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US firm with 'dismal' safety record to run British plants

# Nuclear weapons company under fire

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**A** COMPANY which will help to run Britain's four nuclear weapons manufacturing plants on a seven-year contract has a dismal record on safety, health and management, it was alleged in a House of Commons early day motion last night.

The motion was tabled by Labour MP Frank Cook after he had launched a report into the company, Brown and Root, compiled by Greenpeace and the US National Whistleblowers Centre. Mr Cook's motion details allegations against the company, which is part of the Hunting BRAE consortium, and which will run the privatised management of the warhead manufacturing plants.

The company is said to have fallen foul of both the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and a Senate committee. Brown and Root, which has 31 per cent of the shares, was brought into the Hunting BRAE consortium because of its nu-

clear experience. It will help run plants at Aldermaston, Burghfield, Cardiff and Foulness with AEA Technology, the former Atomic Energy Authority, which has 18 per cent of the contract, and Hunting plc, with 51 per cent.

The report says Brown and Root has been involved in three nuclear plants. At two, both in Texas, its involvement raised questions about its ability to manage Britain's nuclear weapons manufacture, it says.

One plant, the South Texas Nuclear Project, was \$5 billion over budget and nine years behind schedule. In 1985 the owner of the project, Houston Lighting & Power, sued Brown and Root for mismanagement of the plant's construction and obtained \$469 million damages in an out-of-court settlement.

A total of 59 construction and planning errors were alleged, including unacceptable welding and inadequate heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

At a second power plant, Comanche Peak, the NRC accused the company of intimidating workers who raised health and

safety questions, and firing a document reviewer for meeting NRC investigators. In another case, an electrical foreman was paid \$9,375 not to tell federal officials of his concerns over safety problems at the plant. His lawyers were paid \$12,500.

Up to 2,000 former employees have filed personal injury suits against Brown and Root and other firms involved in building the two power plants.

Yesterday Brown and Root issued a statement denying all the allegations. It said the delays at the South Texas plant were beyond its control. It denied liability or that safety issues were involved. The Wimbledon-based company said its US arm, Brown and Root Inc, had an exemplary record for safety, health and management.

Mr Cook, MP for Stockton North, who introduced the report, said: "This is a matter of grave concern. The record of this company should be investigated and everything made public. I shall be asking the Commons defence select committee, of which I am a member, to take up the matter."