

EDITORIAL

The history of energy policy, in conjunction with environmental policy, has been a very peculiar one.

When the peaceful use of atomic energy was first introduced in the 1950's, many of those active in the environmental field welcomed this development, hoping it would see an end to the excessive use of rivers for the production of hydro-electric power and the subsequently damaging effects to the environment.

However, in the 60's concern grew regarding the risks attendant on this new form of energy and then followed the energy crisis in 1973, resulting in a move away from oil. At almost the same time, there was a slowing down in the licencing procedure for the construction of new atomic plants, leading to a massive move to coal and other fossil fuels. At first, this seemed to be the answer, but when the CO₂ aspects (due to the burning of wood/charcoal) and the problem of acid precipitation (mostly due to the burning of coal) increased, there was a call to halt this growth in the use of fossils with its environmentally detrimental results. With regard to the latter problem, it is generally accepted that it will take until the end of this century before "nearly clean" coal plants can be achieved; and there is a body of opinion which advocates the use of atomic energy to offset some of the requirements.

However, in the field of environmental policy, no clear decision has been taken regarding what action can and should be undertaken in the short run to halt increasing and irrevocable damage, especially to vegetation. So far, there is a complete lack of direction concerning quick action, although long-term policies have been initiated.

How do we draw up a risk balance in this case? Does the risk from an atomic energy plant which is slight in the normal run, but which can be massive in the case of accident, outweigh the risk to our forests? For which risk should we opt?

* * *

The resolution on Antarctica from the non-aligned nations was published in issue 11 1/2. At the thirty-eighth session of the UN General Assembly, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Phillipines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, introduced a draft resolution in the First Committee asking, inter alia, "the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive, factual and objective study on all aspects of Antarctica, taking fully into account the Antarctic Treaty system and other relevant factors; to seek the views of all Member States in the preparation of the study; and to include in the provisional agenda of the thirty-ninth session the item entitled "The question of Antarctica".

However, when one considers what the UN has done regarding, for example, the Law of the Sea, then one can envisage the direction in which the discussion will go. As soon as the minutes of the meeting are in our hands, we shall report in detail.

* * *

Following opposition from the government of Queensland and long discussions, the whole of the Great Barrier Reef has become a protected area to be administered under the Marine Park Authority.

This success is the sum of many compromises, although it was undoubtedly influenced by the decision on the Franklin river case, which is of tremendous importance for the future co-operation between the Australian government and the states. Now that some time has elapsed since the judgment, we hope that we shall be able to find an author willing to comment on it without emotion. □

22nd December 1983