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"Put it somewhere else!"

Ten years ago the British government decided that London needed a new airport. It is not easy to hide an airport, especially in the crowded proximity of Greater London; and many Britons exhibited a vehement lack of enthusiasm for having an airport in their back gardens. Accordingly, the then Labour Government took a step at that time unprecedented, and set up a Commission headed by a judge of the British High Court, Mr Justice Roskill, to consider which of several shortlisted sites would be It.

The Roskill Commission sat for over a year. In due course it produced a massive report, couched in the new language of cost-benefit analysis, which declared that the best site for a third London Airport would be the village of Wing, in Buckinghamshire, and its environs. However, the said environs were inhabited by cohorts of prosperous lawyers, stockbrokers and politicians. After some extraordinary scenes in the byways of Bucks, Parliament (by then under a Conservative majority) voted in short order to choose instead the coastal site of Foulness, inhabited mostly by pink-footed geese.

It mattered not that the Roskill Commission had comprehensively dismissed Foulness as unsatisfactory. Political realities swept the multi-million-pound Roskill report aside with scarcely a second glance. Within two years the Foulness site, by now also hotly defended, was likewise reprieved, when the entire plan for a third London Airport was shelved. The Roskill fiasco set the stage for a progressive breakdown of British planning procedures for large-scale projects. The Parker report on the Windscale inquiry *(Bulletin,* June 1978) brought the ensuing decade to an appropriately chaotic close. British planners are now casting about with mounting desperation, to find a way to cope with a daunting array of explosive issues looming before them.

Similar problems confront their colleagues in other industrial nations. However, a planning process which would be effective in, say, Sweden, the Netherlands or the United States would not necessarily meet the case in Britain. To begin with, in Britain the most controversial proposals are those put forward by the government itself, its agencies and the major nationalized industries answerable to the government. Airports, motorways, reservoirs, and major energy facilities like power stations and coal mines are planned by various official bodies, and embraced in government planning policies. All too often the government is caught in a blatant conflict of interest, acting both as advocate and as judge.

This dilemma is one of the many difficulties underlined by the continuing post mortems on the Windscale exercise. To their credit, the government-backed Social Science Research Council correctly anticipated that the Windscale inquiry would be a social phenomenon of considerable importance; the Council empowered a three-person research team to analyze the inquiry and educe the relevant lessons for future such exercises. The study, under D W Pearce of Aberdeen University, was christened the Windscale Assessment and Review Project, thereby acquiring the unfortunate acronym WARP.

As this is written the final WARP report in still in preparation. But an interim report of some 148 pages was readied with commendable speed and circulated to a select subgroup of interested parties in July 1978. It sent a frisson through the Department of the Environment (responsible for planning decisions) and through the advocates of several major undertakings soon to come under scrutiny. The WARP team was plainly unimpressed with the Windscale procedure, for a number of reasons given cogent and substantive expression in the interim report. The report, as yet unofficial, is not available for quotation. But Pearce has discussed some of its findings and consequent recommendations on national television, to a chorus of hand-wringing from the authorities.

The main target for the WARP findings is another nuclear project which has been hovering in the wings for many years, the plan to build a full-scale fast breeder reactor power station. Without going into further detail at the moment, it may be said that no other major planning proposal in Britain is likely to arouse such a national ferment as the so-called Commercial Demonstration Fast Reactor, CDFR-1. Alluding to the promised CDFR-I inquiry, the WARP team recommended a standing commission to deal with general policy issues; at least six months' notice before the commencement of an inquiry; and even - unthinkable to Britain's civil service - government funding of objectors. Even so, WARP's recommendations are modest compared with some put forward by other commentaries in the wake of the Windscale brouhaha. Some detailed procedures proposed would undoubtedly last a minimum of five years.

Even then, there would be no guarantee of a satisfactory outcome, as a sobering new book makes clear. *Windscale Fallout,* by Ian Breach, was published by Penguin Books with exemplary swiftness only two months after Parliamentary approval for the Windscale plan. Breach was one of only two reporters who covered the entire 100 days of the Windscale inquiry; but his book is not simply a recap on the inquiry. It is rather a thoughtful and troubling commentary on the implications of the inquiry and its aftermath. Breach points out that, far from resolving either the particular issue or nuclear controversy in general, the Parker report has produced a bitter polarization hitherto largely absent from nuclear debate in Britain.

Some aggrieved objectors have published statements calling for a boycott of the promised fast reactor inquiry, and a campaign of civil disobedience, site sit-ins and physical confrontation with the authorities, a manifestation widely witnessed elsewhere but not thus far in Britain. British phlegm and good manners are often caricatured in the United States; but it should be noted that organized disruption of public planning inquiries - singing, chanting, and shouting down the proceedings - has in the last two years become an everyday sight at British inquiries into proposed motorway construction. To date the challenges have stopped short of Molotov cocktails and riot gas, but no one in Britain has any profound conviction that such eventualities are beyond imagining.

Nor can the planners seek refuge in non-nuclear options. The National Coal Board has discovered a vast seam of coal under the Vale of Belvoir, a quiet agricultural area of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire which has never before been mined. Part of the seam lies under the ancestral castle of the Duke of Rutland, who has vowed that he will hurl himself prostrate in front of the first Coal Board bulldozer that appears over the horizon of the Vale. He will not be alone. Nonetheless the Coal Board this summer filed the first formal planning application for permission to mine in the Vale. The phalanxes are already drawing up on either side, and the authorities will have to devise some sort of Geneva Convention to minimize casualties. Ten years after Roskill they seem no closer to a solution.

Objectors, on the other hand, have learned from their experience. Ten years ago, faced with the threat of a large-scale and disruptive development, they tended to argue: "Put it somewhere else." Gradually, however, they began instead to argue: "Don't put it anywhere - it's a thoroughly unsound plan." Now they are arguing, "The policy behind the plan is itself unsound; change the policy." As the quandaries deepen, the authorities may have to do just that.

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