

Worse than New York

# Sydney: a breath of death

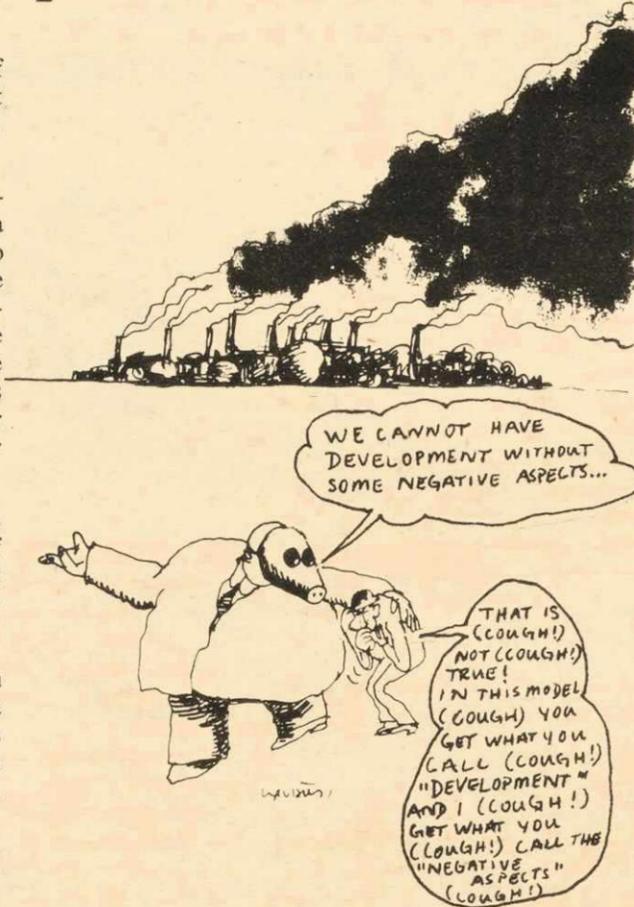
by David Smith

Sydney has the highest unemployment rate of any city in Canada. It also may be the most unhealthy city in which to live. For the moment, though, the latter remains undocumented.

The provincial Department of the Environment placed pollution monitoring devices at a number of locations around Sydney about two years ago. In Whitney Pier, an area close to the provincial government's Sydney Steel Corporation, the pollution index actually exceeded the uppermost level on the recording monitor. The best educated guess of how much ore dust falls on Whitney Pier is 825 tons per square mile per month. The Sydney average is over 100 tons per square mile per month.

Both the provincial and federal governments have the powers to limit the discharge of pollutants. But neither government has felt it necessary to take any action against the provincially owned steel plant.

Based on official statistics, which are often considered to be conservative, Sydney has a higher pollution index than New York or Los Angeles. Health officials in these American cities relate their pollution to chronic and often fatal respiratory diseases. Unlike in Sydney, daily pollution counts are featured on radio and television stations. Residents are urged to



remain relatively inactive during periods of high pollution.

It has been more than a year since the Department of the Environment began a study to determine the health hazards from Sydney Steel's pollution. In the winter of 1976, the local media gave much coverage to the original monitoring which included giving medical examinations to over a thousand residents as well as taking air samples. Since then the press has been silent. Like all of us, they await the long over due test results. When questioned about the delay, government officials simply state that there are a large number of calculations that must be made before any conclusions can be reached.

When the report is finally released the extent of the hazard posed by the government owned steel plant will be revealed. If the report shows that the pollution is above acceptable limits, the government is caught in a dilemma. Sydney Steel was created in order to provide jobs. If the pollution level is too high the plant might have to be closed - at least temporarily. This would be financially disastrous to the area.

The best solution would be to "clean up" the plant so that it would pollute less. But that might cost too much money. In the meantime, Sydney residents continue to run the risk of a serious respiratory ailment.

Rich Fuchs

## Discussing 'the price of fish'

Interview with Richard Fuchs, Education Director of St. John's Oxfam Centre

Last spring and summer, a play called "What's That Got To Do With The Price of Fish?" toured Newfoundland and the Maritimes. It was performed by the Mummers Theatre Troupe of Newfoundland, and by the time September came and the show closed in St. John's, it had visited over twenty communities across Canada and reached some 13,000 people. Theatre critics gave it rave reviews (Toronto and Vancouver were lukewarm, faulting it for not being theatrical enough); the troupe had standing ovations from all its audiences (-including Toronto and Vancouver). The play was an example of the critically and audience appealing type of work that can be and is being produced in our region. "Atlantic Issues" interviewed Richard Fuchs of the St. John's Oxfam Centre, which was responsible for producing the play, to find out why the play was produced.

**ATLANTIC ISSUES: Why did a local Oxfam committee get involved in Theatre? Isn't Oxfam a charity that sends food overseas?**

**Fuchs:** Where should I start? First, I guess, by saying that Oxfam **does** do work overseas, but very little of it is the "feeding the hungry" type in the old soup-line sense of the word. Most of our projects are in agriculture, health or education -- but the play was part of our education programme here in Canada.

Oxfam-Canada tackles the **results** of underdeveloped (poverty, disease, illiteracy, unemployment, poor housing etc) through the projects it supports here as well as elsewhere. It has come to recognise that the **causes** of these problems have much to do with the way the richer countries like Canada control the world's trade and resources. So our education programme aims to make Canadians more aware of the basic changes that will be needed both in Canada and internationally to bring about a more equal world situation. We try to uncover what we see to be the problems facing poor people in Canada and throughout the world, and we also try to point to the role Canadians can play in changing these problems for the better.

**A.I.: I see what you mean about an education programme, but how does theatre fit into this?**  
**Fuchs:** Theatre is one very creative and engaging way of getting your point across. It doesn't have to

be "entertainment" in the sense of taking you away from reality and letting you forget your problems (like most movies & TV shows do) -- on the contrary, it can draw you into an understanding that you can't get by watching television or reading magazines or books.

**A.I.: What is the play about?**

**Fuchs:** Can I quote a review? It sums it up pretty well: It's "an evening of songs, skits and comical anecdotes about the not-so-comical history of Newfoundland since Confederation, ..(it) looks at politicians, carpetbaggers from abroad, industrial tycoons and strategies that were supposed magically to improve their lot and

make them Canada's 'Happiest Province'."

**Fuchs:** The point of the play is that the present economic system is not working to the advantage of the majority of Atlantic Canadians, that the region is both underdeveloped, and being developed in a way that benefits chiefly the wealthy. But even more, this relation between the wealthy few and the majority of poor is exactly the same on an international scale, between countries: a continent like Africa is no more "poor" than a region like Atlantic Canada is -- the real problem is, who controls and benefits from the wealth of both regions? Who plans development in both areas?

**A.I.: How does this relate to the rest of the work Oxfam does in the region?**

**Fuchs:** When people came to see the play, they received a programme, but also a pamphlet, "Mining and Development in Newfoundland", which was produced by our Centre here. So we hope that in this way, people will see that problems here at home and in other countries are often the same. Many people were surprised to learn that we also have slide/tape shows on mining, fishing and farming in the Atlantic provinces.

**A.I.: Did Oxfam pay for the tour?**

**Fuchs:** Oxfam-Canada did make a small grant to the financing of the tour, but the main thing we did was to arrange funding from other sources for the play. We worked on research, programmes, sets also. The entire tour (theatres, reservations, vans) was arranged for free by volunteers -- a tremendous job.

**A.I.: Can you give us one of the highlights?**

**Fuchs:** Well, that depends on the person seeing it, but one of the parts I liked best was on how Newfoundland "got developed". It's a 1950's-style scene, called "True Concessions", and we see little Miss Newfoundland being seduced by all the great, "big-time lovers" like Baron de Rothschild, John C. Doyle, John Shaheen... and the song goes:

Ooo Sweetheart deals -  
I know exactly how it feels  
He left me naked on the rocks  
But you should have seen the size  
of his bank account. Ooo

All her great "Love affairs" with the big developers leave Newfoundland devastated and rejected in her declining years.



Mummers: