

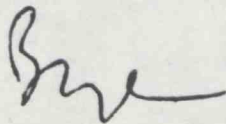
PRIME MINISTER

I am resubmitting the BNFL News Q and A article.

I have sidelined the very small changes made since you last saw it. These have been cleared with the responsible Departments; and men with red flags did walk in front of the first trains.

You particularly queried Answer 4. I am assured that the answer, as now phrased, is perfectly correct.

Please see Annex A for the copy on which you made your comments on the original draft.



BERNARD INGHAM
29 October 1985

BNFL NEWS

Q1: What role do you expect Britain's nuclear industry to play in the future?

A1: I am sure nuclear power is going to be a major source of energy for Britain. I have no doubt that it has a great future. Although we had the world's first commercial nuclear power station at Calder Hall, we have been rather slow to develop nuclear's full potential. Now we are paying a price in dearer energy, which is in turn reflected in industry's costs and jobs.

Q2: The French of course get about 60 per cent of their electricity from nuclear power while the UK proportion is under 20 per cent. Do you agree that this gives the French advantages in cheap electricity and what does the Government propose to do about it?

A2: Yes indeed it does help France to compete internationally. The less the overheads - costs - imposed on your industry the easier it is for your companies to win job-creating or job-preserving orders. We need to get our industrial costs down because they are rising more rapidly than those of our major competitors. We cannot look to nuclear power for much immediate help in this because we have been slow to develop it, but in the longer term nuclear power will be an indispensable part of our industrial and economic strength. The Government I lead believes in nuclear power and we will steadily develop its potential.

Q3: Many people in the nuclear industry feel that nuclear power is singled out for special treatment in relation to measures to protect the environment, and this adds on more costs. Bearing in mind the risks associated with other industries, do you feel that in the nuclear industry's case the balance between industrial advancement and environmental protection is right? Does the Government regard the nuclear industry as a special case and is this justified?

A3: Your question reminds me so much of the days when the railways were being developed and men were required to walk before the engine with a red flag. Contrast that with the recent record breaking run between London and Newcastle at an average speed, I believe, of over 125 mph! Railways are undoubtedly one of the safest forms of travel but people were naturally very, very careful about the first iron horses. It is therefore only natural - and indeed sensible - that we should develop nuclear power with care and due caution. The one sure way of protecting nuclear power's future is to run our power stations, and all the associated operations, safely and efficiently. We now have 30 years' experience of their safe and efficient operation and in the process nuclear power has demonstrated its potential as the cheapest form of power generation, taking into account the necessary protection of the public and environment.

That protection must continue - and to very high standards. And the process of scientific advance should make nuclear power even safer. So the future is very much with you.

Q4: How do you regard the safety record of the nuclear industry in the UK, including one of its more controversial elements, reprocessing?

A4: The safety record of the nuclear industry, compared with other industries in the UK, is second to none. And the health monitoring of its employees and the environment is second to none, too, both in its intensity and consistency. I do not myself regard reprocessing as particularly controversial.

It is merely one facet of the total industry - the one that deals with the reclamation and disposal or storage of waste products. These are familiar operations in most industries, some of which have to cope with absolutely - and instantly - lethal substances. In nuclear's case, the difference is that the materials are radioactive to a greater or lesser degree. But we know how to handle them safely. Indeed our hospitals could not do the fantastic job they do for us these days without radioactive chemicals and x-rays.

So, to put it simply, I don't regard reprocessing as unusual, let alone controversial, however hard some people try to make it appear so. And I am supremely confident in the ability of our nuclear scientists and engineers to maintain the industry's frankly enviable safety record.

Q5: In BNFL's annual report, reference was made to an increase in exports last year by BNFL of 40%. How important do you think it is for Britain's nuclear

industry to get into and remain in the export business?

A5: BNFL is a major export earner both through fuel fabrication and reprocessing. You are undoubtedly our largest source of Japanese yen because of all the business you do with Japan. In this way you are contributing handsomely to our national economic well being. Competition in the world market will get tougher but I look to BNFL not only to hold our share but also to expand our export trade. The nuclear industry is uniquely one Britain pioneered and I don't want to see us lose our hold on the world's business - as we have in so many other sections of industry. Nor, for that matter, does West Cumbria, I am sure.

Q6: What is your attitude to attempts by anti-nuclear organisations to close down Sellafield and their efforts to prevent the building of further nuclear reactors?

A6: I think the opposition is understandable and perhaps inevitable but at the same time irrational and misguided. It is also somewhat ironic since nuclear power is a classic example of how swords can be beaten into ploughshares - converting the destructive potential of nuclear fission into a source of clean energy. History shows that there are always rearguard actions against any scientific development. Not all of this is bad to the extent that it makes for a safer, more careful and sensitive industry. But the kind of opposition that we see to nuclear power is certainly irrational when, for

example, you think of the appalling death toll over the years in the coal mines. However, I think a lot of the opposition must be desperate bearing in mind the extent to which it relies on scaremongering.

Q7: What do you think is the main cause of opposition to nuclear energy?

A7: I am not sure there is one main cause. Undoubtedly, there are many people who are genuinely concerned for the environment and others who seem to fear nuclear because it is different or "unnatural". We have to respond to their fears with our safety measures. We have to respect their point of view, but I think we resist change and scientific progress at our peril. Some of the opposition is political, linked with opposition to nuclear weapons.

Q8: A major issue in the nuclear industry is the public acceptability of nuclear power. Do you feel the industry might be doing more to promote this?

A8: However irrational or misguided the opposition towards nuclear may be, I think you are right to identify public acceptability as a major, and perhaps the major issue confronting you. There is, as I say, no doubt that we know how to run the nuclear industry safely, efficiently, competitively and successfully. But, just as democratic governments need to persuade the public of their competence and virtues, so industries like nuclear power need, in a democracy, to do their bit to win public confidence. This, as the accidental discharges at Sellafield two years ago

sharply underlined, calls for a wholehearted effort on the part of everyone working in the company to avoid such incidents, however slight their real effect. As the judge said, this incident hurt no-one and put no-one at risk. But this serves only to emphasise the need for the nuclear industry to explain itself better and put the real, rather than the imagined, risks into perspective. It has not only to operate its plants carefully, considerately and well; it has to inform the people, who hear so many conflicting claims and allegations, about the nature of the industry and its achievements.

If public acceptability is the key to your future then it is right that the industry should give it the closest attention. I hope you can now put behind you the events of earlier this year and demonstrate, in the face of what will be resourceful opposition, that Britain needs a thriving nuclear industry and is fortunate in the one that it has already got.

As a scientist, I profoundly believe that to be the case. But you - everyone who works in the industry - are your own best advocates and I look forward to hearing you telling the world how safe and successful you are.