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THE HIGH COST OF NOT GOING NUCLEAR

What is the safest, cleanest, and cheapest form of energy available in significant volume? The answer, which may come as a surprise to some, is nuclear. It generates electricity at significantly lower costs than oil, gas or coal.

According to the Atomic Industrial Forum, the average total cost of nuclear-produced electricity in 1978 was 1.5 cents per kilowatt-hour. For coal, the cost was 2.3 cents; for oil it was 4 cents then and is still rising.

The nuclear power industry has a safety record over the last two decades that other forms of energy production cannot match. Some 70 nuclear power plants now produce nearly 13 percent of our nation's electricity; not a single fatal accident has been recorded.

Nuclear power is the most pollution-free energy form now in general use. Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, USN (Ret.) has figured out that if a person were to drink all the water discharged in a year in all the harbors of the world by all 139 nuclear-powered ships of the U.S. Navy, that person would be well within the annual radiation limit set by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Any increase in the American standard of living is absolutely dependent on increasing our flow of energy. Energy and jobs are locked together in a knot that cannot be untied. Yet, the reality of the world we live in is that we could even suffer a cutoff of our imported oil, which is half of the oil we presently consume.

So, why aren't we building nuclear plants to end our dangerous dependency on foreign oil, to end our vulnerability to oil blackmail, and to produce an increasing supply of the safer, cleaner, and cheaper energy that we need so much? Because of Three Mile Island, that's why.

The headline hysteria which followed in the wake of the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island was just what the anti-nuclear propagandists were looking for. It enabled them to propagate the myth that nuclear power plants are like atomic bombs ready to explode or to leak lethal radioactivity all over the countryside.

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There never was any danger of that. It's impossible for a nuclear power plant to explode like a bomb because the energy in a reactor simply cannot increase fast enough. Scientists estimate that the highest exposure to any individual in the area was about the same as two chest X-rays. The average exposure to persons within 50 miles of the reactor was slightly more than from watching color TV for a year.

No one was killed or even injured at TMI. Dr. Edward Teller later said that he was "the only victim of Three Mile Island." Working 20 hours a day to refute the anti-nuke propaganda, the world-famous physicist suffered a heart attack. Rep. Mike McCormick, the chairman of the congressional subcommitttee which investigated Three Mile Island said that "the greatest harm from the TMI accident was its severe emotional impact on an ill-informed and easily frightened public."

Foreign countries, both friends and foes, have no compunction about going nuclear. France already generates 70 percent of its electricity with nuclear power. At the World Energy Conference in Munich in 1980, West Germany's Franz Josef Strauss warned: "Whoever fails to take advantage of nuclear power condemns himself to social backwardness. The future belongs to those countries that push ahead with nuclear energy."

Carlos Castro Madero, an official of the Argentine Atomic Energy Commission, told the World Energy Conference: "Every watt of energy the U.S. fails to produce by nuclear power must be produced by oil. Every barrel of oil burned by the U.S. is a barrel for which we must compete on the market, and this means higher prices."

The United States should ease government restrictions on new reactors and streamline licensing procedures in order to cut the 12- to 14-year time it now takes to plan, build and begin operating a nuclear power plant. If all 110 plants under construction or ordered are completed by 1990, this could cut our oil imports in half.

America has the choice: go nuclear and grow -- in jobs, in prosperity, and in independence from foreign blackmail. Or, try to stop the world and get off; face a future of higher unemployment, plant closings, electrical brownouts, gasoline lines, fuel shortages in the north, and air conditioning shortages in the south. We cannot afford to turn our backs on any source of energy; we need them all.

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