

in favour of the company. For him, the government, and for the media, which lauded his report, the views of the opponents of the plant seemed to entail too much of a change of social priorities.

But one of the ideas that these opponents were trying to get across is that the desperate attempt to use nuclear fuel to prop up our industrial system is likely to result in social costs which citizens will find more and more obnoxious. Two books, recently arrived in Australia, concentrate on some of the political implications of the nuclear commitment.

Reading Breach's account of the public inquiry into the Windscale plant is a more daunting task than it should be, because of the clusters of initials which he liberally sprinkles throughout the text. There is no glossary to help the reader who forgets what the numerous collections of letters stand for. But the scene that Breach describes is familiar: A company which has been doing a profitable business in reprocessing nuclear fuel wants to expand its operations. It already has a very lucrative contract with Japan. The workers are in general in favour of this expansion. And so is the Labour Government. The expansion goes along with future plans for a commercial fast breeder reactor program. But because the company has been secretive about the safety of its operations, because local people are concerned, the Government is induced to hold a public inquiry.

The wide terms of reference of the inquiry encourage those who have objections, mostly environmentalists, to throw a great deal of time, effort and money into presenting their case. They raise the issues of safety, civil liberties, nuclear proliferation, the need for public participation in setting safety standards and making energy policy. In the end, the Commissioners write the report which the company and the Government expected and wanted.

In his account of these proceedings, Breach raises two main questions. The first is about public participation in policy-making. Those who participated in the Windscale Inquiry had time to devote to their cause and enough money to hire lawyers. How can a public inquiry be truly public? Can decisions about momentous matters like energy policy be made democratically? Breach's answer is that this is possible but not likely under present conditions: "The Windscale inquiry was regarded by a majority in both the Government and in Parliament as a horrific concession; to contemplate an exercise which would take perhaps six or seven times as long, consume sizeable amounts of public money, and be designed virtually to dash contemporary official plans and objectives, is to dream"

The second is about the future of the anti-nuclear movement. Breach regards the Windscale inquiry

REVIEWS

Nuclear Politics

Ian Breach, *Windscale Fallout: A Primer for the Age of Nuclear Controversy* (Penguin, 1978)

Robert Jungk (trans. E. Mosbacher), *The Nuclear State* (John Calder, London, 1979).

"Nuclear energy", a witness at the Windscale Inquiry argued, "is a conservative technology. It represents an attempt to avoid basic changes in the industrial system."

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that after 100 days of listening to evidence about the proposal of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. to build a large nuclear reprocessing plant at Windscale in the UK, Justice Parker, who chaired the inquiry, dismissed or ignored the arguments of the opposition and ruled

as a demonstration of the political impotence of the environmental lobby. Anti-nuclear activists may have good arguments, and they may have considerable public support. But they have no influence in the major political parties, no voice in Parliament, no significant support in the unions, and can therefore be disregarded by those who make the decisions. Breach does not seem to be hopeful that this will change. "The politics of nuclear power and reprocessing will increasingly be those of disillusion, anger, frustration and mistrust. We shall all be the losers."

In a country where the nuclear industry established itself early and the movement against it only recently got underway, this is an understandable point of view. But it is a parochial view nevertheless. It fails to take into account the political influence which anti-nuclear movements elsewhere have achieved. In any case, Windscale has proved to be a launching ground for a movement which will find its own ways of becoming politically significant.

When Scargill, representative of the Yorkshire coal miners, appeared at the Inquiry to argue against Windscale, he was accused by the British Nuclear Fuels' workers of betraying the labour cause. In particular, these workers insisted that the safety of their plant compared favourably to the safety record of coal mines. Breach suggests, however, that the employees do have fears about their work and suspicions about management secrecy, though they were reluctant to express their criticisms at the Inquiry. Workers in the nuclear industry, in fact, have a greater than usual problem in dealing with safety issues. A new regulation excuses employers from giving safety representatives of unions "any information the disclosure of which would be against the interests of national security".

The workers at the La Hague nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in France, who took Robert Jungk into their confidence, cynically describe themselves as "radiation fodder". These permanent employees have to worry constantly about the threat of contamination. But the casual workers, which the plant increasingly relies on are even less well protected. "Nobody asks whether they might previously have been employed at other nuclear installations and exposed to radiation there. It is simply assumed that they have not, with the result that they are usually given the most dangerous work straight away. These men are the mercenaries or the Lumpenproletariat of the atomic industry who may be asked to do anything."

In 1976 the workers at La Hague went on strike. However, a reprocessing plant, like other nuclear installations, can't simply be shut down, and eventually when the whole community was in danger, the key workers realised that they had to

go back. The strike collapsed. "In the nuclear industry the right to strike has its limitations."

So, too, does the right of dissent. The nuclear industry and the governments that support it increasingly identify opposition as subversion; they carefully screen and watch their employees, keep their operations secret, demand absolute loyalty from scientific workers, and use underhand and even criminal methods to silence those who rebel. Some of Jungk's informers were afraid to give their names for fear of retaliation.

The idea that the nuclear state will result in loss of civil liberties and the undermining of democratic institutions is not new. But Jungk contends that the repressive measures of the nuclear state already exist, at least in embryo, in the countries involved in the use or supply of nuclear materials. "The totalitarian technocratic future has already begun. Chances of preventing it still exist but time is short." Jungk provides a detailed account of methods of surveillance and social control which are already used or could be used in existing nuclear states.

He suggests that the nuclear industry is in fact being pushed by those who want an authoritarian state. "Is it surprising if we begin to ask ourselves whether it is not these repressive and harshly authoritarian aspects of the nuclear industry that make it so attractive to some people and some interest groups, even though the prospects of profit from this new source of energy have grown so doubtful?"

Though this is an over simple account of the forces behind nuclear power, Jungk does have evidence suggesting that in Germany nazis and their sympathisers find the nuclear state especially congenial.

The hope for the future lies in the anti-nuclear movement. Jungk's picture of this movement is similar to, though more optimistic than Breach's: a collection of sincere idealists who stand alone — outside politics as this is usually understood. The purity of this movement is contrasted with conventional political organisations which are all part of the nuclear state. But this is not an accurate or helpful picture of the situation. It does not account for the effect that the anti-nuclear position is beginning to have on political parties and unions. It is in fact only through alliances with other progressive groups that the anti-nuclear movement will have a chance of affecting the future. Neither Jungk nor Breach discuss the possibility for such united action, but their books do contribute to the widening of the debate around nuclear power and uranium mining. Those who think that the nuclear issue is just about the danger of radioactive pollution should be especially encouraged to read these books.

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