On May 22nd the Public Inquiry into the Central Electricity Generating Board’s proposal to build Britain’s first pressurised water reactor at Sizewell, on the Suffolk coast, took up temporary lodging in a converted grain store, in order to make way for the Aldeburgh music festival in the Snape Maltings concert hall. With the proceedings approaching the end of the safety case the Inquiry took on a more intimate atmosphere in its new surroundings. This report covers the period from May 22 to the summer adjournment on August 3rd, during which a range of disparate issues was under scrutiny including a few residual matters from the need and economics case.

This period opened with Mr McInerney of the CEGB on the stand answering questions on his proof concerned with commissioning, operation maintenance and operator training. Mr Brooke (Counsel to the Inquiry) led the cross-examination asking questions on a very broad canvas, this covered human factors, the 30 minute rule (whereby the reactors will not require human intervention for at least 30 minutes into any accident sequence – although such intervention will be an option), control room layouts and staffing structures, measures to prevent or limit operator boredom, the use of simulators in training operators to deal with emergency situations, the incidence of operator error as a result of stress, and arrangements to deal with the problems created by a power failure in the control room.

Mr McInerney and his support panel were followed by Mr Pepper (also of the CEGB) who was cross-examined by Mr Searle (on behalf of the Stop Sizewell B Association) as well as by Mr Brooke. Mr Pepper’s proof of evidence is on radiological protection during normal operation and Mr Searle had questions to ask on many aspects of this, including exposure limits and dose calculations, safety rules and health and safety legislation, the precautions recommended for contamination zones and the effectiveness of guidelines on protective clothing.

The following week was taken up with a number of discrete topics – each taken for one day only. On May 29th Dr Hale for the Ergonomics Society was recalled, along with his support team, and questions relating to normal reactor operating were put to him by Mr Bartlett for the Board, and by Mr Brooke.

On May 30th Mr Round, who is appearing for the Norfolk County Labour Party (NCLP) came on to be questioned by Lord Silsoe, Mr Brooke and Professor Hall (the safety assessor) on his proof entitled ‘Safety comparisons between the proposed PWR and AGRs’. Mr Round stressed his preference for the AGR and outlined the NCLP’s contentions that an AGR is likely to be safer than a PWR, that the AGR design has more attractive inherent physical characteristics than a PWR (such as core heat capacity and longer projected timescales for accident development) and that an AGR would be less prone to be affected by problems in the transmission system.

The following day (Day 225) was devoted to economic consideration and saw the appearance of Professor Williamson who is a senior fellow at the Institute for International Economics and was invited to attend by the Inspector (Sir Frank Layfield) to present evidence on the effects of changes in the sterling real exchange rate. Questions were put to Professor Williamson by Mr Brooke, Mr Fitzgerald (for the Board) and Professor Foster (the economics assessor), most of which sought to identify the likely effects of such changes on the CEGB’s need and economics case.

Two individual objectors appeared on the following day. Ms Pilkington and the Rev. Drye presented evidence and were cross-examined by the CEGB counsel. Ms Pilkington associated her evidence with that of Mr Patterson (of the Friends of the Earth) and Mr Edwards (of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). This consisted mainly of her views on historic links between the civil and military applications of nuclear energy. The Rev. Drye followed her onto the stand and began by indicating his feeling that nuclear power was a ‘conditional good’. Mr Burton for the CEGB sought clarification on one or two points before the Inspector himself discussed certain moral arguments contained in Rev. Drye’s proof relating to energy for the Third World.

The following week began with two Inquiry days devoted to witnesses from the Anti-PWR consortium (TULA). Mr Taylor appeared first and was questioned on his proof entitled ‘Effects of an accident at Sizewell B on agriculture and fisheries’. Lord Silsoe discussed a number of the assumptions in this proof including those governing the choice of wind directions and weather sequences, the harvesting of crops, and the significance of releases over the sea in assessing the impact of an accident at Sizewell. Mr Taylor was joined by his colleague Mr Kayes for cross-examination on their joint proof on emergency planning in the context of reactor and spent fuel transport accidents. The principal topics considered were computer modelling of accident consequences, UK emergency arrangements contrasted with US practice, and the value of presenting risk information in a map and contour format as opposed to using technical scientific terms.

June 7th saw Dr Bonnell for the CEGB giving evidence on his proof ‘The biological effects of radiation and the medical supervision of radiation workers’. Mr Searle put questions relating to the incidence of leukaemia among Sizewell A workers and
in the Leiston area. The earlier evidence of Dr Bush on this topic and of Sir Edward Pochin on general aspects of exposure to radiation were recalled by Mr Searle and Mr Brooke during this discussion.

Professor Kletz of the Department of Chemical Engineering at Loughborough University of Technology was the next witness and appeared at the invitation of the Inspector to provide an independent viewpoint on risk assessment in view of his expert knowledge and experience in applying quantitative safety analysis techniques in chemical plant hazard evaluation. Professor Kletz discussed many topics including identification of hazards, techniques used in the chemical process industry, criteria of risk acceptability, presentation of risk information, human reliability, and common mode failures. Many of his points were illustrated with examples drawn from experience of the chemical process industry.

The final witness of this week was Dr Ash who made a brief appearance to elaborate on his proof discussing the geological distribution of certain chemical elements and the geographical distribution of sarcoidosis and cancer.

By contrast with this series of short topics, the whole of the next week was taken up with the discussion of matters relating to uranium supply and was split between Mr Rosenthal's evidence on Namibian uranium and the presentation, and subsequent cross-examination of witnesses on behalf of the Joint Ecology Parties (JEP).

Mr Rosenthal is a post-graduate student at the University of London Institute of Education and his case, against Sizewell B going ahead, rests on the uncertainty of Namibian uranium supplies in the long term future. Mr Rosenthal called two witnesses in support of his case, Dr Picciotto, a senior lecturer in international economic law, answered questions on the status of UN resolutions on Namibia, and the UK government position; and Mr Pickering, a Namibian refugee who had been employed as a personnel officer at the Rossing mine in Namibia, gave his view of the Namibian labour system, and of social conditions, and health and safety provisions, at the mine.

Towards the end of the proceedings on June 12th Mr Oubridge came on to make an opening statement on behalf of JEP. He commented on the apparent lack of regard, in the CEGB's evidence, to the potential problem of uranium supply. In addition he concluded that Britain as a uranium user should accept moral responsibility for the effects of uranium mining, the potential of exposure to radiation were recalled by Mr Searle and Mr Brooke during this discussion.

On June 26th Mr Jenkins (CEGB) was cross-examined by Mr Blake of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) and by Mr Brooke and Professor Foster for the Inspector. Discussion centred on the Cambridge Energy Research Group's (CERG)