

*Ammanin Ferguson -*  
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EURO -- MORE RICHES FROM THE NUCLEAR DUSTBIN -- OR NOT ?  
LONDON SEPTEMBER 15--(SPECIAL/MCGILL)--BRITAIN'S FOUR-MONTH-LONG DEBATE ON WHETHER TO EXPAND ITS NUCLEAR FUELS REPROCESSING INTO AN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS IS DUE TO END SHORTLY.

THE DEBATE IS IN THE FORM OF A JUDICIAL INQUIRY AT WHITEHAVEN ON THE BRITISH WEST COAST, CONVENIENTLY NEAR TO THE WINDSCALE NUCLEAR PLANT, WHICH HAS BEEN COMMERCIALY REPROCESSING NUCLEAR FUEL USED IN BRITISH REACTORS FOR THE PAST 25 YEARS.

THE ARGUMENT IS NOT RPT NOT ABOUT THAT FORM OF RE-PROCESSING, WHICH HAS PROVED TO BE CONSIDERABLY SAFER THAN ANOTHER FUEL-PRODUCING INDUSTRY OF THE BRITISH MIDLANDS -- COAL-MINING.

THE WHITEHAVEN HEARINGS ARE ABOUT LARGE-SCALE COMMERCIAL REPROCESSING FROM REACTORS WHICH ARE COMPARATIVELY NEW TO BRITAIN, THE ADVANCED GAS COOLED VARIETY, WHICH USE PELLETS MADE FROM ENRICHED URANIUM OXIDE.

NO ONE AMONG THE SCIENTISTS, THE ECOLOGISTS, THE DO-GOODERS AND THE FEW POLITICIANS AT WINDSCALE DENIES THAT THE OXIDE FUEL IS MORE DIFFICULT TO PROCESS THAN THE WASTE FROM THE EARLIER TYPE OF NUCLEAR REACTORS.

WHAT THEY DISAGREE ON IS WHETHER THE OXIDE SHOULD BE REPROCESSED AT ALL AND WHETHER, IF IT IS DECIDED TO GO AHEAD WITH THE PROCESSING, THE PLANT TO DO THE JOB SHOULD BE MADE BIG ENOUGH TO ACCOMODATE THE WASTE PRODUCTS OF OTHER NATIONS.

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S FIRM, BRITISH NUCLEAR FUELS, WANTS A PLANT BIG ENOUGH TO REPROCESS 1,200 TONS OF THE OXIDE WASTE A YEAR -- ABOUT 500 TONS OF WHICH WILL BE FOR BRITAIN AND THE REST FOR COUNTRIES AS FAR AFIELD AS JAPAN.

THE COMPANY WANTS THE REPROCESSING FOR OVERSEAS CUSTOMERS BECAUSE THE PROFITS ARE HIGH. IT ALSO SAYS THAT THE WORLD WILL BENEFIT BY CONSERVING SOME URANIUM WASTES INSTEAD OF BURYING THEM, BUT IT HAS MANY OPPONENTS IN THE MAKESHIFT COURT-ROOM AT WINDSCALE WHICH SAY THAT THE WORLD WILL BE EDGING TOWARDS NUCLEAR MAYHEM IF IT PERMITS PROCESSED WEAPONS-GRADE URANIUM A WIDER DISTRIBUTION.

AMONG THOSE WHO ARE QUOTED IN SUPPORT OF THIS ANTI-PROCESSING ARGUMENT ARE U.S. PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER, BUT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, EXCEPT IN THE GUISE OF A STATE CORPORATION WITH VESTED INTEREST IN NUCLEAR REPROCESSING, HAS HAD VERY LITTLE TO SAY.

IT SEEMS TO HAVE DECIDED NOT RPT NOT TO PREJUDICE THE COURT-ROOM ATMOSPHERE, WHERE A JUDGE SITS AND LISTENS TO WITNESSES FROM BRITISH NUCLEAR FUELS ON THE ONE HAND AND SOME 30 SEPARATE AND HIGHLY VOLUBLE OPPONENTS OF NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION ON THE OTHER. (PTO)



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EURO - (1) - MORE RICHES....

WHATEVER THE OUTCOME, THE HEARINGS SO FAR HAVE PRODUCED SOME EVIDENCE OF THE INCIPIENT HORRORS OF RADIOACTIVITY NEW TO MANY PEOPLE.

IN SUPPORT OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S CONCERNS ABOUT PROLIFERATION, A STAFF SCIENTIST FROM THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENCE COUNCIL OF AMERICA, DR THOMAS COCHRAN, POINTED OUT THIS WEEK THAT THERE ARE PROBABLY 23 NATIONS WHICH HAVE WEAPONS-GRADE PLUTONIUM SUFFICIENT FOR MORE THAN THREE NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

HE SEES THE WINDSCALE OF THE MID-1980'S AS BEING THE KEY SUPPLIER OF PLUTONIUM TO THESE AND OTHER STATES SEEKING TO BUILD UP STOCKPILES AND HE SAYS SUCH A PLANT COULD REPROCESS ENOUGH PLUTONIUM EACH YEAR TO CONSTRUCT MORE THAN A THOUSAND NUCLEAR WEAPONS. NOBODY HAS CONTRADICTED HIM.

FOR THOSE WHO SEE THE MID-1980'S JUST AROUND THE CORNER, EVIDENCE HAS ALSO BEEN GIVEN THAT NUCLEAR WASTE, LIKE RADIOACTIVE IODINE WHICH WINDSCALE CANNOT RECYCLE, WILL BE AROUND TO HAUNT MANKIND AND HIS SUCCESSORS FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT 30 MILLION YEARS. LMC