

Nuclear reprocessing in the UK: sources of entrapment

William Walker
University of St Andrews
Scotland, UK

1. False predictions and promises

- FBR: 8 needed by 2000 (Windscale Inquiry Report, 1978). None built.
- THORP, MOX, vitrification: poor performance, missed targets
- Plutonium return/recycling: little achieved
- Medium & high-level waste disposal sites: none agreed and developed

2. Utilities' reliance on Sellafield

- Under-investment in spent fuel storage capacity at reactor sites
- Reprocessing: price paid for spent fuel transfers to Sellafield
- Reprocessing site: only large employer in an isolated region (West Cumbria)

3. Tangle of international agreements and contracts

- Withdrawal penalties
- No coordination among customers, who lacked collective will & ability to renegotiate
- Absence of transparency
- Linkage to inter-state relations (e.g. UK-Japan)
- Anglo-French alliance

4. Failure of political management & oversight

- UK Parliament's neglect after endorsing initial decisions
- Politico-industrial bureaucratic networks
- Lack of political courage to challenge entrenched interests
- Embarrassment factor: never admit mistakes
- Public opposition must be defeated!

5. Refusal to consider & study extrication

- Extrication steps & paths were not examined until too late
- Even to study extrication would signal that policies are failing
- Despite ignorance, costs & risks of extrication always portrayed as greater than costs & risks of continuation
- Therefore keep digging a bigger hole, throwing good money after bad

The legacy

- A public policy disaster, with long-term effects
- [Cost of clean-up, decommissioning (billion pounds/yen)]
- [Size of plutonium mountain (tonnes)]
- Waste disposal nightmare
- Public mistrust & cynicism