

# France's La Hague Facility Becoming Center Of Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Industry

The French Atomic Energy Commission subsidiary COGEMA has announced that it will unilaterally sign a 3 billion franc (\$600 million) contract with Japan this month for spent nuclear fuel reprocessing at the French reprocessing center at La Hague. Under the contract, 1,600 tons of spent Japanese power reactor fuel will be reprocessed. The French decision was made this week after the COGEMA and Japanese electric utilities decided to drop joint negotiations with the British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. (BNFL) for part of the package. COGEMA has stated that it will go-it-alone without British participation in the deal due to environmentalist organized hearings on the "ecological impact" of plans to expand the BNFL Windscale facility. Without such expansion, which the bankers' Friends of the Earth and other environmentalist groups are attempting to block, Britain will be unable to accept major foreign reprocessing orders.

The French-Japanese deal is only the first of a series of major reprocessing agreements which the COGEMA is negotiating. Verbal agreement has been reached with the West German fuel consortium, DWK to reprocess spent nuclear fuel from BRD reactors. Additional agreements are being negotiated with Austria, Sweden and Switzerland atomic energy authorities. The feature common to all the negotiations involves advance payment to finance the physical expansion of the La Hague facility in order to accommodate the large influx of reprocessing contracts. The expansion will allow COGEMA to fill the contracts without the participation of the British BNFL.

The significance of the aggressive French organizing on the international reprocessing market is enormous, both politically and at the industrial level. Politically, the French have underscored their fundamental opposition to Carter-Schlesinger attempts to impose an international ban on nuclear reprocessing. The new reprocessing deals also follow by mere weeks related international deals among the French fast breeder program, said to be the world's most advanced, and its West German and Soviet counterparts for international cooperation in breeder development. Nuclear fuel reprocessing, which yields the byproduct fuel plutonium, is an essential prerequisite for a commercial fast breeder economy.

Commenting on the significance of the French reprocessing deals, whose total sum is estimated to reach some 10 billion francs (\$2 billion), the Paris daily

*France-Soir* notes that this is part of a deliberate policy decision by French President Giscard d'Estaing to make France an international nuclear fuel reprocessing center. Part of the agreement includes the safeguard, to inhibit diversion of nuclear fuels into weapons production, that before reprocessed fuel is sent back to the country of origin, the wastes will be 'neutralized' in a unique French vitrification process. This process treats the plutonium to insure that it is useable only for low-grade civilian power purposes. Under such safeguards, *France-Soir* notes, France finds a major asset in its La Hague facility, which "allows it to exercise a certain influence in the world."

The La Hague expansion, in fact, means that France, with the British Windscale facility in doubt and the U.S. government not proceeding on its reprocessing, will fast become the only western country which has established a developed nuclear reprocessing industry. French spokesmen point out that this gives France major bargaining leverage in international political negotiations with both the U.S. and Soviet Union. They further underscore the growing peaceful nuclear industrial cooperation linking France with Europe's major industrial power, West Germany. *France-Soir* points out that by agreeing to reprocess its uranium "in the broad daylight of La Hague," West Germany is allaying the fears of others that the BRD will use its peaceful nuclear program to develop a nuclear bomb. Certain London and New York financial circles have used this fear to sabotage the formation of a European industrial bloc sufficiently strong to break with the bankrupt dollar.

Already there are indications that environmentalist networks, widely known to be financed and run by Anglo-American financier and intelligence circles, will be activated to attempt to sabotage the expansion of La Hague and thereby sabotage the emergence of France as the international center for resistance to the USA's anti-nuclear development policies. The officials of the French Socialist Party in the town nearest the La Hague facility have begun screaming that they have not been sufficiently consulted on the environmental impact of the center's expansion. Further, Rand Corporation spokesman Albert Wohlstetter, currently in Britain at the invitation of Friends of the Earth to testify against the Windscale expansion, told the press that the French-Japanese deal would fall through because the U.S. government will refuse Japan permission to reprocess its nuclear fuel in France.