

region, the Atlantic Provinces, nuclear energy has surged in importance with the completion of the LePreau Nuclear Station and with the possibility that another one would be built at LePreau before long.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Canada has placed a high priority upon efforts to open up overseas markets for the Candu reactor, especially in the last two years. India, Pakistan, Argentina, South Korea and Rumania have all signed contracts with Canada, although of course we have had to end further negotiations with India following the explosion of a nuclear device by that country in 1974. The irony, sir, is that we have continued to feed Argentina's appetite for a nuclear capacity, even though, at the height of its war with Britain over the Falklands, Argentina's Vice Admiral Castro Madero, head of his country's national energy commission, told the International Atomic Energy Commission in Vienna that Argentina reserved the right to develop nuclear energy for military purposes.

• (1720)

In any event, despite the fact that we have lost millions of dollars in our various overseas sales of the Candu reactor—Korea being the only case, I believe, where we actually turned a profit—the export of our nuclear technology remains a major part of what little international trade strategy the current federal Government has deemed it important enough to formulate. Indeed, total federal Government outlays on nuclear energy over the past 30 years amount to some \$4 billion. And there is certainly little evidence that I can discern that any significant let-up can be expected in the foreseeable future.

The point, Mr. Speaker, in connection with Bill C-270, is this: for good or ill, the nuclear option has been embraced by Canada. Like it or not, the point of no return has probably been passed, if for no other reason than the fact that about 36,000 jobs depend on it. Given those realities, the task facing us Parliamentarians, those in this House and those in the Senate, is to ensure that our society's interests are fostered in every way possible in connection with nuclear power. In that respect, I believe we have been woefully neglectful. Bill C-270 is aimed at making up for lost time.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to elaborate briefly. The Atomic Energy Control Act, passed in 1946 and amended only slightly since then—I believe there was only one amendment, in 1974—is the principal legislative instrument for the regulation of Canada's nuclear energy program. Its pith and substance, as my lawyer friends would say, are to control nuclear materials and facilities in the interests of health, safety and security. That control is supposed to be achieved by a comprehensive licencing system, including both the evaluation of an application before the issuance of a permit and a subsequent follow-up inspection to ensure compliance. The Atomic Energy Control Board, as everyone in this House will know, is the agency through which the Act is applied.

Nuclear Control and Administration

The chief problem is that the 1946 Act is appallingly out of date, a fact acknowledged by almost every thoughtful Government and non-Government observer alike. In 1977, the Government of the day sought to replace the Act with a "troughly modern Milly" of a Bill, the Nuclear Control and Administration Act. Unfortunately, the Bill was allowed to die on the Order Paper, and we have seen neither hide nor hair of it since then.

Bill C-270, before us for debate today, like the sister Bill of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bruce-Grey, Bill C-218, seeks to resuscitate the Nuclear Control and Administration Act of 1977, with certain improvements made to it. In a nutshell, my Bill would do the following things. In general, the Bill seeks to correct certain drafting flaws in the initial Act. Second, again generally, it seeks to decrease the amount of discretion vested in the relevant regulatory body by opening up the entire process to the public and by enhancing the authority of Parliament itself.

Specifically, the Bill broadens the scope of nuclear regulation by declaring all types of nuclear facilities for the general advantage of the country. Matters related to national defence would be covered by the Act unless explicitly excluded. The Minister of the Environment (Mr. Roberts) is delegated responsibility for the Act on the grounds that environmental considerations, including human health, must be deemed paramount in the nuclear field. The Bill contemplates a slightly larger regulatory board whose meetings would be public to ensure due process and whose members would include people chosen from the public at large, rather than merely from among activists in the nuclear industry itself, as is now too often the case. Provisions have been added to decrease the potential for a conflict of interest on the part of members appointed to the regulatory agency.

More precision is provided to ensure that professional, scientific, technical and other personnel are hired to ensure the health and safety of the public and the protection of the environment. But this need not involve an added burden on the Treasury because some of those people, probably all of them, could be seconded from other areas within the federal bureaucracy. The Act is given more muscle in other ways also in terms of ensuring that health and environmental factors are taken fully into account in the nuclear field; for example, by requiring applicants to submit environmental impact assessments which must, in turn, be reviewed, studied and decided on by the regulatory board. At present, such a procedure is dependent on the whim of the powers that be. Again, procedures are specified to maximize involvement by, and notice to, the public in relation to the regulatory process.

Of special concern to me, and no doubt to other Members, is the matter of nuclear waste. The topic is dealt with specifically in my Bill. More broadly, the improved mechanisms and procedures for public participation included in Bill C-270 will better ensure that health and environmental concerns will be reflected in all decisions made under the authority of the legislation.

Allow me to conclude, Mr. Speaker, with two brief points: first, currently our nuclear waste is stored in interim reservoirs, so-called swimming pools, on the site of each of the reactors