



FROM : MINISTER OF STATE (REVENUE)

DATE : 8 February 1983

PRIME MINISTER

LIAISON COMMITTEE PAPER ON THE GOVERNMENT'S NUCLEAR POWER PROGRAMME

1. I have read this paper with a great deal of interest.
2. It looks to me to be a very useful piece of work. It gives us material to deal with all the arguments, save one or two mentioned below, which are commonly adduced against nuclear power. My only criticism of the document is that its tone is perhaps too defensive. There is a lot of positive stuff hidden away within it. But the "reacting to other people's arguments" format can mean that this does not come across as prominently as it might do. Perhaps we could add early on some punchy positive material on the lines that:

- nuclear power is safe power;
- nuclear power is cheap power;
- nuclear power means more jobs [because power costs will be lower];
- other countries, such as responsible Switzerland, have substantial programmes of nuclear power;
- our regulatory system for nuclear power safety is among the best in the world.

3. Two arguments not dealt with in any detail in the report are:

(i) Some environmentalists will accept most of the arguments put forward in favour of nuclear power. But they will point out that if a nuclear station ever "goes seriously wrong", there could be terrible consequences for literally thousands of people (and their unborn children) as a result of windborne radio-active contamination. There is no other power source which could have such an impact in this country. The only reply to this argument that springs immediately to mind is that, while such a catastrophe is not impossible, it is, according to the experts, so improbable as not to be a material factor. The paper ought to try to answer it in as convincing terms as possible.

(ii) "A uranium based society will inevitably lead to a restriction of civil liberties". The point here is that the increasing terrorist threat will require armed guards on nuclear power stations, trains carrying nuclear waste etc, and that this, together with consequential restrictions on civil liberties, will undermine individual freedom. In present day circumstances this is a somewhat fanciful argument, but it is one that is seriously put forward. It deserves a paragraph of rebuttal.

4. My final comment concerns the statement on page 2 that:

"The production of electricity in nuclear power stations has less adverse impact on the environment than electricity production from fossil fuels."

Presumably this is referring to the acid rain and sulphur and carbon dioxide emissions from coal and oil stations. If

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so, the statement may be true, but it is one which is not readily understood by the public without explanation. The argument is also perhaps somewhat debatable since, I am advised, the deleterious effects of electricity production from fossil fuels can be dealt with by installing, admittedly expensive, "scrubbing" devices in power station chimneys. In any event, if this sentence is to remain, some of the supporting arguments ought to go in.

5. I am copying this minute to other Liaison Committee members.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Wakeham". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

JOHN WAKEHAM

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