

Statement by Rep. Bella S. Abzug concerning safety dangers at Indian Point atomic power plants

February 10, 1976

The numerous dangers inherent in operating nuclear power plants are so apparent that even the people most committed to nuclear power are risking their reputations and their livelihoods to force long-suppressed information into view.

Now we have a charge by Robert Pollard, project manager for safety evaluations at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, that the Indian Point nuclear plants threaten the health and safety of millions of people in the Greater New York area. Because of the utmost seriousness of these revelations, Governor Carey and other State officials have an immediate responsibility to protect the people living within the radiation reach of these plants.

I have been in close contact with Robert Pollard since mid-January. After he submitted his resignation at that time, officials at the NRC denied the importance of his charges and immediately limited the scope of his inquiry. Initially, Mr. Pollard had been promised access to all files necessary to substantiate his charges of unexamined safety problems, both at Indian Point No. 2 and No. 3 and at many other nuclear reactors throughout the nation. An attempt was made to restrict the topics of his final report. Mr. Pollard's attorney then consulted with the House Government Operations Subcommittee on Information and Individual Rights, which I chair. After the Subcommittee counsel telephoned Peter L. Strauss (counsel for the NRC), Mr. Pollard was allowed greater access to NRC files for the remainder of his period of employment.

However, Mr. Pollard has charged that crucial evidence of the agency's withholding of information on safety problems exists in the NRC internal files. On January 30, citing the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, I formally requested the NRC to provide me with the following material:

- 1) The correspondence between Mr. Pollard, Mr. William A. Anders, chairman of the NRC, and Mr. Gary Simpson (Mr. Pollard's attorney) concerning Mr. Pollard's access to NRC files for the purpose of substantiating his charges.
- 2) Mr. Pollard's January 23 interim report listing unresolved safety problems at Indian Point.
- 3) The December 1975 "Technical Safety Activities Report," and previous issues of this report issued since December 1974.

I have been informed by Mr. Pollard that this third item is an updated compendium of continuing unresolved nuclear safety problems, with roughly one problem on each of its several hundred pages. Release of this quarterly publication will finally demonstrate the extent of the NRC's willingness to license plants now and ask questions about safety later.

Since all of this material is either in published form, or is correspondence involving Mr. Pollard, and none could under the most extreme definition be called classified national security information, I see no reason why this information should not be released immediately, rather than within the 30 days provided by the statute.

In addition, Mr. Pollard, whose formal term of employment ends February 13, should be allowed access to files at the NRC headquarters for as long as he requires to produce a substantive and comprehensive documentation of his charges.

As for the specifics of the Indian Point nuclear plants, Mr. Pollard has cited three principal dangers:

- 1) Lack of separation between electrical and instrument cables which jeopardize emergency backup systems;
- 2) Problems with backup diesel generating facilities;
- 3) Danger of overloaded pumps and turbines, leading to the possibility that a loosened flywheel could turn into a high-velocity missile, puncturing the nuclear container and releasing radioactive material into the atmosphere.

Mr. Pollard's focusing on these three areas does not preclude the existence of safety problems in other systems which he did not examine at these plants.

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Until these questions have been resolved, Indian Point No. 2 should be shut down, and Indian Point No. 3 should not be licensed for operation.

I have questioned the safety and the economics of these plants since their inception. Beginning in April 1975, I attempted to block the sale of Indian Point No. 3 to the Power Authority of the State of New York (PASNY). In general, the State authorities involved took Con Edison's word about this plant, and they failed to consider my objections, as well as those of many other elected officials and concerned citizens. On January 19, before Mr. Pollard's story became known, I called upon the State Legislative Commission on Energy Systems to investigate the circumstances surrounding the sale of this plant. The need for such an investigation is even greater at this time.

Con Edison is now operating Indian Point No. 3 in its pre-operational phases under PASNY supervision. Con Edison has already applied to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for a "full-term, full-power license" for Indian Point No. 3. At some time after the plant becomes operative, PASNY will apply for a license to operate the plant. Several problems in this transfer are still unknown to the public, including the reluctance of insurers to write separate insurance policies for three adjacent nuclear plants (Indian Point No. 3 is still shut down as unsafe) operated under different authorities. And this spring, the glossed-over problem of dangers from nearby geological faults will again be examined.

Therefore, I call upon the NRC and PASNY to suspend the application for operating licenses for Indian Point No. 3. And I call upon Con Edison to close down Indian Point No. 2, all pending an investigation of all charges by an independent board of scientists and technicians. I urge the Governor to establish such a board immediately. Mr. Pollard is not the only individual with serious charges. Last week, three General Electric senior engineers resigned, asserting that nuclear power plants could not be built safely. And it is rumored that a number of Con Edison employees at Indian Point have terminated their employment in recent years under similar circumstances, but with no public attention.

Con Edison, which was able to sell the No. 3 plant to the State by pleading financial hardship, is once again as robust as it was before it suspended its dividends. The price of its stock is back at the level where it was before taking this dramatic action for the benefit of the State Legislature and the Public Service Commission. PASNY has paid Con Edison \$354 million so far for Indian Point No. 3. The total eventual cost, including financing, to the state agency, may reach \$600 million before the plant goes into operation. At this time, it is essential that Con Edison and PASNY renegotiate their purchase agreement, so that, in the event the plant never goes into operation, and it can be demonstrated either that Con Edison neglected important safety considerations or concealed them from State officials, the utility will return a substantial portion of the funds to the State.

I am today writing to Governor Carey, Chairman Fitzpatrick of PASNY, Chairman Anders of the NRC, and Chairman Luce of Con Edison, concerning the matters I have raised in this statement.

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