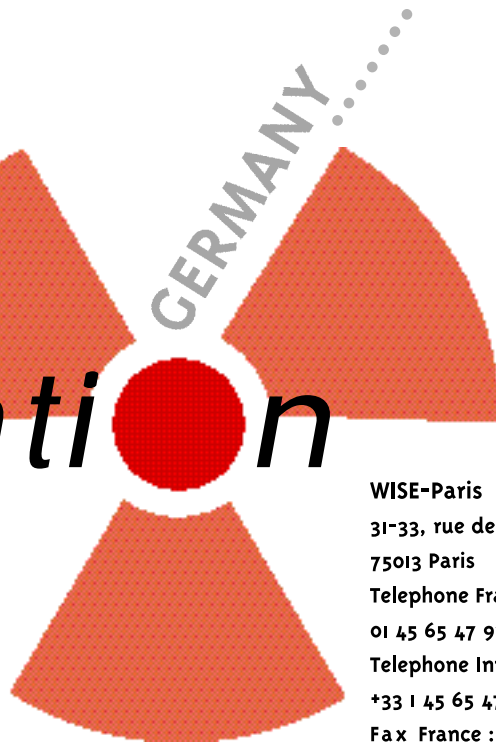


Plutonium *Investigation*

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EDITORIAL

Pass the hat round!

What is a recent figure for German plutonium stocks? Germany belongs to a group of nine countries which agreed in December 1997 to publish basic information on their plutonium policy according to common "Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium". Therefore it seemed an easy question. It seemed. Dieter Hornschild, a top official from the German Foreign Office argued in a letter dated 2 April 1998 that with the signature of the EURATOM Treaty in 1958, Germany does not have its own State System of Accountancy and Control and "therefore EURATOM transmits to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna [data on] the plutonium stocks and quantities as defined in the Plutonium Guidelines". Mr Hornschild states: "I regret not being able to respond to your request and suggest that you turn directly to EURATOM." That's what we did. Wilhelm Gmelin, director of EURATOM Safeguards declared over the phone: "We do not even process such information. We do not have the resources. We can hardly carry out our legally required tasks. We are poor!". Intolerable! Picture EURATOM inspectors passing the hat round outside the plutonium facilities which mobilize almost half of the EURATOM control budget. By the way, German utilities spent about \$US 4 billion producing their current stockpile of plutonium, safeguarded by EURATOM. You got a buck? The IAEA does not seem to be better off than EURATOM. A note on the bottom of the IAEA communication on management of plutonium dated 16 March 1998 reads: "For reasons of economy, this document has been printed in a limited number".

GERMANY: Problem Export Expert

Germany was not permitted to engage in a nuclear programme directly after the Second World War. But it did not take long to catch up. For the establishment in 1957 of the first European nuclear consortium Eurochemic aiming to build a commercial reprocessing plant in Belgium, Germany played a key role. The signature of the EURATOM treaty in 1958, by which Germany transferred the State System of Accountancy and Control of nuclear materials to EURATOM, paved the way for the catch-up in plutonium-related technologies. An entire plutonium economy was established in the country, including commercial reprocessing plants and fast-breeder reactors.

Facing increasing political opposition, heightened by the 1986 Chernobyl accident, the nuclear industry in Germany was forced to cancel its domestic plutonium industry programme, even though very large sums had already been invested. The fast-breeder reactor programme was terminated in 1991, the site of the never-operated Kalkar reactor was turned into

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an amusement park. The reprocessing programme was stopped in 1989, the Wackersdorf site attracting solar cell and car part factories. Finally, the MOX industry at Hanau was shut down in 1994. The plutonium bunker on the site is to be emptied over the coming years.

However, instead of abandoning these high-risk activities, the German industry has turned towards its counterparts in neighbouring countries, notably France and the UK, which have been happy to take over. Currently, German electricity utilities have reprocessing agreements with COGEMA and BNFL, which separate plutonium from German spent nuclear fuel. Both companies, as well as the Belgian Belgonucléaire, produce plutonium bearing mixed oxide (MOX) fuel which is used in some of the German power plants.

Germany's Nuclear Sector

The Federal Republic of Germany has developed nuclear power since the mid 1950s. There are several hundred electricity utilities in Germany, but only a dozen large utilities operate the nineteen nuclear power plants in distinct geographical regions. Each of these plants was built by Kraftwerk Union (KWU), the power plant division of the large Siemens group. These reactors generated 169 billion kWh during 1997, corresponding to about 35% of the total electricity production (485 billion kWh) in the country. Six Soviet designed VVER reactors had been operating in the former German Democratic Republic, but were shut down in 1990 after the unification because of safety concerns. The construction of five other of these Soviet-type reactors was abandoned for the same reasons.

One feature which is specific to Germany is highly decentralised institutions. The governments of the sixteen Länder, together with their parliaments (Landtag), share much authority with the Federal government and parliament (Bundestag). Local opposition to a project reverberates further in Germany than in a country with a more centralized decision-making process. Another particular feature is that the political landscape is unfavourable to nuclear energy. While the governmental coalition, led by CDU Helmut Kohl, has been trying for the last five years to come to some kind of agreement with the other major parties on the development of nuclear power - or at least a guaranteed life time for existing reactors - both the SPD and the Greens are clearly opposed to any extension of current generating capacity, or much of the nuclear industry's projects. Notably, no future power plant is planned in Germany.

Although Siemens has launched the Nuclear Power International (NPI) joint venture and invested with the French Framatome and some of the utilities for a new design of nuclear power plant, the

European Pressurised Reactor (EPR), it is clear that without a broad political consensus, no order will be made for such a reactor. The possible future election of SPD's Gerhard Schröder to succeed to Chancellor Kohl makes such a consensus even less likely. In fact, it has become clear that not even one of the EPR promoters believes that there will be any new German plant, whereas there are still some hopes that a prototype could be built in France. However, the 20,000 protesters at last year's rally against the vague prospects of a reactor project at Le Carnet in the west of France and the subsequent announcement to abandon any such project by the French government indicate that times are also getting tough for the nuclear industry in France.

The Shutdown Of The Plutonium Industry In Germany

The development of fast breeders in Germany, while initiated in the framework of a European collaboration, was ended before it reached the commercial stage. SBK (Schnellbrüter-Kernkraftwerksgesellschaft), a German-led consortium with participation of utilities from the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK (which sold its share to the German utility RWE in January 1997), started building a prototype fast-breeder 295 MWe reactor at Kalkar on the Rhine in 1973. The project was finally abandoned in March 1991 after DM 7 billion (US\$ 4 billion) had been invested, because neither the North-Rhein-Westphalia Land nor the Federal governments indicated they would license it. A Dutch investor decided in 1995 to buy and transform the reactor, which was never used and therefore never contaminated, into an amusement park, due to be opened after the year 2000. Recently, the planned use of the fresh Kalkar fuel in the USA to produce tritium for the military in a nuclear power plant was criticised as an unacceptable link between military and civil activities. A few years before, in 1985, a reactor similar to the 1,200 MWe Superphénix reactor in France (in which SBK holds a 16% share), which had been projected by German and other European electricity utilities, was also definitively abandoned because it had become clear that the breeder line would never be competitive with conventional nuclear power plants.

The WAK reprocessing plant at Karlsruhe's (Nuclear) Research Center was a pilot plant operated from 1971 to 1990. It did not operate as planned and reprocessed only some 208 tonnes of spent fuel during that time. The construction of a commercial-size reprocessing plant got underway at the beginning of the 1980s at the Bavarian Wackersdorf site. After spending DM 2.6 billion (about US\$ 1.5 billion), the utilities abandoned the project in 1989. Once the breeder line was given up, there was no longer any reason for investing in large plutonium

production facilities, in particular given the fact that the plants then under construction at La Hague and Sellafield would have significant excess capacity after the turn of the century. At the same time, the large energy holding VEBA projected to take a direct share of COGEMA, a move which was first backed by both French and German governments, but which did not succeed. One of the reasons for the failure was that some top officials thought it would be impossible for a German company to get a share of an operator of military nuclear facilities. Instead, COGEMA allocated a share of the UP3 plant's capacity after the year 2000. The abandonment of the German plant was a stroke of luck for the French and British plants, towards which the German utilities turned themselves. However, the reprocessing agreements signed for the period after the turn of the century contain a political clause allowing the Germans to withdraw from the undertaking with modest penalties.

MOX fuel, containing both uranium and plutonium oxides, was experimented with rather early in German reactors. A demonstration programme was started in 1966, and the first commercial plant to be fuelled with MOX was the Obrigheim PWR which received MOX fuel in 1972. During 1997, only five plants were partly fuelled with MOX fuel out of the 12 which are licensed for such use.

Until 1990, German utilities were waiting for the Siemens commercial MOX manufacturing plant at Hanau (nominal throughput 120 tonnes/year), which was to replace a demonstration plant on the same site (35 tonnes/year). After an accident during which three workers were contaminated with plutonium oxide powder, the demonstration plant was shut down and the licensing procedure for the commercial plant was stalled. As for reprocessing services, the German utilities have to rely entirely upon foreign companies to provide them with MOX fuel. In an unprecedented move, the French COGEMA has nominated the former Hanau MOX manager Jürgen Krellmann from Siemens as director of the MOX manufacturing plant at Cadarache in the south of France. In order to satisfy Siemens clients, COGEMA now manufactures MOX in France according to Siemens' technical specifications.

According to the German Atomic Act (Atomgesetz), operating licence of nuclear power plants must specify a spent nuclear fuel management scheme six years ahead. Until an amendment in July 1994, the German Atomic Act required reprocessing spent fuel if reprocessing was "justified on technical and economic grounds". For a long time, utilities read this to mean that the Act required the spent fuel to be reprocessed. They thus signed reprocessing contracts with the French COGEMA (4,755 tonnes plus about 2,000 tonnes to be reprocessed after year 2000) and the British BNFL (969 tonnes plus 690

tonnes to be reprocessed after year 2000). German utilities are the largest foreign customer of COGEMA. Spent fuel from the Russian-designed VVERs in the former GDR is stored in storage ponds and no reprocessing for this spent fuel is planned.

The July 1994 amendment states that direct disposal and reprocessing are equally acceptable options for spent fuel management. Since then some utilities have disengaged themselves from their commitments to foreign reprocessors, and are not willing to sign further reprocessing contracts. This situation has pushed COGEMA and BNFL to offer better deals to German utilities (cheaper prices, "reprocessing or storage" or "reprocessing and MOX manufacturing" contracts, less waste to be returned...). Recently, the federal government stated it planned to tax the reserves made by utilities to pay for reprocessing costs. Utilities have protested that this discriminated against the reprocessing solution for spent fuel. One thing is for sure: it will put even more pressure on the French and British plutonium producers.

Future Evolution

The domestic German plutonium industry is being "abgewickelt" - a term meaning *wrapped up* which is used for run down East German companies which are closed down in the aftermath of unification. The leading nuclear manufacturer Siemens is turning towards exports to compensate for the diminished markets in Germany. While Siemens has an undertaking with Framatome in the joint venture NPI, in 1997 it shocked both the French industry and authorities with the news that it had struck a deal with the British BNFL, the key competitor of the French nuclear fuel industry, to set up a joint venture for nuclear services (nuclear fuel, decommissioning etc.). Siemens is also looking into the possibilities of selling parts of the abandoned commercial MOX plant at Hanau.

While no new nuclear power plant has been ordered in Germany since 1980, there are no signs to indicate that the future would be rosy for the industry. Utilities have already acknowledged this fact by exporting to France and the United Kingdom the activities they have not been able to continue in Germany. Thus, opposition to nuclear activities in Germany in a way favours nuclear activities in the two other countries. Even though this shift might satisfy local concerns in Germany, it raises new questions about these same activities in France and in the United Kingdom. The opposition in Germany has drawn consequences out of this analysis and has significantly stepped up its campaign against spent fuel transports to the plutonium factories in France and the UK. It is true that the boomerang in form of radioactive waste packages from La Hague did not exactly receive an enthusiastic welcome in Germany either. No wonder.

NUCLEAR TRANSPORTS : A FEW DEMONSTRATIONS MADE, PLENTY TO COME

Over the last 25 years Germany has seen many demonstrations against the nuclear industry. Those against the Wackersdorf reprocessing plant in Bavaria in the 1980s were particularly massive. Today's demonstrations are in particular against nuclear shipments. During the last four years, demonstrations have been organised against transports of nuclear spent fuel or high-level radioactive waste to two "interim" storage facilities. These demonstrations have involved tens of thousands of citizens - organised in "Bürgerinitiativen", citizens' groups - activists, farmers, and even local police trade unions, and have required the intervention of tens of thousands of policemen. The use of police forces and the repair for damages (to road and railway tracks) have been very costly:

- April 1995: one cask of spent fuel to Gorleben - 8,000 policemen, DM 50 million;
- May 1996: one cask of highly radioactive waste from the reprocessing plant at La Hague transported to the Gorleben interim storage facility - 9,000 policemen, DM 90 million;
- March 1997: four containers of spent fuel and two containers of highly radioactive waste from the reprocessing plant at La Hague, France to the Gorleben storage interim facility - 20,000 demonstrators, 30,000 policemen and estimated to have cost DM 111 million;
- March 1998: another transport of six containers of spent fuel from the Gundremmingen and Neckarwestheim nuclear power plants to the Ahaus interim storage facility - 10,000 demonstrators, 30,000 policemen (several football matches had to be cancelled since the police could no longer guarantee security), at least cost an estimated DM 100 million.

According to the security organisation in Germany, it is up to the Land concerned to pay for the police forces during such demonstrations. However, since the Lower Saxony Land, in which is located the Gorleben storage facility, has been obliged by the Federal government to accept the waste against its will, it has not yet agreed to pay for these sums. The outcome of the conflict is still unclear.

The two interim storage facilities for radioactive waste, the Gorleben "Castor-Hall" and the Ahaus storage facility, are basically warehouse type buildings. The large demonstrations have shown that the population concerned is fundamentally opposed to the 1970s choices for interim storage, especially as no final storage management scheme or site has been decided upon. The transports have also been opposed for safety reasons because of the potentially catastrophic consequences of an accident during the journey through densely-populated areas. As one radioprotection engineer puts it, these transports are nuclear facilities on wheels and risks associated with transports are of the same extent as those associated with the operation of a plant.

Since the return of high-level radioactive waste from the reprocessing countries to Germany is just beginning, as well as the transport of spent fuel which will not be reprocessed to interim storage sites, many more transports are to be carried out and corresponding protests are scheduled.

GERMAN PLUTONIUM STOCKPILE NOWHERE TO GO ?

As of 1 January 1998, Germany had processed 3,376 t of spent fuel at La Hague (3,552 t as of 1 March 1998) and 56 t at Sellafield. At an average plutonium content of almost 1% the total amount of German plutonium produced in France and the UK is roughly 36 t. The total amount of plutonium produced at the German Karlsruhe plant WAK is 1,164 kg.¹ The total amount (leaving minor other sources aside) is therefore about 37 tons. And there is a great deal more to come: current contracts with Sellafield and La Hague cover an additional 2,116 t plus 2,690 tonnes contracted for the post-2000 period). The reprocessing of all of this fuel would lead to an additional 48 t of plutonium.

On the consumption side, the total amount of MOX fuel introduced into German reactors as of 1 January 1998 is 238.3 t. At an average of about 5% plutonium content, about 12 t of plutonium have thus been reintroduced into LWRs. An additional ca. 1 t of plutonium has been contributed by Germany to the first Superphenix core.

In other words, as of January 1998, Germany owned a stockpile of about 24 tonnes of unirradiated plutonium in various forms. If German plutonium separation was immediately halted, it would take 13 years at the 1997 MOX fuel loading rate of 37.5 t spread over five reactors to absorb the stock. The full implementation of the existing contracts would stretch that period by another 25 years to 38 years. And it would still take almost 20 years if the number of reactors loaded with MOX was doubled to ten. A brilliant strategy to impose continued operation of the reactors onto policy makers. Time to talk seriously about plutonium immobilisation as final waste.

Most of the current stockpile is at La Hague and about two tonnes are still stored in Germany in a bunker at Hanau. The State of Hesse, which has not granted the operating licences for the two MOX plants, has negotiated with the Federal government and Siemens that the Hanau site has to be cleared of plutonium and dismantled. However, no decision has yet been taken on the final destination of the material, nor on the form under which it will be stored.

While some of the fresh Kalkar breeder fuel was transported to Dounreay in Scotland, about 140 kg of plutonium have been transported without much public attention during the summer of 1997... back to La Hague.

¹W. Weinländer, et al., «Twenty years of WAK reprocessing pilot plant operation», in RECOD'91, Proceedings Vol.1,14 -18 April 1991, Tokio.



Who's Who ? In Germany

STATE and INDUSTRY

BMU Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit

The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Conservation of Nature and Nuclear Safety is the federal regulatory authority for nuclear safety. BMU shares authority for licensing facilities with the government authorities in each of the Länder.

KENNEDYALLEE 5, D-53175 BONN

TEL: +49-228-305 2010 - FAX: +49-228-305 3225

GRS Gesellschaft für Anlagen- und Reaktorsicherheit

The Society for facility and reactor safety is one of the official technical backup institutions for nuclear safety. A lot of quality control is also performed by the local technical supervisory offices (Technische Überwachungsvereine TÜV).

SCHWERTNERGASSE 1, D-50667 KÖLN

TEL: +49-221-206 80 - FAX: +49-221-206 88 88

BfS Bundesamt für Strahlenschutz

BfS is the Federal Office for Radiological Protection. It oversees the Reactor Safety Commission (RSK) and the Radiological Protection Commission (SSK).

POSTFACH 12 06 29, D-53048 BONN 1

TEL: +49-228-305 3720 - FAX: +49-228-67 03 88

GNS Gesellschaft für Nuklear Service

The Society for Nuclear Service is a utility service company specializing in nuclear fuel services (spent fuel casks, radwaste transports, storage facilities, etc.). GNS also manages the reprocessing contracts with the French and UK plutonium producers.

ZWEIGERTSTR. 28-30, D-45130 ESSEN

TEL: +49-201-72 20 102 - FAX: +49-511-91 16 100

VDEW Vereinigung Deutscher Elektrizitätswerke

There are hundreds of electricity utilities in Germany but only about a dozen of the largest ones are operating nuclear facilities. Utilities have a common organisation called the Federation of German Electricity Utilities which manages the technical and economic relationship between utilities and forms a powerful lobby.

STRESEMANNALLEE 23, D-60596 FRANKFURT

TEL: +49-69-63041 - FAX: +49-69-6304 289

OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES and CONTACT ADDRESSES

Öko-Institut

The Institute of Applied Ecology is a technical consultancy organisation with over 70 experts which is partly funded through the membership of individual citizens and city councils (about 4,000). It works on many different environmental issues but has a team of outstanding experts on nuclear issues including reactor safety and radioactive waste management. Over the years, the Institute has developed significant expert activities for the Länder nuclear licensing authorities. Öko-Institut experts also advise the Hessen government on the final shutdown and dismantling of the Hanau MOX fuel fabrication facilities.

There are three offices in Darmstadt, Berlin and Freiburg. The Darmstadt office is the largest and comprises the nuclear department.

MICHAEL SAILER

BUNSENSTRASSE 14, D-64293 DARMSTADT

TEL: +49-6151-8191 0 - FAX: +49-6151-8191 33

Physikerbüro Bremen

This Physicist Office has the best independent experts on breeder reactors in the country. They constitute also a highly reliable reference on many other nuclear safety issues.

RICHARD DONDERER

LANDWEG 6, D-28203 BREMEN

TEL: 49-421-323571 - FAX: 49-421-328719

GÖK Gruppe Ökologie / INTAC

The GÖK has a team of nuclear specialists who have been focusing in particular on reprocessing and radwaste management for a long time. They work for licensing authorities as well as for other public institutions or environmental organisations.

WOLFGANG NEUMANN

KLEINE DÜWELSTRASSE 21, D-30171 HANNOVER

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University of Bremen

One of the very few independent labs in Europe able to perform plutonium measurements. Very reliable.

GERALD KIRCHNER

D-28334 BREMEN

TEL: +49-421- 218-3266 - FAX: +49-421-218-3601

IANUS

IANUS has been working on the links between the civil and military nuclear industries. It serves as the secretariat of the International Network of Engineers and Scientists Against Proliferation (INESAP) and publishes the INESAP bulletin.

MARTIN KALINOWSKI

HOCHSCHULSTR 10, D-64289 DARMSTADT

TEL: +49-6151-16 4368/3016/4468 - FAX: +49-6151-16 6039

IUH Initiativgruppe Umweltschutz Hanau

Very efficient local group opposing the Hanau nuclear fuel establishments.

ELMAR DIETZ

KÖRNERSTR. 6, D-63452 HANAU

TEL: +49-6181-85473 - FAX: +49-6181-295 670

Greenpeace Germany

The German office of Greenpeace has become the largest and most influential branch of the international environmental organisation.

VORSETZEN 53, D-20450 HAMBURG 11

TEL: +49-40-31 186-0 - FAX: +49-40-31 186-141

Plutonium IN GERMANY

19 OPERATING NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS (status 1.1.98)

- 6 Boiling Water Reactors (BWR), of which 2 are licensed for MOX use.
Both were loaded with MOX in 1997.

- 13 Pressurised Water Reactors (PWR). Mülheim-Kärlich will probably not restart. Although 10 are licensed to load MOX, only 3 made use of their license in 1997. A good indicator of the lack of enthusiasm for MOX fuel. Isar-2 is to be loaded in 1998.

2 INTERIM STORAGE FACILITIES FOR SPENT FUEL AND HIGH LEVEL REPROCESSING WASTE

- Ahaus
- Gorleben

NO OPERATING REPROCESSING PLANT

NO OPERATING MOX FUEL FABRICATION PLANT

FIGURES OF THE MONTH

The La Hague reprocessing plants operate very successfully not only for France but especially for foreign clients. Of the 12,124 t of cumulated throughput of light water reactor fuel as of 1 March 1998, close to 60% or 7,105 t were of foreign origin, of which exactly half or 3,552 t were discharged from German reactors. At its current rate, without any major technical incident or accident, the foreign "base load" contracts of 7,000 t could be fulfilled by the end of the year 2000 (the foreign UP2 contracts having already been executed). It would take COGEMA until the end of 2001 to process all of the 8,156 t under contract. The French utility EDF has not signed any follow-up contract yet. The only substantial quantity (roughly 2,000 t) under - very flexible - contract after the turn of the century has been signed up for by the German utilities. No wonder COGEMA follows election results in Germany closely.

Reprocessing at the French La Hague Plants (in metric tons of heavy metal as of 1 March 1998)

	REPROCESSED IN UP 2	REPROCESSED IN UP 3	TOTAL REPROCESSED BY COUNTRY
France	5,019	0	5,019
Germany	1,643	1,909	3,552
Japan	151	2,223	2,374
Switzerland	132	229	361
Netherlands	85	141	226
Belgium	139	453	592
Total	7,169	4,955	12,124

WORDS OF THE MONTH

Bayernwerk AG Chairman **Otto Majewski** wrote to Federal Minister of Finance Theo Waigel on 24 June 1997 that if the Federal government goes ahead with its plans to tax utility reserves which are earmarked for reprocessing, "reprocessing, as an alternative to geological disposal, would in the future be eliminated as a spent fuel management option". He warned that "if reprocessing contracts with France and Britain are cancelled or limited, [this would bring] unforeseeable consequences for relations with Britain and France". Given growing opposition to foreign reprocessing in France, these consequences may be rather positive.

«One does not solve problems in exporting them», stated **Klaus Töpfer** in February 1997, then German minister for local development, about the reprocessing in France of spent fuel from German nuclear power plants and the return to Germany of the generated radioactive waste.

Töpfer, now heading the UN Environment Programme in Nairobi, has been a long time minister for environment and nuclear safety. He continued by saying in an interview with WISE-Paris that he was conscious that these problems had to be taken care of "at home": "I am entirely convinced that, in some cases, we should be more honest with ourselves and clearly say that we have not avoided the risk but that we have only shifted it".

SUPERPHENIX INQUIRY

The French National Assembly has voted unanimously in favour of the establishment of an inquiry committee to investigate "the conditions under which the creation, the building and the abandonment of Superphenix were decided, its consequences for the fast neutron and breeder reactor line, and the lessons which have been drawn from this experience in the scientific, administrative, financial, political and environmental areas".

The pro-nuclear lobby hopes to be able to put into question the government's decision to shut down Superphénix for good, and the critical MPs try to highlight the countless errors and failures of the breeder programme from the beginning. Also, in July 1977, extremely violent riot police broke up a demonstration of 50,000 people; one demonstrator lost his life, and over one hundred people were injured.

The initiator of the bill for the establishment of the inquiry committee, right winger and long term nuclear lobbyist Robert Galley, had actually thought limiting the mandate of the committee to look at "the shut-down of Superphénix and its consequences on employment, research and orientation of the French energy policy". No surprise he did not think of investigating the past: Galley was part of the Barre government which forced through the construction of Superphénix against massive opposition.

The socialist MP Michèle Rivasi delicately reminded the Assembly of the fact that a similar request for the establishment of an inquiry committee was voted down by the right wing majority... in December 1976.

