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## **Plea for nuclear dialogue goes unheeded**

By Walt Patterson

A nuclear assembly of potentially critical proportions came together in Switzerland at the end of last month. Unfortunately, however, no discernible chain reaction occurred. The occasion was a conference with the title "Crisis in the Nuclear Industry?", organised by the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, Zurich. It is difficult to recall any previous gathering in Europe offering such a wide range of well-informed opinion on nuclear policies. The organisers deserve congratulations for their imagination - indeed their courage - in bringing together an impressive array of vigorous advocates and outspoken critics, and giving them three days to strive for a mutual *modus vivendi*.

It was a pity, therefore, that the opportunity was not better utilised. The conference opened with an urgent warning about the danger of a total polarisation between pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear camps, such as now exists in the US. The warning was given by Llewellyn King, publisher of *Weekly Energy Report*, a hard-headed veteran observer of the nuclear scene; but few of the nuclear community present seemed inclined to take the warning to heart. Conference sessions heard papers on planning and forecasting; finance; research and development; uranium supply; safeguards; and the public policy context, and social consequences, of nuclear energy development. Virtually every problem area came under consideration. But, in the working groups which followed the presented papers, the stance of the nuclear proponents was, in general, to defend their perception of the status quo, and deny the validity of critical comment.

Informally, to be sure, much valuable contact occurred between differing viewpoints, over coffee or on the Institute terrace. It was intriguing, for instance, to see the similarity between the approaches espoused by David Comey, one of the most respected nuclear critics in the US, and Dr Jan Doderlein of the Norwegian Institute for Atomic Energy, one of the most thoughtful nuclear advocates in Europe. Both have long insisted that the keyword should be openness: access to information, honesty about problems, and a recognition that "the other side" is not necessarily malicious, vindictive or stupid.

However, the attitude of the conference chairman, Dr P. J. Jansen, of the Karlsruhe Nuclear Institute, typified that of most of his colleagues. From the outset they assumed that any "crisis" would be dealt with entirely from within the industry. "Experts" must decide (such context as could be distinguished assumed that "energy supply" was interchangeable with "central generation of electricity"). Throughout the conference the nuclear proponents regarded contact with the general public as a one-way street: to inform, to explain, to persuade, to reassure - in the apparent hope that the public would then go away and let the industry and government get on with it.

On the evidence of the Zurich conference very few European nuclear people have yet realised how necessary it is becoming for them also to listen to the world outside.