

Mr. Speaker, for the RECORD I present the article by William Drozdiak entitled "France Acknowledges Radioactive Leakage in South Pacific Nuclear Tests."

[From the Washington Post, Jan. 24, 1996]

FRANCE ACKNOWLEDGES RADIOACTIVE
LEAKAGE IN SOUTH PACIFIC NUCLEAR TESTS
(By William Drozdiak)

PARIS, January 23.—France acknowledged today that radioactive materials have leaked into the sea from its nuclear tests in the South Pacific but insisted that the quantities were so minimal that they posed no threat to the environment.

The confirmation that radioactive elements such as iodine-131 have seeped into the lagoon near the Mururoa test site seemed likely to revive the storm of protests that followed President Jacques Chirac's decision to conduct a final series of underground nuclear explosions before signing a global test-ban treaty.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda said he will demand a full explanation from France about the nature of the leaks. Other countries in the Pacific region, notably Australia and New Zealand, are expected to follow suit, French officials said.

Defying international criticism, France has carried out five nuclear tests since September to verify a new warhead and to perfect simulation technology that will be used to monitor reliability of its nuclear weapons. A final test will take place next month before the test site is shut down permanently, French officials said.

But the latest accounts of radioactive leakage at the Mururoa test site have raised questions about the credibility of the French government's arguments that the nuclear explosions present no environmental menace.

"There is no way to assess whether there is a coverup because the French do not allow independent verification," said Tom Cochran, a nuclear-test specialist at the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington. "What makes people suspicious about whether they are hearing the truth is the fact that these tests were really unnecessary in the first place."

France has always contended that its underground nuclear blasts inflict no damage on the fragile ecology of the Mururoa coral atoll, 750 miles southeast of Tahiti, which serves as its principal test site. Explosive devices are bored deep within the basalt foundation of the atoll, and French scientists say the intense heat from the blast vitrifies the rock and traps all radioactivity before it can escape.

But Alain Barthoux, director of nuclear tests at France's Atomic Energy Commission, acknowledged that traces of radioactive material are usually "vented" into the lagoon when scientists drill down into the rock to obtain samples after every blast.

Barthoux claimed, however, that such leaks involve "insignificant amounts" of radioactive substances, such as cesium, tritium or iodine, that vanish quickly in the environment. Quantities of iodine-131, for example, which can cause cancer when ingested by humans, shrink by half within eight days and disappear entirely within 80 days, he said.

Barthoux denied a report in the Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper that small amounts of radioactive iodine were continuing to leak into the water as a result of the latest round of nuclear tests. The paper quoted sources at the Geneva disarmament conference, where the global test-ban treaty is being negotiated, as saying a French nuclear expert disclosed the radiation leakage at a meeting in Washington last November.

The French specialist was quoted as saying the information was "extremely confidential."

France first acknowledged the release of radioactivity from its nuclear tests when oceanographer Jacques Cousteau visited the Mururoa site in 1987 and was allowed to conduct independent tests of the water in the lagoon. He found the presence of radioactive iodine, cesium, cobalt and europium, but in quantities that were not considered dangerous.

But he warned that Mururoa's coral crown was deeply cracked and could pose a problem if testing continued. He said risks grew that higher levels of radioactive residue could seep into the lagoon.

French Defense Minister Charles Millon denounced reports from last year of widening fissures in the atoll as "unreliable." Foreign Minister Herve de Charette told the National Assembly that "never have any cracks of any kind been spotted."

But a confidential Defense Ministry report acknowledged the government has been aware, at least since 1979, that Mururoa's underwater basalt foundation is fractured several places.

The report described the effects of an accident in 1979 in which the French detonated a 150-kiloton weapon only 1,300 feet below the surface of the lagoon. The blast was supposed to occur at 2,600 feet, but the bomb got stuck halfway down the test shaft and the French detonated it there rather than risk trying to move it.

The explosion blasted loose more than 130 million cubic yards of rock and coral, causing a tidal wave that injured several French scientists and guards. The document also described underwater avalanches that followed three tests as proof the growing number of tests was posing serious environmental risks to the Mururoa atoll.

The fragile state of the site after repeated tests persuaded France to stage its biggest blasts on nearby Fangatafa atoll, where, in October, it exploded a 100-kiloton warhead, designed for submarine launch.

PRESIDENT'S ACTIONS SPEAK
LOUDER THAN WORDS

(Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, last night our President spoke to all Americans about the challenges facing us. The President challenged Congress to help him produce a smaller, less bureaucratic government in Washington. The President told Americans that the era of big government is over. The President challenged Congress to balance the budget, reform welfare, reduce teen pregnancy, to provide a tax credit for children, and to preserve Medicare.

Mr. Speaker, the President's actions speak louder than his words. I am reminded of a colloquialism, "Been there, done that." Congress already passed legislation to balance the budget, reform welfare, reduce teen pregnancy, provide a tax credit for children, and preserve Medicare.

The President's response? He vetoed them, all of them. This President will say anything, but he obviously has trouble performing.

FUEL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
IMPORTANT FOR AMERICA

(Mr. SANDERS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, in the United States of America millions of our citizens should not be forced into worrying about how they are going to heat their homes in this record breaking cold weather winter.

In Vermont and throughout this country we have had nights of 20 below zero, 30 below zero, and even 40 below zero.

The LIHEAP Fuel Assistance Program has provided over 24,000 Vermont households, and 6 million low-income households nationally, including many senior citizens, with the fuel assistance they need to survive the freezing weather. Three-quarters of the households on LIHEAP have incomes of less than \$8,000 a year.

Today, I am sending Appropriations Committee Chairman ROBERT LIVINGSTON a letter with over 115 congressional signatures, Democrats and Republicans, asking him to make certain that the continuing resolution that is passed by Friday contains full funding for LIHEAP—and that the remaining \$200 million that was appropriated is released.

This is America, and 80-year-old senior citizens should not be forced to go cold in the winter.

THE CHINA HOLOCAUST

(Mr. WOLF asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, every Member should read the editorial in the Washington Post called "Holocaust: The China Parallel." It is by Walter Reich, the director of the Holocaust Museum and the chairman of the American Psychiatric Association's Committee on Human Rights.

What does he say?

According to the reports provided by Human Rights Watch, the starved children in the Chinese orphanages look very much like the starved children in the German "Children's Specialty Institutions"; the Chinese institutions, too, administer sedatives to some children selected for death; they, too, use false diagnoses as coverups; they, too, cremate the remains of starved children; and they, too, employ physicians, many of whom probably tell themselves that the children dying under their care would have died anyway, and in any case are useless eaters in a country challenged by scarce resources.

The parallels between the Chinese orphanages and the Nazi programs to kill disabled children are alarming. These parallels remind us that human beings, including physicians and other caregivers, are extraordinarily vulnerable to inhuman acts and extraordinarily capable of justifying their behavior on what they see as rational grounds. And they remind us that countries in which democratic institutions are forcibly forbidden and human rights systematically quashed are ones in which human life becomes, quite simply, expendable.