

York prof attacks ozone 'horror show'

By Hugh Westrup

A York chemistry professor has criticized the federal government for conducting closed hearings on

controversial environmental law. At a Tuesday night lecture on stratospheric pollution, Professor Harold Schiff described the new government procedure whereby environmental protection laws are drafted as a "real horror show".

Under the new procedure, whenever the need for a new environmental regulation is thought to exist, the government gives the decision to a task force composed only of government and industry representatives. The public, university scientists, environmentalists and organized labour are all excluded from the task force.

Said Schiff, "it's a bloody autocratic government we have in this country."

If there's one Canadian who speaks knowledgeably about environmental regulation, it's Harold Schiff. For the past decade he's been a central figure in the ozone controversy that led to the recently imposed ban in the United States on fluorocarbons in spray cans. Those tumultuous years are chronicled in *The Ozone War*, a book Schiff co-authored with former *Globe and Mail* science writer, Lydia Dotto.

Schiff's book is not only an intriguing account of an investigation that most science fiction writers wouldn't dream of, but a textbook case on the multi-layered debate that surrounds American environmental legislation. Government, industry, science, the media and the public were all influential players in a high stakes struggle that many on the battlefield predicted would determine the future of life on the planet.

No fluorocarbon regulation exists in Canada, but not for lack of trying.

Schiff has prepared two reports for the government—one was requested reading material for the prime minister—but both were buried. A third report written by a fellow scientist met the same fate.

Although Schiff acknowledges the tremendous maze of regulatory routes in the US, he describes the American system as "much fairer".

"It's an open system in the states, but ours is very much a backroom operation."

Schiff said he was incredulous when he first learned of the government's new procedure for drafting environmental law.

He favours the establishment of

a body of scientists to discuss environmental issues independent of government interference.

The present absence of spray can legislation in Canada doesn't mean that we're any less dependent on ozone. Every form of life as we know it could not have evolved on earth without ozone in the upper atmosphere. From 11 to 50 miles above the earth's crust, ozone absorbs a frequency of ultraviolet radiation called UVB that is lethal to living organisms. What little UVB that isn't absorbed produces sunburn. Long term exposure to UVB is believed to be a major cause of skin cancer.

The danger of fluorocarbons is that they decompose in the stratosphere into chlorine which catalyzes the destruction of ozone. One chlorine molecule can break down as many as one thousand ozones. With megatons of fluorocarbons being released into the air every year, scientists predict a major reduction in the amount of protective stratospheric ozone.

The most immediate effect of less ozone upon human beings would be an increased incidence of skin cancer. But informed people can avoid the sun or wear hats. What worries scientists more is the

effect increased UVB could have on plants and animals. It's taken billions of years of evolution to adjust to the present amount of UVB that penetrates to the ground. Scientists fear that a sudden change over the next fifty years could destroy this delicate defense.

Schiff points out that phytoplankton, one of the earth's major oxygen producers, appears to exist at a precise protection level from UVB beneath the ocean surface. Is plankton biologically sophisticated enough to submerge deeper into the ocean to guard itself from V intensified UVB?

The answer is unknown.

Schiff estimates the American spray can ban has reduced worldwide fluorocarbons output by 11 per cent. Most other countries don't have legal limits as yet, and even the US ban doesn't cover the air conditioning and refrigeration industries which are major purchasers of fluorocarbons. Only "non-essential" uses of fluorocarbons have been restricted in the states so far.

Confronting the new Canadian regulation system, Schiff gives a weary sigh. He must be burdened with the prospect of many more chapters to come.

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Should politicians fear the press?

By Laura Brown

Can the media make or break political leaders? This was the question posed to York professor Fred Fletcher and Toronto Star editorial writer Robert Duffey at last Tuesday afternoon's Bethune College Heroes and Beer session.

The session was hampered by the absence of microphones for the two soft-spoken guests, and the 50 students and faculty strained to catch the mildly interesting but unstimulating comments and opinions which they offered.

Fletcher's opinions were based almost entirely on his research of the 1977 provincial elections which involved interviews with 1200 voters across Canada. One-third of the questions dealt with media influence.

"The media can break politicians, "but I'm not sure it can make them," Fletcher began.

"And the most effective way in which the media can break political leaders is through exposure journalism", he continued.

Generally there are no conspiracies against politicians, he stated, but the opinions of the voters are changed when the media "brings to light some act or pattern of behaviour which violates some standard of contemporary values" such as in the press coverage of former Solicitor General of Canada, Frances Fox.

As the politicians' public images are crucial in their campaigns, bad press about their competence, concern of public welfare and credibility can also effect public opinion. "And once the image of a

leader is established, the media's selection process will reinforce the image, which can be dangerous to the politician," Fletcher charged.

"The selectivity of the press coverage on Joe Clark hasn't done much for his image of competence", he remarked

Duff, disagreeing with Fletcher's declaration of the weight the media carries in changing public opinion said, "Politicians are certainly paranoid about the press, but they don't need to worry about it because its not that effective."

"It is usually the politician's action, not the media which makes or breaks them," he said.

Referring once again to the media coverage of Fox, Duffy stated, "Fox had to resign as a matter of principle...it was a parliamentary scandal, not a newspaper scandal which forced him out."

The audience responded with laughter when Duffy continued, "And the most devastating thing that happened to Joe Clark in the press was McPherson's cartoons".

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Founders college student council is holding an art competition during the week of Feb. 26 to Mar. 2 Submissions are welcomed in the areas of film, music, poetry, prose and choreography. Entries will be displayed in the Founders Art Gallery. Submissions must be handed in by, Feb. 26, to rooms 121FC or 216FC.