

Supply

● (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Guilbault): Any more questions or comments? Debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ian Watson (Châteauguay): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment—

Mr. Tousignant: A good choice!

Mr. Watson: Yes, a very good choice!

[*English*]

While I support and sympathize with the efforts of individuals and groups who have raised and are raising the level of public awareness of the dangers of nuclear war and the absolute urgency of convincing the nuclear powers to move toward at least partial nuclear disarmament, I never cease to be astonished by the near and often real hysteria which is engendered every time a problem occurs relating to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. I cannot understand why there is so much consternation about minor problems when real problems go totally ignored.

Let us look at the situation with regard to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Not only do we have the five major nuclear powers, but we have two other countries—South Africa and Israel—which possess substantial numbers of nuclear weapons and both of which are at the centre of regional controversies. The potential for nuclear conflict involving or related to either the Middle East or South Africa is very real. Yet the people who make the most noise about the dangers of peaceful nuclear energy never seem to raise the issues of the dangers relating to the nuclear weapons possessed by small countries, because officially they do not have any nuclear weapons. In reality, Israel has more than 100 nuclear warheads. I do not know how many South Africa has.

All of us appreciate the dangers which exist in the Middle East. It is totally abnormal that we should be completely ignoring the real danger of making while raising at the drop of a hat or at the leak of a few drops a huge controversy each time something happens relating to one of the Pickering generators near Toronto. I do not understand it.

When we decided a few years ago to put a lot of money into Candu, there were reservations. There are still many reservations. I happen to believe that it was a good decision to continue investing in the Candu. It is one of the world's better, if not best, nuclear generating systems. There are examples around the world of countries which have taken the initiative and for internal reasons decided to go all the way with nuclear generation. France is one of them. France, 20 years down the road, will be a more powerful country than it is today because it made the decision to go all the way for nuclear. Unfortunately, I am sad to say, our neighbour to the south will be terribly regretful 20 years down the road that it had this lapse in its movement forward in developing nuclear energy. This lapse in forward movement will have been caused by public

hysteria south of the border which has run on almost unabated for the last 10 years or 12 years. It has resulted in a tremendous slowdown in the construction of new nuclear facilities. When a new energy crunch hits the United States 15 years or 20 years from now, we will be in more danger because we will have the energy sources which the United States may need in a hurry. We will be threatened then in a way we would not be threatened if the United States nuclear program had moved forward at the pace we could have expected 15 years ago.

It is in our interests to be doing what we are doing at Lepreau, New Brunswick. It is in our interests to build facilities which will be able to export electricity to the United States and to help the United States overcome any future energy shortage. There is no contradiction and no need for alarmist cries from the Province of Quebec that nuclear energy will replace some of its potential sales of hydroelectric energy to the United States. I think there is room for sales of both. We should be encouraging our companies and our nuclear industry to move in that direction. It makes a lot of sense for our independence as a country to have the United States fully satisfied in so far as its energy needs are concerned. We can help do that via our nuclear generating system. At the same time we could supply tremendous numbers of Canadian jobs. We could do it safely and in a way which is good for mankind—good for our people and good for the world in general.

In this debate I will deal specifically with radioactive waste management. There has been much controversy about how effective it is, but I believe that we are doing most of the things that could humanly be done. Within a few years it will be possible to say without any shred of scientific doubt whatsoever that the problem is in hand.

Waste management problems are particularly difficult ones to resolve because it is not sufficient to have solutions which are adequate in technical safety and environmental terms. They must be politically acceptable as well, in terms of both process and outcome.

People who live near existing wastes want them dealt with. Even when there are no significant health or safety risks, the wastes often carry a stigma, which has real effects upon property values and the ability of a town to attract new businesses or people. The general public also wants the problem solved. The media find that waste often makes good stories and may sometimes exaggerate its potential hazard in the public mind. Finally, people who live near proposed storage or disposal sites do not want the wastes moved into their backyards. Their resistance is often more intense and more concentrated than the more general and diffuse public pressures to find the site. Perhaps society at large will have to find some way of compensating people who accept waste disposal sites in their communities above and beyond the normal benefits they will receive from the activities which produce the waste.

Radioactive wastes seem to be regarded as a uniquely hazardous form of waste. In fact, the low levels of most radioactivity in most large volume waste is such that they do