

to a proposal by a group of utilities to build a nuclear power plant in the desert some 200 miles east of San Diego — but its repercussions could be far wider than that. For this particular plant is so sound — technically and with respect to its remote location — that if it is turned down by the state's energy development commission, or if its approval is delayed for a long period of time, the utilities are unlikely to propose another nuclear plant in California any time in the foreseeable future...

The trouble... with the policy of Gov. Edmund Brown Jr. — which favors solar and geothermal power to the exclusion of nuclear power — is that no one really knows whether it is feasible. Sooner or later, Californians, like people in the rest of the country, are going to have to face nuclear power squarely instead of playing games with its proponents. If the decision is not to have any more nuclear plants, then the reality of where electricity is going to come from in the future must be faced. It should be obvious, even in California, that oil is not an alter-

native. Neither are geothermal hot spots in the ground and energy from the sun, unless there are major technological breakthroughs or a huge reduction in the use of electricity. Even coal, which provides the most likely alternative, has shortcomings in its destruction of land and its risks to human life that must be weighed carefully against the shortcomings of atomic energy.

... But it is hard to understand why so many opponents of nuclear power regard these problems as not solvable while they are prepared to stake so much on the ability of scientists and engineers to solve equally difficult problems involving the safe and cheap production of electricity from coal or solar or geothermal sources... At present, however, it seems to us that the burden of those who want to close out nuclear power is to tell us how they expect future needs for electricity to be met. Otherwise the next generation is likely to be sitting around in the dark blaming the utilities for not doing something this generation's officials won't let them do.

Is Schlesinger On His Way Out?

Energy Secretary James Schlesinger may soon find himself the first Cabinet-level official in recent memory to have been fired from two consecutive Administrations. The prime victim of Gerald Ford's October 1975 "Halloween Massacre" as a result of his espousal of the policy of "limited nuclear war" during his tenure as Secretary of Defense, Schlesinger and his heavily conservation-oriented national energy plan are now widely perceived in Washington as a political liability Jimmy Carter can ill afford in 1978.

ENERGY

The principal public complaints about Schlesinger's performance are coming from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, the so-called strongest supporters of the Carter Administration program he authored, embodied in the House version of the energy bill. As the accompanying box shows, however, the disaffection with Schlesinger spans the entire political spectrum.

Schlesinger's situation is complicated by the fact that his efforts to strike a compromise with Sen. Russell Long (D-La.) spokesman for conservatives who radically rewrote the Schlesinger program before passing it in the Senate, have run into difficulty. Rep. Thomas Ashley (D-Ohio), leader of the House forces on the joint Congressional conference committee now seeking to put together an energy bill in final form, has bitterly attacked Schlesinger for remarks he made at a Nov. 21

press conference where Schlesinger outlined the parameters of the proposed compromise, and according to well-placed Capitol Hill sources, is feeding the rumors of Schlesinger's resignation.

Moreover, Sen. Long himself, although still publicly professing expected agreement on the energy bill, appears determined to drive a hard bargain. Last week Long postponed the conference committee's consideration of the "centerpiece" tax portions of the bill until at least Dec. 6 in order to observe the results of conference negotiations on natural gas pricing and controls, another major outstanding issue.

Earlier in the week, Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.), a leader of the Senate conferees considering the natural gas issue, predicted there would be no action on oil and gas pricing by Congress this year unless industry ordered its spokesmen in the Senate to give ground on key points. Long remained adamant. "If I were in their shoes," he said referring to the Administration, "I'd take whatever I could get."

Rep. Toby Moffett (D-Conn.) who claims to lead a bloc of some 70 House liberals who will vote against the energy package if the conference committee makes substantial concessions to Long, is becoming more vocal daily; one of his allies, Rep. Abner Mikva (D-Ill.) expressed a sentiment increasingly heard in the House that the energy bill "looks like a loser." A senior partner in a major Wall Street investment banking firm flatly asserted in an interview yesterday that no energy bill will be passed. The collapse of the bill would virtually guarantee Schlesinger's ouster, Washington observers believe.