

Another Setback for Clinch River

When the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) ruled last month that the site for the Clinch River Breeder Reactor could be cleared before the licensing process is completed, it seemed that the much-delayed project was finally about to get under way. But on 2 September, just hours before the first trees were to be felled, a federal judge in Atlanta stopped the operation in its tracks. He ruled that the site cannot be cleared until an environmental impact statement has been completed. And that may take until early December.

The delay could be crucial. The plant's supporters had hoped to begin construction operations before Congress votes this fall on the reactor's budget for fiscal year 1983, but that no longer seems likely.

The judge ruled on a suit, brought by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), challenging a waiver granted by the Environmental Protection Agency immediately after NRC's ruling. NRDC is challenging the NRC ruling in a separate suit. The next act in the Clinch River drama will play in Congress.—**Colin Norman**

India-U.S. Deal Falters

A hitch has apparently developed in the compromise fashioned to resolve a long-standing dispute between India and the United States over the supply of nuclear fuel for India's Tarapur reactors.

During Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Washington in late July an agreement was announced under which France would supply enriched uranium fuel for Tarapur in lieu of the United States (*Science*, 13 August, p. 614). Press reports from New Delhi indicate that new difficulties arose when France sought acceptance by India of international safeguards that would have discouraged reprocessing of spent fuel. Reprocessing was the nub of the Indian-U.S. quarrel.

Under an accord dating from 1963, the United States agreed to act as exclusive supplier of fuel for Tarapur. After passage of the U.S. Nuclear

Nonproliferation Act of 1978, the United States moved to withdraw as supplier because India declined to place all of its nuclear facilities under international safeguards as the new law required. American concern was directed particularly at reprocessing operations which produce plutonium that might be used for nuclear explosives.

The two countries differ over interpretation of a consent clause in the 1963 agreement, with India insisting that it has the right to reprocess spent fuel. The French are reportedly seeking to attach the same sort of requirements for safeguards as had the Americans. A spokesman at the Indian embassy in Washington says that what is at issue in the present dispute is a matter of principle. His country's general position is that "We are free to reprocess when necessary. I know of no immediate plans to reprocess."

—**John Walsh**

HUD's Orphan: Research on Lead Poisoning

Irwin Billick, who has researched the causes of lead poisoning among children for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for 5 years, finds the latest directive from his bosses painful to carry out. "In effect," he says, "they have asked me to write an options paper on how to abolish my job." He is director of environmental hazards research.

"They told me that HUD no longer needs research in this area, and that my services are no longer required. Now they want me to write a memo on what should be done with the data"—computer tapes and files that document patterns of lead poisoning among hundreds of thousands of children in U.S. cities since 1967. HUD supported this research in carrying out the mandate of the Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act (1971). HUD was responsible for cleaning up federally subsidized housing, but most of Billick's work focused on the relationship between lead in gasoline and lead in human blood.

The data are controversial. They have been cited twice by the Environmental Protection Agency in justifying rules that cut back the amount of lead

allowed in gasoline. And they have been attacked as often as they have been cited. For example, Jerome Cole, executive vice president of the Lead Zinc Research Organization, wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* (23 August) that HUD's research was used to produce "spurious correlations, such as the seasonal trends, to blame lead in gasoline as the cause of elevated blood lead. . . ." Cole claimed that "the real problem with lead is old lead paint," and he said HUD and other agencies ought to have spent their money removing this paint, not funding research on leaded gasoline. Cole's foundation is supported by the lead industries. (The use of lead in paint was prohibited in 1971, but is still permitted in gasoline.)

HUD officials say only that Billick's program is "no longer being funded." The assistant secretary for administration, Judith Tardy, told the *Times* that the "basic data are already there. The emphasis now is on policy and legal issues." E. S. Savas, assistant secretary for policy development and research and Billick's chief, told the *Washington Post*: "The research is not what helps the people in the houses; it's the actual elimination of hazards."

If research is not what is needed, why did HUD create a new Cabinet-level group in July to reexamine the problems of lead poisoning? Savas, as chairman, led the discussion during the group's second meeting on 1 September, in which half a dozen agencies reviewed the research still needed to deal with lead poisoning. Billick was not asked to contribute.

What is planned in HUD's new, nonresearch plan for attacking lead paint? U.S. District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell ruled on 22 June that HUD has been derelict in carrying out its duties under amendments to the lead paint law. He ordered HUD to develop new, more forceful regulations to deal with the problem. HUD has decided to send out notices describing the hazards of old paint, but, according to HUD spokeswoman Jackie Conn, the agency also will appeal the judge's decision.

Asked for a summary of HUD's current efforts to curtail lead poisoning, Conn sent out a document written in 1978 by Billick. It is the best thing available, she explained.

—**Eliot Marshall**