

Sobering energy report

By WALTER GRAY

A two-year study of the world's vital sources of energy by 75 experts from 15 countries, has produced a sobering report entitled *Global Prospects 1985-2000* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd.; 291 pages; \$14.95).

The study group, known as the Workshop on Alternative Energy Strategies (WAES), was sponsored by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Canada was represented by Marshall A. Crowe, chairman of the National Energy Board, and Maurice F. Strong, chairman of Petro-Canada.

The project director, Carroll L. Wilson, sums up the project's major conclusion ominously:

"My conclusion at the end of the Workshop is that world oil will run short sooner than most people realize. Unless appropriate remedies are applied soon, the demand for petroleum in the non-Communist world will probably overtake supplies around 1985-1995.

"That is the maximum time we have: 13 years, give or take five. It might be less. Petroleum demand could exceed supply as early as 1983 if the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries maintain their present production ceilings because oil in the ground is more valuable to them than extra dollars they cannot use.

"We don't have much time to learn how to replace, or decrease our dependence on the fuel that for three decades has fed the expansion of Western living standards and the hopes of all nations for material betterment. Time is our most precious resource. It must be used as wisely as energy."

END OF AN ERA
It is difficult for Canadians to fully comprehend this message. We are an oil-rich country—aren't we? We have the Alberta fields, the Arctic frontier, the Athabasca tar sands.

The WAES spells it all out for us. The end of the era of growth in oil production is probably at the most only 15 years away. North American gas production will reach a plateau and start to decline before 1985, and we will become a gas-importing country. Many nations, including Canada, are looking to coal as an alternative fuel. North America's known coal reserves total 409 billion metric tons, of which Canada has 13 billion. Of these reserves, 254 billion (six billion in Canada) are economically recoverable.

Analyses by the WAES indicate that coal will be a major available alternative to oil, and it will be up to individual national governments to determine the extent and pace of the switch to coal.

NUCLEAR DILEMMA
The WAES report outlines the international dilemma over nuclear energy. A vigorous program of building nuclear power plants, sustained over the next 25 years, could lead to nuclear sources contributing as much as 21 per cent of primary energy in the year 2000. This would be equal to the total oil consumption in the non-Communist world in 1975.

However, there are many obstacles in the way of such growth, as the people in each country decide on the risks and benefits of nuclear energy. It cannot be counted on to meet the shortfall expected through declining oil production.

Since the energy crisis of 1973, many people have believed that our salvation will be found in solar energy. According to WAES, it won't make any significant impact between 1985 and 2000; much more research and development of solar systems will be required.

GLOBAL EFFECT
The WAES report concludes that the transition away from primary reliance on oil will be well underway by the year 2000. For this to be a smooth transition, greater international co-operation among increasingly interdependent nations is essential. Vigorous research, development and demonstration of new supply sources, conservation and fuel-switching programs must move forward on an international scale.

"The main thrust... for the year 2000 is inescapable: The period to the end of the century will be one of energy transition—away from oil as the world's dominant fuel," the report warns.

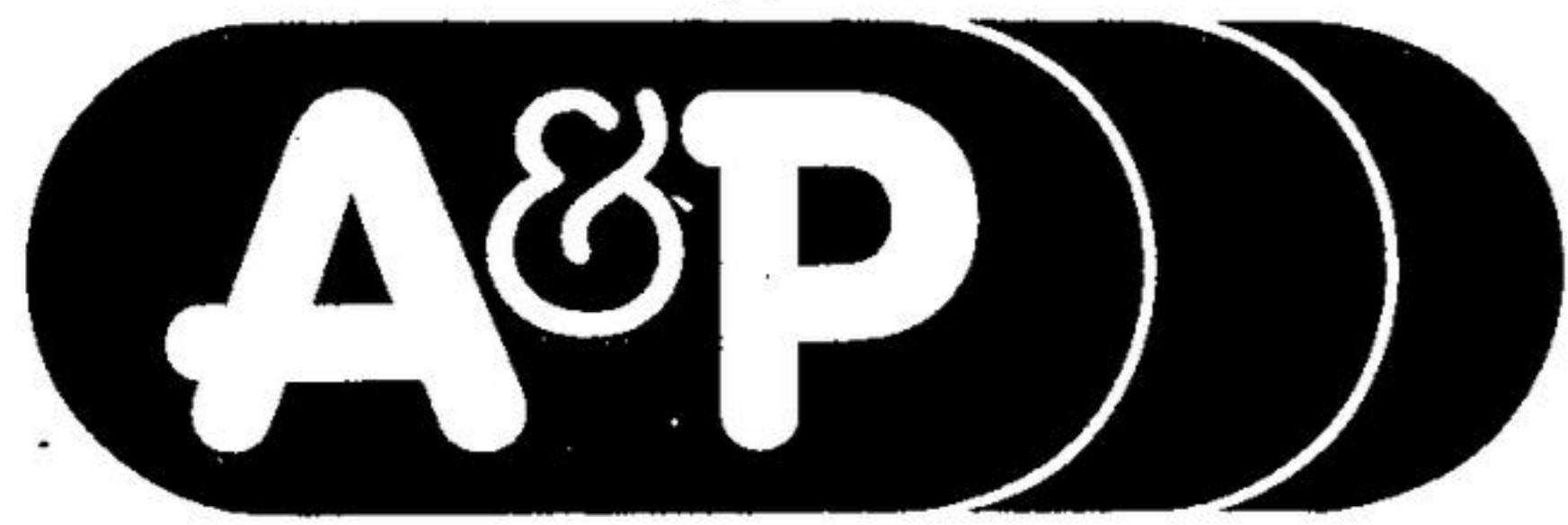
"The timing of future energy-related programs and plans must take account of the challenges of this critical period. Our energy world then and in the 21st century depends on it."

These are very sobering words for complacent Canadians. It leads one to hope that our policy-makers know "at their own doing."

Otherwise we may find ourselves out in the cold, without a light.

Walter Gray is a writer specializing in energy matters. —Thompson News Service.

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