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PRIME MINISTER

30 October 1985

VISIT TO BNFL AND CEGB SITES

Your visit to sites of British Nuclear Fuels plc and the Central Electricity Generating Board includes your opening of two plants at BNFL's Sellafield site. I would like to add a wider perspective to the factual briefing which the Department of Energy has provided. My views are based on a visit to Sellafield last year and discussions with the BNFL Board.

2. A continued growth in the UK's nuclear power capacity is desirable for reasons of both energy production (in particular, the projected decline in fossil fuels from the North Sea) and environmental protection (the contribution of fossil fuels combustion to air pollution damage). Sellafield is the "Achilles heel" of the industry. Over recent years there have been several uncontrolled escapes of radioactive materials, most notably the incident in November 1983 which led to the successful prosecution by the Crown earlier this year, which have shown up serious failings in management, technology and public relations. Sellafield is now the focus of national and international criticism of the UK's nuclear power programme, and its performance is being watched closely. Any further failing is likely to be exploited with the danger of a critical loss of public confidence in the nuclear power programme.

3. The opening of the plants today and the expenditure, already authorised, of many millions of pounds at Sellafield on further plant to reduce the discharge to the environment of waste from fuel reprocessing, may be difficult to justify in cost-benefit terms to BNFL, but it is essential if the national nuclear power programme is to be sustained.

4. Senior BNFL management, both privately and publicly, have occasionally expressed doubt about the need for such investment in expensive plant. You may wish to take the opportunity to make clear that the Government considers that only the very highest levels of environmental and safety standards, and of management performance will suffice to maintain public confidence in nuclear power generation which is of such importance to the country's economy.

5. I am copying this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong.

RBN.

SIR ROBIN NICHOLSON  
Chief Scientific Adviser



## NUCLEAR POWER IN THE UK

### Nuclear contribution

In 1984 nuclear power contributed more than 18% of UK electricity supply. (In terms of energy consumption, this figure is equivalent to 6% of total UK energy consumption.) With completion and full operation of Heysham II and Torness by the end of the decade, the nuclear contribution could reach 25%.

The UK occupies a middle ranking in comparison to other OECD countries in terms of the percentage of electricity supplied from nuclear stations. The league table is headed by France where about 60% of electricity supply came from this energy source in 1984.

### Nuclear Stations

Type	Total Capacity (MW)	Number	Operator
Magnox	4,000	8	CEGB
		1	SSEB
		2	BNFL
AGR	6,480*	4	CEGB
		1	SSEB
[Under construction	2,640	1	CEGB
		1	SSEB]
Total UK nuclear generating capacity	10,480	16	
Total UK nuclear generating capacity by end of the decade	13,120	18	

The CEGB has also placed an application to construct a 1,200 MW Pressurised Water Reactor (PWR) at Sizewell.

\* including three stations commissioned in 1984 but not yet fully operational.