be brought into the political process. If people are to continue to have a feeling that political processes matter, if they are to continue to feel that this House of Commons matters—if, indeed, they still feel that—then the parameters of political debate have to be enlarged. This is part of the general malaise which besets us—the parameters are so small that people feel that too much happens automatically without any real debate. This may be the fault of the people as well. However, it is also because they are being falsely comforted on issues such as energy. For instance, in the area of energy, they are being falsely comforted by the advertising campaign of the government, by assurances that we have what it takes, that it is just a matter of relying on the structures, the values and the goals that we have now and our energy needs will be looked after with no problem at all.

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Why then is nuclear power such an important question? Why should it be set aside as different from other energy decisions for a specific debate, a debate which might take the form of a moratorium—followed by a decision-making process such as a referendum or perhaps merely a decision of this House or some other process? Actually, nuclear energy is not all that different from any other form of energy in the sense that all energy decisions involve the kind of moral and political decisions which we contend are involved in this issue.

Nuclear power, like any other energy form, cannot and must not be discussed only within a technical framework. The minute we begin to do this we narrow the scope of the discussion and in doing so we miss many of the important points which must be taken into consideration. The form of energy we use determines many aspects of our life, from our relationship to others to our relationship to the environment, our relationship to the future.

In terms of our relationship with others, for instance, and its effect on the structure of our society, nuclear power is a highly centralized form of energy which creates dependence and destroys the self-reliance of communities and regions. Nuclear energy creates the need for security to protect the installations from, for example, the theft of radioactive material. Nuclear energy involves a highly technical and capital-intensive infrastructure in order to maintain and operate the system, not to