



HART/DAL PHOTO

## Uranium raises hopes of commercial find, but doubts about health

by Cathy McDonald

Uranium deposits large enough to support a commercial mine have recently been discovered in Nova Scotia, according to Susan Holtz of the Ecology Action Centre. The discovery, in Hants County, means Nova Scotians will have to determine the desirability of an industry with serious health and environmental implications.

Ron Barkhouse, Minister of Mines and Energy, denied that uranium had been discovered in commercial quantities in Hants County. He described the findings there as "interesting."

Uranium mining has had a poor record in other parts of Canada. Following the findings of a Royal Commission inquiry into health and environmental problems in British Columbia, Premier Bill Bennett placed a seven-year ban on uranium exploration and mining in February of last year.

Citing health hazards to miners and the damaging effects uranium mining has on the environment, Holtz said, "we think the stuff should stay in the ground."

When asked if Nova Scotia is considering implementing a similar ban to that in B.C., Barkhouse said, "No. Speaking for the department, we aren't considering any ban." He described the procedure whereby a company may obtain a lease to mine uranium in Nova Scotia. A company's application is reviewed by the Department of the Environment, and the final approval is given by cabinet.

The major hazard to the public with respect to Uranium mining is the creation of huge quantities of waste ore or "tailings." The extraction of three pounds of uranium leaves one ton of crushed ore. These tailings retain 85% of their initial radioactivity. The highly toxic gas Radon-222 is produced, which when exposed to the atmosphere can travel 1000 miles before it decays. Radon gas is responsible for the high levels of lung cancer in miners.

As radon is highly soluble in water, leaching from the tailings contaminates the surrounding area. Dr. Jack Garnet,

Director of the Mineral Resources Division with Mines and Energy, said his department is "keeping an eye" on problems encountered with uranium mining in the country. Garnet suggested that a method of keeping tailings out of contact with air and water is to envelope them with a thick rubberized mat covered with a foot of water.

Uranium exploration has been going on for six years in Nova Scotia. Over a million dollars has been spent by the company Aquitaine on exploration in Hants County according to Garnet. Other hopeful areas for uranium are Cumberland and Colchester counties.

"I am not aware of any commercial deposits. None is kept secret by the government or companies," Garnet said.

Holtz speculated that perhaps the government had not been notified of the discovery, as it was very recent according to her sources. Aquitaine Ltd., has neither denied nor confirmed the discovery. A company is legally bound not to publicize any mineral discoveries for a certain time period.

Holtz said the decision to allow uranium mining is a mat-

ter of weighing the economic benefits against the dangers of the industry. Economically, the long term outlook is not good, as the demand and price for uranium has sunk and will not rise again for a while, she said.

Holtz stressed that there should be a great deal of informed public debate over the decision to allow uranium mining in Nova Scotia. "There should be resources available to bring in experts on different sides of the issue," Holtz said. "Resources are always there for industry to bring in their experts, whereas public groups do not have this financial ability," she said.

After a few years of uranium mining at Elliot Lake, Ontario, the entire Serpent River system was contaminated with radioactivity and aquatic life had perished for 50 miles downstream of the mine.

The United States Regulatory Commission recognized in 1977, that "uranium mining and milling are the most significant sources of radiation exposure to the public from the entire nuclear fuel system — far surpassing nuclear reactors or high level radioactive waste disposal."

## Government makes bucks off higher education, SUNS claims

by Paul Clark

The provincial government is making money off higher education, said Student Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS) chairperson Loretta Mullen.

Mullen said last year the Buchanan government received \$108.5 million in Established Program Financing (EPF) earmarked for higher education from the federal government, but \$5 million was spent in other areas.

This year SUNS has learned that \$121.5 million will be available for higher education through EPF but the government has been advised to

spend only \$117 million of it in this area, she said.

"The government doesn't have to spend this money, but they ought to, especially when education is not being made a priority in this province."

Mullen also noted it is kind of funny that the province claims so adamantly that education is a provincial responsibility yet refuses to put any of its own money into it.

The federal government transfers money to the provinces for health, social services and education through the EPF agreement which expires in 1982.

## Joe Clark Comedy Hour

"...Complete with one liners and the famous

'...If we'd only had a few more days...' routine." see page 11

## The Night of the Iguana

## Genius in high gear

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