

found that living conditions surpassed their expectations. Delegates approached Russia with misgivings. They had read that life in Moscow was grim and drab. They were uneasy about possible hostility of civilians or secret police. Instead, they encountered reasonably agreeable circumstances. The hotel accommodations were on a par with those of the United States or Western Europe. Women wore attractive clothes, styled a bit more conservatively than those of the West, but fully as varied in their patterns and colors. Many of the young women had resorted to cosmetic artifices to produce synthetic blonde or reddish brown hair. The typical Muscovite is somewhat aggressive and inclined to snarl a savage *nyet* at his fellows. However, if anything, they were polite and good-natured with their visitors.

Communications Network

The American delegates quickly found that their life in Moscow was different from what they were accustomed to. Few had any facility with the Russian language. They felt cut off from the rest of the world. A few of the hotel personnel could understand some English, but most of the service people could not. Information on happenings in the United States was not readily available. Late arrivals from America were greeted with special enthusiasm, for they brought with them news. In a short time, Americans created an efficient communications network. They became proficient in sign language, while picking up a few essential words. The first day of their stay, the delegates hovered close to their hotel or to the university. Soon they were fanning out all over Moscow on foot, in public buses, or on the Metro. Those staying at the Rossia Hotel (Europe's largest, 6000 beds) found that service at the restaurants there was slow and undependable, and the menu limited. Instead of complaining, they took their business elsewhere, often to the National Hotel where service and food were excellent. Most Muscovites spend a substantial fraction of their lives standing in lines, but with a little ingenuity, the privileged visitor could escape that annoyance.

Moscow has several features that are superior. The delegates felt safe on the streets at night. The underground Metro system is fast and dependable. Moscow streets are kept clean to a degree unmatched in the United States. Pedestrians do not disrupt traffic on

Court Decision Jolts AEC

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia issued on 23 July a decision that harshly criticizes the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) for dawdling in its implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which went into effect in January 1970.

The immediate effect of the decision has been to introduce new environmental elements into the licensing process for the construction of nuclear power plants. The upshot of the matter is that many plants, both operative and under construction, may have to install cooling towers and other costly devices to cut thermal pollution.

Three environmental groups precipitated the decision with a suit over the controversial Calvert Cliffs reactor now being built in Maryland on the Chesapeake Bay. The AEC responded with the announcement that it would review its licensing procedures and will come up with new guidelines "as soon as possible."

The court generally found the AEC to be delinquent in adhering to the intent of NEPA, saying the AEC's "crabbed interpretation . . . makes a mockery of the Act."

The decision outlined four specific criticisms: (i) the AEC did not require the independent hearing boards charged with reviewing its staff recommendations to consider environmental factors unless such factors were brought to the boards' attention by outside parties; (ii) the AEC's procedural rules prohibited an outside party from raising nonradiological environmental issues if notices for the hearings were posted before 4 March 1971—14 months after NEPA went into effect; (iii) the hearing boards, instead of conducting their own investigations, were taking the word of other federal, state, and local agencies that environmental requirements were being satisfied; and (iv) facilities that were issued construction licenses before NEPA went into effect were not subjected to further environmental review until it came time to issue an operating license—by which time "corrective action may be so costly as to be impossible."

The court dwelt at length on what it called the AEC's "abdication" to other agencies of its responsibilities under NEPA. By merely adhering to existing standards (such as federal-state water quality standards), said the court, the AEC has neglected to balance a broad range of environmental costs against the economical and technical benefits of nuclear power plants on the "case by case" basis the Act requires. As a result, the AEC has ignored the fact that in some cases the total environmental impact of a power plant might outweigh its benefits even if the plant were to comply with pollution regulations. Through this policy, the AEC has barred the public from raising a wide spectrum of environmental issues and has thereby "subverted" the Act, wrote the court.

The court had little sympathy for the commission's explanation that the long time lag between NEPA's enactment and AEC compliance was necessary to "accommodate transitional implementation problems" and that "unreasonable delays" in plant construction and operation must be avoided because of the "national power crisis."

Said the court: ". . . a transition, however 'orderly,' must proceed at a pace faster than a funeral procession." As for the power crisis, the court noted that the purpose of NEPA was to tell federal agencies that environmental protection deserved an equal footing with the promotion and regulation of industry. "The spectre of the national power crisis . . . must not be used to create a blackout of environmental considerations."

The court's decision is applicable to 88 units now under construction or in operation, and it excepts only the handful of plants that started operation before 1 January 1970. In a specific reference to the Calvert Cliffs plant, the court said the commission should "consider very seriously" halting construction, pending a new environmental review.

As of last week, the AEC was still considering the court's recommendations.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN