

AECB decision viewed with skepticism

by Margaret Sutherland

In what it touts as a "Major departure from past practice," the Atomic Energy Control Board (AECB) has announced that effective May first, it will make available to members of the public documents concerning the licencing of nuclear facilities.

The AECB is a federal agency authorized to make regulations controlling atomic energy materials and equipment.

However, members of ecology groups, such as Susan Holtz of Halifax's Ecology Action Center, have termed it part of the Board's attempt to "save its own neck," after not having lived up to its mandate with the public.

They are skeptical as to whether this is really a major step towards public access in an area which so greatly affects their safety, or merely a public relations move to quiet growing criticism of the Board's activities.

According to a news release dated January thirty-first, it will make available at its offices, any information submitted concerning or supporting a licence application which the board requires, any reports from board members or

advisors concerning the application for licence, and reports on any action which the board takes in revoking a licence of a facility which handles or processes radioactive materials.

The board also promises to report promptly through the media any information which they see revealing a public hazard and the action which they take or orders done as a corrective measure.

The communique says that the AECB has identified a need to move towards a policy basis consistent with the intent of the Freedom of Information legislation placed before the House of Commons during its last session.

Still, the Board has included a clause whereby there are still some documents which they see as not suitable to be made public:

Information not required by the Board but which has been submitted on a confidential voluntary basis; commercial information, the disclosure of which could be harmful to the competitiveness of a company; documents which intergovernmental or international agreements have made secret; or that information which has been deemed necessarily secret for reasons of security (the statement does not specify whether this is security of a nuclear facility or that of the nation).

The Board is to decide whether a document falls into any of these categories.

Holtz, research co-ordinator and energy specialist for the Ecology Action Center, said the ambiguous wording in some parts of the policy contains possible places for loopholes which might be used to conceal information which may hurt the atomic

industry.

"It is an extremely informal document with all kinds of ways that the AECB can still withhold many things."

"In the history of the AECB, most of its members have previously been part of the nuclear industry, such as AECL (Atomic Energy of Canada Limited) which of course promotes use of nuclear energy in Canada. A small clique of the Board members has been created which is naturally sympathetic towards industry's side in

anything between the nuclear industry and the Minister of Energy who represents the public. As it is, it seems the board could never flex its muscles even if it wanted to."

Holtz went on to cite a 1977 Ontario Legislature Select Committee hearing where it was supposedly discovered that repairs ordered by the AECB on a reactor owned by Ontario Power had not been carried out. Holtz told the *Gazette* that it was also discovered that safety reports

submitted on nuclear "incidents" (accidents) had not been evaluated or investigated in any real depth by Board workers, but "were left on the shelves to gather dust indefinitely."

The communique is an attempt on the part of the AECB late last year to downgrade general licencing requirements rather than force upgrading of safety equipment in an Ontario atomic plant.

This lack of action and co-operation with the public interests on the part of the Board has, in the eyes of many ecologists, given them reason to be suspicious of how the policy will be used by the AECB.

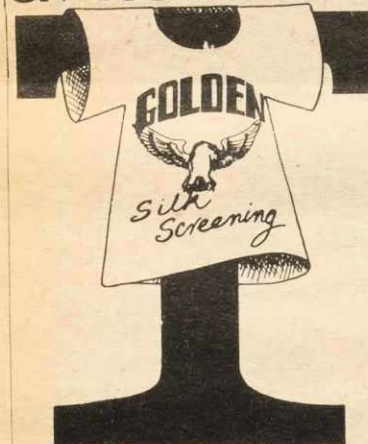
The decision was not scheduled to be submitted to open public review before going before the board. However, some groups, such as the Ecology Action Center, were able to submit short briefs protesting this before the board finally approved it. As of yet, the decision has not been made.

Holtz hopes that this means more than just a publicity measure to pacify organizations such as hers and shows a trend toward better cooperation from the board.

"While there are a lot of possible loopholes in this document, there seems to be some hope with the newer members of the AECB who I think are starting to see the public as an ally. The document has the potential to be useful to us. It remains to be seen just how the board co-operates with people who will be asking to see the documents."



GET IT
ON YOUR CHEST



Let us put your
club, team or slogan
on a Tee.

GOLDEN SILK SCREENING
7156 Chebucto Rd., Hfx.
Tel: 454-8441

'CLASSIFIEDS'

TAX PROBLEMS?

... come and see us.

Simple as A.B.C.
(Atlantic Business
Consultants)

Bring your tax form and all
relevant information to: 6094
University Ave., any Thursday
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Cost for insertion of a "CLASSIFIED" ad is \$4.00. Ads. must be thirty words or less, and must be left at the Gazette office, or the SUB information desk, by the Monday before publication, accompanied by a cheque for the appropriate amount. We cannot run any ads. which are not pre-paid.

Draft to hit U.S. Students in Canada

MONTREAL—American students studying in Canada may soon have to register for the draft according to a selective services officer in Washington.

Brayton Harris said the U.S. would probably begin registration for compulsory military service within the next few months. Student deferment was removed from U.S. law in 1970. Before that date, students were exempt from the draft.

"The priority now is just to amass a pool of names and addresses," he said.

"The plan is to revitalize the selective service to increase the country's readiness," he said. "Now we're trying to get this sleeping nation on its feet." Reaction from American students in Canada has been mostly negative.

American students at McGill University, who represent about five per cent of the enrolment, were negative about the prospects of going to war.

"I think that men and women should be equal in the draft if it comes to that," said one McGill woman, "but I'd oppose being drafted as a person."

Her comment was echoed by many other women students.

Some students said they would not honour a draft and would consider staying in Canada illegally or applying for citizenship.

The University of B.C. has 300 U.S. students and most of them are unwilling to throw themselves into the fray of the current cold-war situation.

"I think I'm too old," said one woman student, "but if I were within the age I would not go. I think it's absurd."

Another student said he couldn't see much sense in it and disagreed with war in general.

U.S. president Jimmy Carter announced after his state of the union address that women would also be required to register but it would be for

non-combat positions in the military.

UBC graduate student said that he would register, and if drafted, would go.

"I would support it if I were of age," said another grad student and added that he thinks his feelings of patriotism are shared by many Americans at home and abroad.

The draft announcement also has University of Toronto American students worried.

"I oppose conscription," said one graduate student. "It was unfair in Vietnam and I think it would be unfair under the present circumstances."

"I can't believe that the majority of Americans are in favour of countering the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan with military action," he said.

A U of T second year student said he would not fight in a Vietnam style conflict, but that he might if he thought the war was based on legitimate issues, as was World War II.

"I think in the present situation I would probably become a conscientious objector," he said. "I'd try to get some job in the army in communications or working in a medical camp."

Another second year student disapproved of the Soviet invasion but said it did not give the U.S. a right to take action. "The U.S. doesn't have a moral leg to stand on but if the Russian invasion spills over into a war I would have to think carefully about what I would do."

A graduate English student was registered, but not drafted, during the Vietnam years, and believes that a war now would not accomplish anything.

"It's all based on an antiquated notion of balance of power. Carter came in on a platform of seeking world peace and justice through dialogue and now he has descended to a threatening power policy," he said.