

# Nuclear Power—Where Do You Stand?

by Cathy MacDonald

Are you a stiff-neck, capitalist backer of man's greatest technological "feat", or a paranoid, red-tainted reactionary, or are you a somewhere-in-the-middle-open-minded person who wants to believe in "our scientists".

But the whole thing is so damn huge and complex that who the hell BUT a scientist can make sense of it! Then this article is for you.

Nuclear development began optimistically during World War II. No-one asked questions about its impact. Now with its application in the energy field, the safety, social, economic and environmental issues are discussed heatedly throughout the country. In the Maritimes, discussion focuses on the Point Lepreau reactor, in New Brunswick, due to begin operation 1981.

The disaster at Three-Mile-Island, in Pennsylvania, has focused the question "How safe are NUKES?" Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd., asserts that CANDU reactors are much safer in design than their American counterparts. However, they offer no evidence and the question "How safe?" remains.

Ramzi Ferahian, an engineer who resigned from Canaton Limited for ethical reasons, said, "I was not happy building reactors with a margin of safety which I did not feel was adequate in accounting for their social and environmental costs."

In particular, Ferahian re-

ferred to earthquake safety in the design. This brings the situation close to home. The site of the Point Lepreau reactor is on a geologically active zone. Earthquakes occurred there in 1976 and April 20, 1979.

Officials pooh-pooh the idea of nuclear accidents. The NUKE record however, is not too good.

In 1952, Canada had an accident at the Chalk River, Ontario, reactor, that entered the first stages of melt-down, the worst type of accident. Among several "minor" accidents at the Douglas Point reactor on the Bruce Peninsula, Ontario, were severe leakages of radioactive water in 1970, to the extent of a year's quota in one day, into the lake.

Pickering, Ontario, Canada's largest electricity producing reactor site, has experienced many leakages necessitating costly shutdowns which have taken as long as 10½ months for repairs. The cost of a lengthy shutdown and major repairs at Lepreau could cripple the poorer New Brunswick economy.

The actual health hazard from low levels of radiation routinely emitted from a re-

actor is only now being determined. U.S. Health Researcher Dr. Thomas Mancuso, reported on his study in 1976. "Our findings are that the levels of radiation in the so-called "safe" area definitely cause cancer. . . [and] should be reduced tenfold."

Plutonium, one of the most toxic of radioactive wastes, takes 250,000 years to stabilize. Officials admit that no fool-proof methods of storage has yet been found. They are pleased to point out the small amount of plutonium waste compared to waste from using coal for electricity. Another statistic states that one pound plutonium can cause 9 billion cancer cases. Each of the four Pickering reactors produce 550 lbs. plutonium per year. An actual hazard today is the huge amounts of radio-active minetailings which remain toxic for thousands of years, and are polluting their surroundings.

The nuclear issue plays into social - economic concerns. Yes, the economy is ailing and unemployment soars. There's the looming threat of energy crisis. Is nuclear the only option for our increasing energy demands?

Officials estimated costs for Lepreau have risen from \$450 to over \$895 million. The job it will provide will go to a few

highly skilled technologists. Alternative energy sources, wind, wood and solar, are renewable. The solar industry is established. Solar provides a decentralized option with a high percent of jobs for money invested.

Solar is not yet economical on a wide scale. Pro-solar forces push for a fraction of the billions spent on nuclear energy to be siphoned off to solar interests, to make it viable.

Nuclear energy is an example of concentrating capital and power at the top. Three-Mile-Island, is an economic disaster. It underlines the low economic reliability of nuclear energy.

NUKES make electricity which comprises only 12% of our energy needs. NUKES come in big packages, a minimum size of 600 megawatts, enough to supply twice Nova Scotia's peak demand.

Does nuclear technology offer anything to solve Canada's energy problem? Is it "sound business" to invest in such a huge vulnerable source when NUKES only apply to 12% of our energy demands?

Nuclear energy has unsolved safety hazards. Indications are we are investing billions into an economically unstable white elephant, a technological joke.

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