

## Japan On Short End Of A-Plant Compromise

Japanese and U.S. negotiators have reached a "compromise" agreement on Japan's controversial Tokai nuclear reprocessing plant which will permit the plant to open and operate as planned, while postponing the issue dividing the two countries: Japan's commitment to develop fast breeder nuclear technology.

According to the terms of the agreement, scheduled to be ratified in Washington next week, the U.S. will allow the Tokai plant to operate on a trial basis for two years, reprocessing uranium from Japan's existing light water reactors. In exchange, Japan has agreed to postpone its ambitious efforts to develop plutonium breeder technology for commercial use and will not build a plant needed to convert the nitrate products from Tokai into oxide products for nuclear fuel. During the trial period, Japan must carry out a "major effort" to develop alternatives to the plutonium method of breeder reactors. The agreement envisions a review of all breeder technology development after the two-year trial period.

The break in the long-stalled negotiations came last week when the chief U.S. negotiator, Trilateral Commission member Gerard Smith withdrew the Carter Administration's most outrageous demand — that the Tokai plant could open for use only if the plant were restructured to produce a useless mixture of uranium and plutonium. Smith then introduced a "compromise" that specified the plant could open if the plutonium breeder program was postponed.

In demanding that the Tokai plant meet U.S. specifications, the Carter Administration was utilizing its control over all by-products of enriched uranium supplied by the U.S. to Japan. At this time, the U.S. is Japan's only source of enriched uranium, although the Soviet Union has offered to supply the islands.

Japan has strongly resisted the Administration's original demands, arguing that restructuring the Tokai plant for "co-processing" would take at least 10 years and cost another \$2 billion. This particularly angered the Japanese not only because of the billions of dollars already spent on the plant, and not only because of the

time delay implied in the demand for the already energy-starved Japanese economy, but because the Tokai plant was first built after close consultations between Japan and the U.S. under the Nixon Administration.

### *Two Views of a Short Stick*

Compared with the original U.S. demand, the Japanese undoubtedly viewed the Smith "compromise" position as an "offer that could not be refused," and see the two-year "trial period" as little more than a temporary delay in achieving plutonium breeder technology. A high official in the Japanese Science and Technology Agency, who told reporters last week that if Japan does not have a satisfactory alternative to the plutonium technology at the end of the two-year trial period, "Japan will go on the same way (with plutonium technology.)"

Carter Administration officials see it otherwise, emphasizing that Japan was allowed to open the Tokai plant only because the government has agreed to comply with the Administration's zero-growth bias against plutonium technology. The State Department's top nuclear expert, Joseph Nye, menacingly claimed last week that "The Japanese government has associated itself with our view that recycling of plutonium into light water reactors is premature."

No matter which way the compromise is interpreted, the Japanese have been left with the short end of the stick. Nuclear technology is the foundation of Japan's future economic growth, and the Japanese have agreed to an arrangement that deprive them of two years of technological development. The Tokai plant will produce nitrate products useless as nuclear fuel, and research at the plant will emphasize "alternative" reprocessing methods which have already been shown to be inferior to the plutonium method. Moreover, the agreement has handed the Carter Administration political leverage to escalate its anti-development pressure on other nations firmly committed to the development of plutonium breeder technology.