

A comment from Bradbury in 1980...



This country does not always know how to run its long-range programs. The basic problem is this: major programs today, the nuclear reactor, breeder reactors, controlled thermonuclear fusion programs, and the like, take years and years and years. I'm speaking of decades. But the professional lifetime of some manager in Washington, if he's lucky, is possibly five years. And so what turns out to be one man's meat may be another man's poison in some types of programs. And no man is ever held to account for his errors. When mistakes are made and discovered in the reactor business, the chances are good that the individual who made them is long gone. What is one going to do about it? Programs last so long, by nature, that the man who starts the reactor research doesn't live to finish it. It used to be a sort of standing joke that in our nuclear rocket work we felt similar to the people who built the cathedrals in Europe: they were started by the grandparents and finished by the grandchildren. The last thing that I managed to accomplish before I retired was to get Washington's approval to build a very large, half-mile-long accelerator for the production of some nuclear particles, pions, and a so-called meson factory, which is now running and doing useful research. And you say, what's that for? It's not for bombs, it's not for energy, it's just plain good physics, and the argument for doing plain, good nuclear physics has to be what it always was. You've got to look under every stone and see what might be there. If you hadn't looked under certain stones about neutrons versus uranium in 1938-39, you'd never have found fission. I don't think that this accelerator is very likely to do more than produce good physics, good understanding of sub-nuclear physics, sub-nuclear particles, medical-use discoveries to deal with malignancies because of certain characteristic ways mesons react with tissue. You simply cannot let the country leave stones unturned. There may not be anything there, but suppose there is. You'd better find it.

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