Energy Solution—Conservation

by Glenn Walton

Susan Holtz of Halifax's Ecology Action Centre sees energy as a major political and social issue of the 1980's and at an ARCUP conference this weekend at Mount Saint Vincent University, she told delegates of nuclear energy and its alternatives as well as her own solution to the energy crisis-conservation.

The Ecology Action Centre is an independent organization working to inform public and government on crucial issues involving health and environment. Part of its inspiration comes from the Club of Rome, which published a report in the early 1970's questioning the widespread belief in unlimited world growth. In the face of an exploding population, the Club perceived genuine limits to growth, and rejected the notion that the poor nations will eventually 'catch up' with the rich ones. The inescapable conclusion was that 'we' the rich, in order to survive, will have to cut back on our consumption and waste of the world's resources.

Energy is a vital resource All activities use energy; oil is the basis of our food supply, our transportation, and our industry. In light of global inequity and the need to cut back, it is necessary to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, which are becoming increasingly expensive, and are ultimately exhaustible. Besides the expense, fossil fuels pollute. Alternatives to them must be found that are renewable and environmentally

The Great Debate on nuclear energy seems to have obscured the essential point, that while nuclear plants produce electricity, only five to eight per cent of our total energy needs are strictly electrical. Full development of nuclear energy still wouldn't solve the energy crunch. In addition, it is highly inefficient; up to two thirds of the original energy source is lost in conversion. Government policy is to promote electricity, despite the fact that we are not facing an

electrical crisis Ontario even has an electricity surplus

Besides the questionable benefits to be derived from nuclear power, includes inherent dangers that are potentially catastrophic. In the 60's a U.S. government study into the effects of radiation on the population was initiated. Two scientists researched the question: "What would the effect on the U.S. population be if everyone received the permitted level of radiation?" They concluded that there would be thousands of deaths caused by cancer. Their findings were considered politiunacceptable. scientists were harassed by the Atomic Energy Commission and their study was not published. The book Poisoned Power was written when the public had little perception of nuclear issues, but the atomic industry was in full swing.

Not much is known about nuclear energy. The subtle effects of radiation take years to be discovered: cancer and leukemia can strike 20 years after release of radiation in a particular area, such as has happened in Southwestern Utah, site of atomic tests in the 50's. Tiny doses of radiation can cause great damage and inhaling infinitesimal amounts of radioactive material can cause cancer. In addition, released radiation does not simply disperse, -it concertrates in certain food supplies, and attacks the thyroid gland.

A genetic mutation caused by radioactivity will affect up to 40 generations.

Why is there such a fight going on over the use of nuclear energy? Holtz says that much of the press coverage is simply misinformed, and that the nuclear lobby is strong. The industry is "on the ropes", and public relations are an attempt to survive the crisis, brought on by declining orders. The main argument is that nuclear energy will be essential to our future economic order. This is a questionable notion, considering the non-electrical nature of the crisis. Politicians

tend to listen, however, to high-power arguments that avoid the overview and the long-term considerations.

Nuclear energy also involves some serious political issues-Canada is selling reactors to other countries, to offset domestic loss in sales, but some of these sales are downright irresponsible. Countries such as Argentina and South Korea, not known for their adherence to democratic principles, are in the market for reactors that can be used to produce atomic bombs as India has already done, with Canadian help

Nuclear proliferation on a military level, is inevitable. Argentina and Brazil have been engaged in a 'sabrerattling' border war for the past few years, and Canadian responsibility in any future nuclear holocaust in the area is unavoidable.

Recently, the Ontario Atomic Commission was ordered by the federal regulatory board to tighten up its controls on nuclear plants, but it simply refused. The case is now being tried.

Corporate defiance of a government agency is not the only reason for unease. The emphasis on electricity as an alternate energy source assumes a very centralized society where every home is on a grid. It would be important that the energy supply is safeguarded against disruption. Surveillance of workers, intelligence gathering, and like controls would be necessary when energy sources begin to assume such political importance. It would seem desirable to pursue alternatives.

In light of the dangers of nuclear energy, it is questionable profitability (nuclear plants have been plagued with technical problems from the start), and the fact that it will not fulfill our future energy needs even with optimal de-, it is velopment. essential that other long-range sources be found. At present, there are no nuclear plants in Nova Scotia, despite a proposal in 1972 to build one off Stoddard Island. It would have

produced 12,000 megawatts of power, and large quantities of hot water that would have been dispelled into the environment. This water would have ended the lobster fishing on the south shore, so the proposal was dropped.

What will the future hold? Premier John Buchanan has

really saying nothing. Basically then the problem to be faced is not an electrical

stated that there will be no

nuclear plants built in Nova

Scotia in the 80's: since it

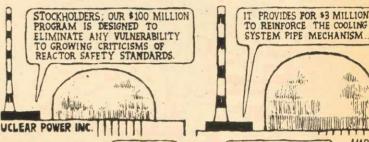
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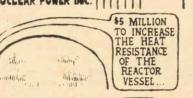
complete a nuclear plant, the

premier's statement "was

continued on page 10

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