

## U.S. Warns Britain on Reprocessing

Efforts by the Carter Administration to head off international trade in plutonium appear to have reached a critical stage. France last September signed a contract to reprocess 1600 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel from Japanese reactors. Now Britain is nearing a decision on whether to expand an existing reprocessing plant at Windscale into a full-scale commercial facility capable of reprocessing 1200 metric tons per year of spent fuel from Japan and other countries.

The Carter Administration has made no public move to intervene in the British decision, but they have sent a strong private warning that the United States may seek to undercut the economic base for the billion-dollar Windscale facility. The warning comes in a letter from U.S. undersecretary of state Joseph Nye to his counterpart in the British Foreign Office that was made public in the House of Commons 2 weeks ago.

The Windscale plant had been the subject of an extended public inquiry in Britain that heard testimony for 100 days last year and became a forum for opposing sides in the debate over nuclear power and its connection to nuclear weapons proliferation. During the hearings, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. (BNFL), the firm that proposes to build and operate the Windscale facility, seized upon a carelessly worded letter from the U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA, now the Department of Energy) to argue that U.S. opposition to reprocessing and plutonium commerce had weakened. The ERDA letter approved a one time transfer of 42 bundles of spent fuel from Japan's Tsuruga nuclear power station, which was running out of storage space, to BNFL; the letter's wording, now admitted by U.S. officials to have been an error, also seemed to approve the re-export of purified plutonium to Japan. (ERDA approval was required because the fuel was originally of U.S. origin, as is most of Japan's fuel.)

The Windscale hearings concluded last November. In December the Carter Administration, concerned about what it regarded as a deliberate misrepresentation by BNFL of U.S. policy on reprocessing, sent the Nye warning letter to the British Foreign Office with a request that it be passed on to the inspector who was writing the Windscale inquiry report. The letter refers to an "unwarranted conclusion" in the testimony and then goes on to a more general discussion of nuclear proliferation and reprocessing plants that appears to be addressed to the British government as a whole, not just to the inspector. The letter says "the United States is not prepared at this time to encourage weapons states to decide in favor of proceeding with new reprocessing plants." In regard to the proposed Windscale plant, it says, "we cannot give any assurance that BNFL may count on MB-10's [the DOE document that approves transfer of spent fuel] as a matter of course for feed for a new plant or in support of long term reprocessing commitments that it may enter into." Since BNFL is apparently counting on Japanese reprocessing business as a means of financing the Windscale plant, lack of U.S. approval could make it uneconomic to operate.

The Nye letter appears to be a diplomatic way of urging the British government to forego Windscale without quite saying so. It also appears, however, to have had little initial effect. Press reports in England indicate that the inquiry report will strongly recommend to the government that it go ahead with the plan. The French are already committed to construction of their new reprocessing plant.

Some observers believe that Carter efforts are too little, too late. They contend that the United States will not in fact deny its allies access to spent fuel when push comes to shove and hence that an expanded Windscale plant will signal the start of commercial reprocessing across national boundaries and foreshadow the eventual accumulation of plutonium stockpiles in countries that do not at present have nuclear weapons. Thus the credibility and the success of the Carter antiproliferation effort are arguably riding on the British decision.

How that decision will go is uncertain. But last week the British government announced that it will submit the Windscale plant to a full debate in Parliament before making a decision.—ALLEN L. HAMMOND

much less get mathematicians and physicists into the mix." Goslin believes ABASS is more seriously interdisciplinary than any other advisory group.

Being interdisciplinary, in fact, seems really to be what ABASS is all about. In January the ABASS executive committee, now known confusingly as the "assembly," had a meeting in Palo Alto at which they discussed just that. Chairman Duncan Luce of Harvard asked the members (now expanded from 15 to 18 to include a psychologist, a psychobiologist, and a lawyer) to discuss the issues within their fields. Among other things, the group noted that there no longer seem to be any grand theories within disciplines that are rich enough to illuminate current problems.

Wellesley economist Caroline Shaw Bell says that from almost every field came "the same feeling—of waiting for some development within that field to show the direction things are going."

The problems facing the social sciences were seen as more overwhelming than ever. Fundamental social assumptions have been falling away, laying bare mysteries and paradoxes that "common sense" used to cover. The economy is on a weird trip that Keynes did not supply any answers for. Poverty persists despite the solutions of the 1960's. People are losing faith in government and institutions in general. Bureaucracies, supposedly the "epitome of rationality" suffer from built-in "pathologies" that no one knows how to cure. It has become increasingly clear that little is known about how large numbers of people form and change their values and attitudes. And history equips us with little precedent for such problems as the effect on social services of an aging population, the effect of mandatory retirement, income maintenance, why the general public cannot get serious about energy conservation, and how to understand social and public policy choices when our social goals are unclear.

As University of Chicago archeologist Robert McC. Adams, the first chairman of ABASS, has noted, we are still digging our way out of the mass of data supplied by the government programs started in the 1960's and "coherent, generally acknowledged results, and even a clear sense of federal purpose, are in many cases still distinguished mainly by their absence."

More and more issues are now perceived as being in the realm of the social sciences, for as political scientist Aaron Wildavsky says, "The less people trust social processes, the more they make