

'Risk is the new four-letter word. If they flew on a jet to get there, they got more radiation than they would have in a year at Three Mile Island.'

— Dr. Margaret Maxey

Atomic power expert blasts nuclear bans

By CAROL MAHONEY

First there was "The China Syndrome," a film about an accident and subsequent cover-up at a nuclear plant. Then there was the real life foul-up at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania.

Public attention has suddenly been riveted on the dangers of radioactive fallout when one of these accidents occur. Anti-nuclear factions predict dire consequences if these plants continue to operate.

Dr. Margaret Maxey, associate professor of Bioethics at the University of Detroit, has some different opinions. Speaking to members of the Birmingham branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) last week, she attempted to give her listeners a balanced view of the actual dangers involved.

"Four years ago I was about as anti-nuclear as anyone in this room could be," she told her audience.

Then Dr. Maxey was assigned to teach a course which required her to research the nuclear question.

After extensive reading of professional journals on the subject of nuclear energy, Dr. Maxey said she came to realize "what a job had been done on me" both by popular opinion and the media.

As a result of her study Dr. Maxey has become a staunch supporter of nuclear energy. She believes that the American people "are being seriously misled" by the anti-nuclear forces. "They are trying to convince the American people that they can have a future without nuclear power," she said.

"Risk is the new four-letter word," she maintained.

Referring to the anti-nuclear activists who staged a demonstration in Washington recently, she said, "If they flew on a jet to get there, they got more radiation than they would have in a year at Three Mile Island."

IT IS DR. MAXEY'S argument that we are worrying excessively about the

wrong things. She believes that the risk levels of nuclear plants are acceptable in light of what could happen if they were all closed down.

"There is no conscientious way in which we, as a society, can go on burning up natural gas and coal. We should be saving these petrochemicals for medicines."

Dr. Maxey believes many nuclear foes think that the generation of nuclear power is synonymous with the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

"Nothing says that because you have plutonium it is predestined to be used in weaponry," she said. Dr. Maxey said that it is not merely having weapons that causes wars. She cited instead the "serious instability" and "domestic unrest" that could occur if "we don't have adequate sources of energy."

She also disputes those who say we can cut back on our energy consumption by 25 to 50 percent and suffer no loss of the quality of life.

As for alternate sources of energy, she argues that there are limits to what they offer. In terms of what Dr. Maxey called "payback time," nuclear energy offers a three- to five-year wait as opposed to a 20-year payback time for solar energy. Payback is the amount of time necessary to gain back the expenses incurred in production.

"And that 20-year payback time is just in the sun belt states," she added.

She further warned that the world is going to have a nuclear future whether the country elects to use nuclear energy or not. By ignoring this source of energy she thinks this country "we will be losing the only political leverage this nation has."

In summing up her position, she quoted Madame Marie Curie, who said, "Nothing in life is to be feared — it is to be understood."

WHETHER OR NOT they agreed with her stand, Dr. Maxey gave AAUW members something to think about at their last general meeting of the year.



Dr. Margaret Maxey wasn't always a supporter of nuclear energy. She changed her mind when assigned to teach a course which required research on the nuclear question. (Staff photo by Stephen Cantrell)

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