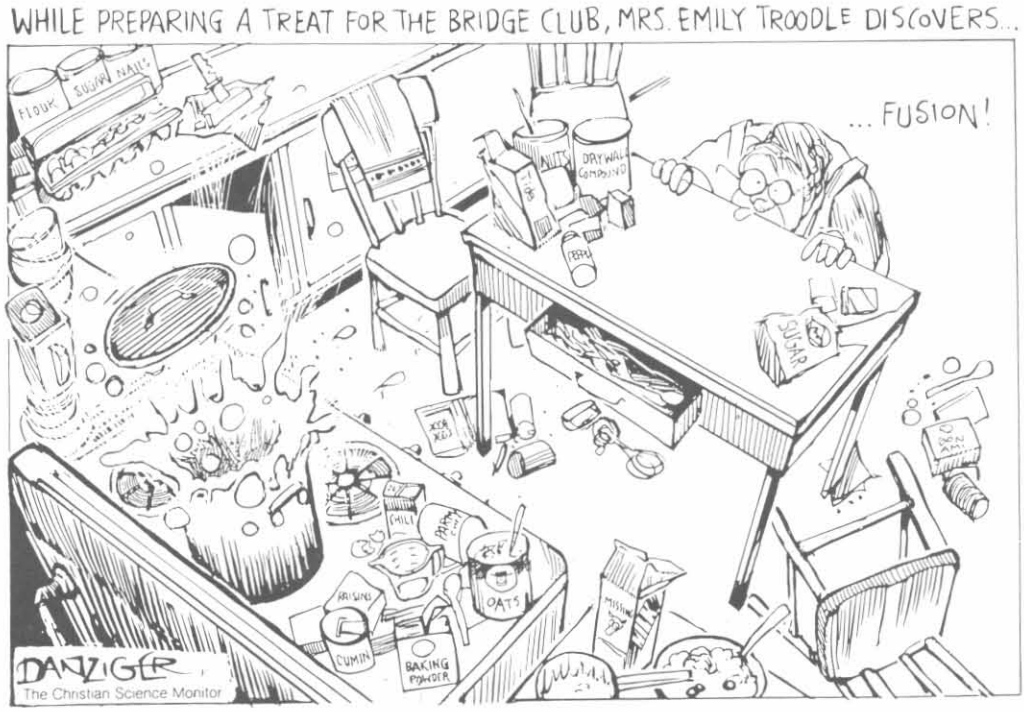
Issue 57

Nuclear Power: Risk Assessment

Some of the pros and cons for using nuclear reactors as a source of power follow.

Pros:

1. In a few hundred years, known reserves of coal will be depleted. In energy, 1 kilogram of uranium is equivalent to 2,000,000 kilograms of coal. The pressures in favor of nuclear power will become enormous.



Danzinger in The Christian Science Monitor © 1989 TCSPS.

2. Breeder reactors *never* run out of fuel.
3. Nuclear reactors produce no significant emission of greenhouse gases, while coal and oil produce many pollutants dangerous to health and cause acid rain.
4. The problems of spent fuel and waste disposal are being solved.
5. Standardized safer and cheaper reactors are being developed.

Cons:

1. Radioactive poisoning and radiation are deadly.
2. There is no safe and effective way to get rid of radioactive wastes.
3. Stolen uranium and plutonium may be used for weapons.
4. Many nuclear plants are near big cities, where an accident will have particularly severe consequences.
5. Human error was the cause of the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents. Can we ever prevent people from making errors?
6. The impending worldwide uranium shortage will provide strong pressures to reprocess spent nuclear fuel into plutonium, easily diverted into nuclear weapons.
7. Despite the efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Israel and India already have evaded safeguards and joined the nuclear weapons "club." Several other nations are probably close to doing so. Such diversion and proliferation may be impossible to prevent.

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