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NATIONAL ENERGY ISSUES—HOW DO WE DECIDE: PLUTONIUM AS A TEST CASE

By R. SACHS, Ed.

Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Company. 1980. Pp. 336.

National Energy Issues—How Do We Decide: Plutonium As A Test Case, is an account of a 1978 symposium of the same name, designed to foster open discussion of unresolved issues plaguing the development of a national energy policy. Significant insight into these issues and problems is provided through this interesting collection of presentations and lively discussion, edited by Robert G. Sachs.

Following the editor's brief introduction outlining the recent shift in emphasis from technological issues to sociopolitical issues, the work proceeds to establish itself as both perpetrator and victim of the problems which it cites. Sachs attributes the present inability of the United States to establish an effective energy policy to the numerous factors which must now be considered including regulatory policy, economic philosophy, and national and international politics and ethics. This complex of factors, accompanied by an influx of political scientists, economists, sociologists, politicians, special interest groups, and the news media, has introduced new and divergent values into the energy debate.

The symposium, which Sachs faithfully reproduces here, provided the opportunity for a meeting of the minds allowing a wide range of prominent academicians and expert industry and government representatives to explore areas of agreement and disagreement in the energy debate. The diversity of the participants' backgrounds facilitates thorough discussion of "Growth vs. No-Growth" economic assumptions, risk assessment, proliferation dangers, and approaches for improving the decision-making process.

The discussions often develop into a microcosm of the present energy debate. For a few of the participants it is evident that predilections of what the proper decision on a particular issue should be bias the decision criteria or theories which are projected.

The discussion is effectively organized around four distinct but interrelated issue areas: (1) Needs for Nuclear Fuel; (2) Health, Safety, and Environment; (3) Nonproliferation Requirements; and (4) the Decision Process and the Plutonium Question. Each section is comprised of at least two individual presentations followed by discussion involving all symposium participants. This format allows the reader to examine the dilemma which faces our national policy-makers as advocates of diverse viewpoints substantiate equally respectable bases for decision-making.

National Energy Issues—How Do We Decide: Plutonium As A Test Case, offers the reader a thorough overview of contemporary issues in the national energy debate. Robert Sachs has presented important reading for those of us who continue to wonder why we can't decide.

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