

Soviets say nuclear unsafe . . . for West

While the Soviets keep the world peace movement supplied with propaganda and funds about the U.S. "weapons arsenal," they don't mention their own plutonium production capability—the dual-purpose nuclear reactor of the Chernobyl type.

There is no disagreement among nuclear experts in the West that the graphite-moderated reactor at Chernobyl is capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium. The question is: What did the production of weapons-grade plutonium have to do with the Chernobyl accident?

Short of a full, open inspection of the 20 or so graphite-moderated water-cooled nuclear reactors, known as the RBMK-1,000 series, no one can dismiss the charge that the Soviets were using these units to produce significant quantities of weapons-grade plutonium for their nuclear arsenal.

The Soviets have admitted that Viktor Sidorenko, deputy chairman of the State Committee for the Safe Conduct of Work in the Atomic Power Industry, was at Chernobyl just three hours after the explosion, and it is he who told the press that the accident occurred "at the state of experimental research work" being carried out during a routine shutdown of the reactor. The chairman of Sidorenko's committee is Yevgenii Kulov, formerly of the Ministry of Medium Machine Building, which oversees "military applications of nuclear energy" and fuel-cycle operations at all Soviet nuclear power plants.

Why is Moscow still basing its nuclear program overwhelmingly on the graphite reactor? They have acknowledged that the graphite-moderated channel reactors require greater capital investment than the pressurized water reactor type used in the West for civilian power production. And some 40% of present Soviet nuclear capacities are already similar to Western pressurized water reactors, which do not have the inherent instability problems of the graphite reactor design.

The Western civilian nuclear reactor program developed on an entirely different track—adaptation of the pressurized water reactor first used by Adm. Hyman Rickover to power the U.S. nuclear submarine *Nautilus* in the 1950s. This design, together with modified versions such as the GE boiling water reactor, constitutes the basic civilian reactor design in use today in the West. These reactors are inherently incapable of direct production of weapons-grade plutonium.

In fact, nuclear scientist Dr. Edward Teller told a Montreal audience June 3 that he chaired a U.S. committee in

1950 that had ruled out the graphite design for commercial power production, because the graphite moderated reactors were considered unsafe.

Making propaganda out of Hamm

As the Soviets pursue the cleanup at Chernobyl and announce that the undamaged plants at the site will be back on line in October 1986, they have accelerated their campaign to shut down nuclear power in the West. The Soviet "big lie" disinformation campaign went so far as to accuse West Germany of covering up a nuclear accident at the Hamm high temperature reactor by blaming the alleged radiation release from Hamm for the massive radiation from the Chernobyl disaster! The Soviet daily *Pravda* reported June 3: "There is much discontent in West Germany over the nuclear plant incident near Hamm. . . . The management tried to conceal the nuclear plant accident from the public to attribute the release of radioactivity in the area to the Chernobyl reactor."

Pravda reported that the accident was "covered" up by Germany only to "maintain their campaign of anti-Soviet lies" around Chernobyl. TASS on June 4 stated, for export only: the "nuclear reactor accident [at Hamm] . . . resulted in contamination of the environment. The current indignation and protest in the Federal Republic is understandable and justifiable."

While the Greens and the Soviets yell "accident," what actually happened was routine and well within the safety limits of normal operation for the Hamm plant. The so-called incident took place May 4, when a small fuel pellet got stuck in one of a series of valve-locks in a pipe leading to the reactor core. The procedure in such a case is to release some of the reactor's helium gas coolant into the locks of the valves to push the pellet toward the reactor. Then the plant operator has to move that helium gas, which is very slightly radioactive, back into the helium circuit or release it through the plant's smokestack. Both actions are routine operating procedure.

In this case, the operator vented the small amount of helium gas; the total amount of radioactivity released was approximately 2.2 millicuries, limit for the reactor *per day*—4 millicuries. In other words, the so-called accident was not an accident, but within normal operating procedure.

Nevertheless, the pro-Moscow Social Democratic Party state administration in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the Hamm plant is located, ordered the reactor closed until the utility produces a full safety report.

One of West Germany's leading nuclear scientists, Rudolf Schulten, professor of reactor technology at the Technical University at Aachen and a leader of the Institute for Reactor Development, characterized the event as follows: "On May 4 in Hamm, nothing happened that was not allowed to happen. . . . What was released through the chimney was nothing but a fart."