

Private Members' Business

Cobalt 60 is a human-made radioisotope produced using a nuclear reactor. Radioisotopes are used to help diagnose medical ailments and prescribe remedies. Such isotopes can detect how well organs are functioning, how well the body absorbs particular substances, and where tumours might be located. They have a range of valuable uses.

The hon. member has told this House of Commons and all Canadians that AECL is a waste of money. Are all these facts a waste of money? The hon. member should take a second look and do his homework.

I will end my comments here. I have much more I would like to say to educate the hon. member, but I will pay due respect to the Chair. My time is up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that I am very happy to take part in the debate on Bill C-285. First of all, I wish to thank the NDP member who introduced this bill and who has done so in such an entertaining and informative way.

Bill C-285 provides for the elimination of financial support for nuclear reactor design and construction. That prospect is viewed by the Bloc Québécois as interesting and relevant under the present circumstances.

Indeed, how could we not have doubts about the nuclear energy development policy of the Canadian government and the significant investments required for the implementation of that policy. As the Official Opposition of the House of Commons, we are deeply concerned by energy development policies.

Our concerns are twofold. First, we should wonder about the environmental costs of the development of any type of energy, in this instance nuclear energy, and second, about the impact the development of such energy may have on the economy of a country. I would like to take a few minutes to discuss those two issues.

The Minister of Natural Resources of Canada said recently to the Nuclear Awareness Project that she believed it would be appropriate to continue to develop nuclear energy in Canada. But at what cost to the environment and the Canadian taxpayers, that is the question.

First of all, in the industrial process of long term development of nuclear energy, the risks for the human environment are very high. Indeed, we know fully well that radioactive waste produced by the nuclear industry is most dangerous to the human species. Spent fuel represents not only the highest risks, but also the most difficult challenge if we want to find a safe, long term method of storage.

• (1845)

After 500 years, for example, nuclear fission material produced by the Canadian nuclear industry will still be active. In

December 1992, there were 21,000 tonnes of spent fuel stored in Canada, 90 per cent of which was produced by Ontario Hydro, and the Canadian nuclear industry is not even 50 years old. For human beings, radioactivity is highly cancerous and very harmful genetically.

Clearly, the results of the accidents that occurred at the nuclear compounds of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl are very good examples of that. We must also remember that the nuclear industry in eastern European countries is in such a state that it is a time bomb for humanity and we can all see clearly what political problems that creates. The coming apart of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics left nuclear power plants almost abandoned everywhere because the people in charge of those plants moved from Eastern Europe to more financially secure countries where they can earn a better living. Mechanics and plumbers generally speaking operate the power plants and these certainly are time bombs for humanity.

Not only does the nuclear reaction from the fuel produce radioactive elements, it also produces neutrons which strike other components of the reactor itself and activate some of its substances which also become radioactive. This means that the reactor structure will have to be stored as radioactive waste once the reactor has reached the end of its useful life. The Chalk River nuclear laboratory of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited contains three outdated nuclear reactors, and the site itself is seriously contaminated by radioactive waste. Atomic Energy is also responsible for two outdated reactors, at Whiteshell, Manitoba, for the NPD reactor at Rolphton and the Douglas Point reactor at Bruce, both in Ontario, and for the Gentilly 1 reactor in Bécancour. All of these reactors are no longer in use and should be stored.

The cost of a stockpiling system is astronomical. The estimated cost of stockpiling a little over 100,000 tonnes of used fuel is \$9 billion. We share the view of the Auditor General of Canada that Atomic Energy of Canada will require even larger subsidies in order to cover the costs of dismantling these outdated reactors. This means that the costs the government is calculating now, in terms of the cost of this energy, the costs that have to be budgeted later, to ensure safe storage of the waste from these plants when the government is no longer in power, simply because hundreds of years are involved, these costs are never calculated.

This leads to the next question of whether the nuclear industry can turn a profit over the long term. Another question with respect to the human environment concerns the use of nuclear energy for military purposes. Uranium 235 and 238 are consumed in Canadian reactors of the CANDU type; they are elements which, when bombarded by a neutron to cause fission and create energy, become plutonium 239 atoms. The creation of plutonium 239 in nuclear reactors raises a very serious problem in regard to nuclear weapons and world peace. Plutonium 239 is