

could not be accused of that. In order to have a full debate about the use of nuclear energy, alternate uses of power must be put into the equation.

The Liberal Party has not committed itself to nuclear power, but it has committed itself to ensure that the proper safeguards are in place for the maintenance and use of nuclear power. The Liberal Party is committed to the improved use of moneys for research and development into methods for handling waste products. Those long-term answers are required in order to live comfortably with nuclear energy. To my knowledge, there is no form of energy in the world which does not have some malicious side effects. If we were to remove suddenly all of the energy power stations in the world and replace their energy output with energy derived from coal, the result would be a problem with the atmosphere. Every form of energy has problems. The debate must be intelligent and informed. If we can achieve that, I think we will have advanced the debate which the people have so badly wanted.

[Translation]

Mr. Hamelin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a short comment and put a question to the Hon. Member about nuclear power.

Naturally, the Hon. Member has denounced the delay of the Soviet Union in informing its own population and the other countries which are now affected, and this includes Canada, albeit not too seriously.

I would like to ask the Hon. Member why it is usually the leftist groups who organize protest marches against nuclear energy, and especially against the United States and other countries of the free world. How does the Hon. Member explain the fact that there were so few demonstrations in this case? Where are all the leftist groups which are gaining ground in nearly all parliamentary institutions, especially in Europe? Where are they? How can the Hon. Member explain their reaction to the events in the Soviet Union?

Mr. Frith: Mr. Speaker, I did not have any problem with the question asked by the Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin), but I do have one in trying to explain the absence of many people who do not want nuclear power in this country.

In view of the urgency of the situation, I think that everyone in this case wanted an answer to a two-part question. First, internationally, they wanted an answer by the international community about the problem in the Soviet Union. Second, in our country they want to see the development of an emergency plan of action in case of a similar problem. I think that in this case the response of people the world over was indeed to obtain the necessary information concerning the crisis created by the Soviet Union.

[English]

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in this debate and to conclude it. The motion before us this afternoon, which calls for a public inquiry into nuclear power, is one of enormous

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importance to the well-being of the entire country and, potentially, to the good health of individuals and communities in selected parts of our country where nuclear power is already important.

Nuclear power as an energy source deserves recognition for the enormous dangers which are inherent in that industry. We have all been watching, with a horrible fascination, the unfolding of the disaster at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union. We wonder what its consequences will be. One hardly need point out to people—although in the debate which we are having this afternoon it is worth doing—that when a disaster occurs at a nuclear power plant, it will not lead only to a loss of energy for people in the immediate area. It is not something which will affect only those persons who are in the plant in the way of immediate consequences of the accident. It is not a matter of physical injury and that is that. Quite clearly what happens or can happen in one of these disasters is a spreading of potential death for large numbers of people at considerable distances from the reactor itself. What the consequences are for those people beyond the immediate vicinity of the plant is something that only time will tell. It will take statistical studies to clarify the consequences.

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What is so often forgotten when considering these things is that the question of safe levels of radiation is not a subject on which there is agreement in the scientific community. We live with the standards of the 1940s and 1950s. We live with the thought that it is high levels which are dangerous. Yet there are sneaking suspicions among some epidemiologists and other researchers that quite low levels of radiation can have equally harmful effects in the long term on human beings. The effect on workers in the plants, the effect on thousands of people at some distance from the plant, the spreading of radiation around the globe, the warnings not to drink rain-water even though it is safe for children to splash around in it, the need to check for radiation levels in milk, all underscore the fact that we are dealing with a quite unusual form of energy.

We take comfort from our technology. We have been fortunate in the Western hemisphere in not having any of our nuclear plants affected by earthquakes or similar disasters. Yet what would happen to that technology in the event of that kind of disaster? How widely would the consequences be felt? It is for those reasons that my colleagues and I are emphasizing the importance of a public inquiry on nuclear energy. I suggest that the need to do this can be underscored by the fact that we have built societies and developed economies on the basis of two kinds of dubious energy, the first being petroleum and the second being nuclear energy. Dependence on petroleum has made it possible for the producers to shock our economies and bring us near the brink of economic disaster several times. Because of the failure of their price program recently, there is the possibility of a new kind of disaster. We are in a most perilous economic situation these days because of our petroleum-dependent economy.