

Percy Bill Would Hamper U.S. Nuclear Export

Earlier disagreements between the State Department and the offices of Senators Percy (R-Ill), Ribicoff (D-Conn), Javits (R-NY), and Representative Bingham (D-NY), sponsors of the controversial "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1977" have been resolved and the bill, with various amendments, was passed by the House of Representatives unanimously. The Senate version of the same bill, bitterly opposed by U.S. industry, has just been reported out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with a favorable vote of 13-0.

The bill, receiving remarkably little attention while the press rivets public attention on the Senate debate of the Carter Administration's separate National Energy Act, has far-reaching significance for the future growth potential of the USA's advanced nuclear technology exports.

When Sen. Percy introduced the bill in the Senate last March, he announced the bill would give the government "unprecedented criteria to govern the transfer and U.S. nuclear export items." The heart of the bill, S. 897, as subsequently amended, gives Congress veto powers over approval of reprocessing and retransfer of nuclear fuels, a move which could plunge any coherent U.S. nuclear export program into chaos and uncertainty.

A further provision, which would require an arbitrary and vague "timely warning" criterion against possible diversion of U.S.-enriched fuels into weapon development, opens the door for further U.S. disruption of export fuel and technology contracts of the type "informally" imposed by the Carter Administration this past winter to attempt to blackmail West Germany and France into breaking major nuclear supply contracts with Brazil and Pakistan. Two of the five members of the government's Nuclear Regulatory Commission attacked this proviso saying that it "might well result in an unwarranted suspension of nuclear fuel shipments to important allies of the U.S."

"A Bad Bill"

A former U.S. ambassador to the International Atomic Energy agency (IAEA), strongly denounced the Percy-Bingham bill as "a bad bill". The former representative to the United Nations agency primarily concerned with international safeguards against nuclear weapons proliferation, told the Senate subcommittee on Energy Research and Development that the bill will "turn potential future customers away from cooperation with the U.S." He added that the bill contains far too many "built-in deterrents to effective cooperation" between U.S. nuclear industry exporters and the rest of the world. He then cited the resulting probability of delays and ultimate Congressional veto over approval of export contracts will

prove a too high risk for the growing number of countries seeking to develop peaceful nuclear energy sources.

George Stathakis, who heads the U.S. Atomic Industrial Forum's committee on nuclear export policy and is vice-president of General Electric, the second largest nuclear manufacturer in the U.S., joined in attacking the bill as selfdefeating even in its own terms since it will tend to weaken the present IAEA international framework and force other countries to accelerate their own development of technologies such as enrichment and reprocessing centers as well as fast breeder technologies. He added that the bill comes across as an attempt to "impose on other nations a U.S.-determined set of solutions to proliferation concerns."

Since the President's April national address espousing the Ford Foundation-MITRE line to halt development of plutonium-linked technologies, specifically, nuclear fast breeder and related nuclear fuel reprocessing technologies, the Carter Administration has faced almost unanimous opposition from the rest of the world and the domestic U.S. nuclear industrial and scientific community.

Last week, delegates from over 70 countries met for the Tenth World Energy Conference in Istanbul, Turkey, and came out unanimously in favor of development of fast breeder technology. Their call termed the Carter Administration ban on so-called "sensitive" technologies "pointless," since "the technological cat is already out of the bag." A growing number of U.S. scientists, some of whom previously believed there was a significant danger of weapons proliferation from developing the fast breeder and fuel reprocessing, have begun to realize the argument is a fraud perpetrated by circles around the Ford Foundation and MITRE, including Defense Secretary Harold Brown, who helped draft the report prior to his appointment as Defense Secretary.

Recent experiments at Los Alamos Laboratories in New Mexico have proven that the contention that extraordinary new safeguards for plutonium-related technologies are needed to halt nuclear weapons proliferation is senseless. Experiments at Los Alamos demonstrated that any nation intent on committing the required hundreds of millions of dollars and teams of top engineers and scientists can actually produce a weapon from conventional low-grade uranium. This shoots holes in the motivation behind the Percy-Bingham bill: that the development of breeders and reprocessing easily leads to nuclear arms proliferation.

— W. Engdahl