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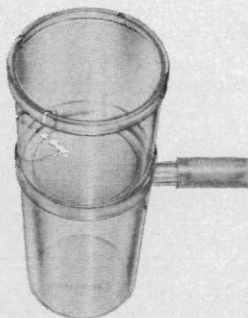
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LETTERS

Nuclear Power Plants: How Many?

In his letter (7 Nov., p. 686), Hull calls my book *The Careless Atom* "a one-sided picture" of nuclear reactors, and Rossin in another letter (p. 687) recapitulates the usual arguments for nuclear plants, as though the book does not include them. It does. But the title would warn most readers that I am less impressed by these arguments than Hull and Rossin seem to be.

Hull cites "100 reactors in the United States, that operate routinely and dependably." We have heard a lot about these 100 reactors lately, and I am sure there are some utility executives who would like to know where they are. Only 17 civilian nuclear power plants (and one military plant at Hanford) had been completed by the end of 1968, when my book was printed. Of these, five had already been shut down prematurely as impracticable or unsafe; a sixth, the Fermi reactor, was never made to operate properly and finally suffered an accident which took it out of service; a seventh, the Humboldt plant, has operated within allowable radiation release limits only by reducing power output. The remainder have had various degrees of difficulty, and another was shut down this year. Only two reactors have gone into operation since my book appeared, so the situation has not changed very much.

It is therefore not clear what 100 reactors Hull is talking about, but to get such a large number he must be including the various research reactors in use in universities, as well as the reactor experiments conducted by the Atomic Energy Commission. Most of these machines share little but a name with central-station power reactors. One small research and training reactor, not dealt with in my book, caused the only deaths—three—that have occurred in the reactor program so far, but I assume this was not one of the 100 reactors whose operation so gratifies Hull.

In view of the limited operating experience with power reactors, and the failure of about half those constructed, it is hard to evaluate Hull's statistic that such reactors have kept within 1 percent of allowable radiation-release limits. The data he cites indicate that emissions increase over time, and the plants which have operated at

all have achieved only a fraction of their expected lifetimes. In any case, the argument is only persuasive if one forgets that the allowable limits are set by the same agency that approves the designs of the plants in question. The standards themselves, not AEC's success in meeting its own requirements, are the source of concern.

The only point on which Hull, Rossin, and I are agreed is that the costs and risks of nuclear power should be weighed against those of other means of power generation. Only open debate will settle the merits of the various approaches that are possible. The recitation of platitudes and irrelevant numbers will not advance the debate in a useful direction.

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NAS Collaboration with SSRC

Unfortunately, Walsh's story ("Behavioral and social sciences: NAS report stresses applications," 31 Oct., p. 585) carries a headline which gives the impression that this was a report exclusively of the National Academy of Sciences. Although the joint sponsorship by the Academy and the Social Science Research Council is correctly mentioned in the middle of the article, the reader does not get the impression that this was a truly joint effort in every way.

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Drug Detection

We know from testimony given in October in San Francisco before the House Select Committee on Crime chaired by Congressman Pepper that drugs are being diverted in alarming amounts from the manufacturers to illegal markets. This diversion requires, of course, very complex political and social "cures." However, it would help enforcement agencies if drugs were to be tagged at the manufacturing source with minute quantities of harmless isotopes (deuterium, oxygen-17, carbon-13) or with trace elements (zirconium, rare earths) which could be neutron-