

INSIDE

THE

INCO

OPERATION

On Monday, December 9, 1968, Morron Shulman (NDP High Park) told the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that he had in his hands the truth surrounding the recent accusations levelled against INCO. Following are excerpts from that speech:

Three huge smoke stacks dominate the sky over this flat little town. Twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year, the three giants belch grey-white columns of smoke that curl to form the ghostly cloud that hangs over Sudbury.

On the edge of Copper Cliff is a vast complex of smoke-blackened buildings that feed the stacks. The complex is couched beside a 300-foot high range of slag-waste rock and iron-and stands out of the flat wasteland like some Alcatraz. It is surrounded by a 20-foot high fence, which is closely watched by the armed security police.

Where all the trouble is

This is the Copper Cliff smelter of INCO — and a brave man whose name is Mark Starowicz climbed over that slag heap to get you the results that I am going to tell you about in a few moments, Mr. Speaker. This smelter is the largest of its kind in the world, the pride of the Ontario mining industry. And this is where all the trouble is.

Here, the workers claim, they are forced to work in conditions that are archaic and unsafe, amid fumes that poison their systems, in dust that chokes their lungs.

Here, in these buildings, where clouds of blue-white gas prey through the various floors, and where millions of tons of chemicals are spewed into the atmosphere, they think lie the explanations for two startling facts discovered by a study done at Laurentian University.

These two facts are there: first, the death rate of a Sudbury male over 55 is 50 per cent higher than for the rest of Ontario.

And second, the life expectancy of a Sudbury male over 45 is seven years below the national average.

"They think they're being poisoned"

The men who work in Copper Cliff don't believe this is coincidence. They think they are being poisoned.

But INCO replied in their calm, reasonable way these charges are "exaggerated and irresponsible" and, as far as INCO is concerned, the excess gases are a product of the union's imagination. Well, who is telling the truth?

Well, we finally found out in August,

Mr. Speaker. To finally settle the truth of this matter, the Toronto Star hired a McGill University student, Mark Starowicz, and on the night of Wednesday, August 29, he went to find out for himself. I quote from the statement he subsequently dictated — after getting out of the plant.

"Entry to the plant is illegal, unless one is a worker with a badge, a tourist with a guide, or a special visitor conducted by a company official. The plant is heavily guarded by armed security men. For two days I asked various workers to sketch for me sections of the plant they knew, and draw for me every walkway, passage and entrance.

"The only way to avoid crossing the guards who scrutinized all entrants was to wait till nightfall, and climb over the massive slag range that dominates the rear of the complex.

"Wednesday night, dressed in clothes given me by workers, and equipped with the required safety goggles and gas mask, I began crossing the slag heap. With me I took a camera and a drager meter—a compact precision instrument used to measure gas content in the air. Guards intermittently played powerful lights onto the slag range, and that made my progress slow, having to duck them.

Worth getting fired for

"But finally, after an hour, I was within the plant and at a set place, prearranged, met one worker who was going to be my guide that night. The worker would, without question, have been fired for helping me enter the plant if he was caught. But he shrugged off my fear, saying, 'If you see it like it really is here and report it, then it will be worth getting fired.'

"We moved toward the converter building beneath the centre stack of the three giants, avoiding groups of men and supervisors' offices. Entering the giant operation, we inched past machines that dwarfed the men tending them and worked our way to the giant furnaces that were the core of the building. Several hundred men were in the plant on the night shift.

"After half an hour of winding ramps and ladders, we reached our first destination: 'D' floor, the base of the furnaces. Open furnaces blasted the ore, molten red, and through the furnace doors we saw the gentle rising of silvery grey fumes that followed the neck of the furnace up to the stacks.

"Here was the source of the sulphur dioxide. Upstairs, on 'M' floor, were the areas the men were complaining about. But they were also complaining about 'D' floor, which is where we were and

so we approached the groups of men who worked by the furnaces.

"The heat grew in intensity at every step, and it was like breathing with your head in a hot oven. The heat pounded you and you felt the veins in your head.

"These stoves of hell"

"I asked that we stop before we even reached the men near the furnaces. I was streaming sweat, and trying to walk towards these stoves of hell was like walking against some big, soft hand that was pushing you back. I could see the men better now — like automatons performing their tasks, their eyes half closed by the heat, moving silently. I myself could barely move.

"You get used to this, sneered the man with me, but maybe if you ask the company very nicely they'll tell you how very conscientious they are about ventilating it. "He said the heat reached 150 degrees at times, and I believed it. As we climbed the east stairs to 'M' floor, I held my breath so as not to inhale the hot stench of the furnaces.

"'M' floor is a 20-foot wide walkway around the top of the furnaces, which fill the centre of the building. On the west side, the air is acrid, but bearable — it's the prettier side of the building where they show the tourists and where some supervisors' offices are. But down the walkway, dimly lit by naked hanging bulbs, the east side was immersed in a shiny blue pall. In that pall, I saw the silhouettes of men working.

"We donned our masks and goggles and moved toward the pall. After 50 feet, the acrid smell was penetrating my gas mask, and my mouth and throat felt suddenly as if I had gargled in kerosene. As we moved in deeper, the pall became milky cloud, and I could only see a few feet ahead.

Gas masks not adequate

"My eyes began stinging unbearably, and I struggled to keep them open to see. They watered so much the tears formed inside my goggles. A feeling of nausea began to grow in me, and I began gasping for air, which gave me acute chest pains. I pressed the gas mask to my face, but I could not shut the gas out. I held my breath and tried to pull my camera out. But I began coughing, and unwittingly breathed a gulp. A sharp pain in my chest doubled me over, and the nausea overwhelmed me. I pulled off my mask and began to retch. As I groped for something to grab hold of,

I felt very suddenly dizzy. Then, I collapsed.

"I wasn't unconscious for long — 45 seconds to a minute, said the worker who was with me. He had been right behind me and dragged me to a window when I passed out. The gas was rushing over my back as I bent low over the window sill to find air that was fresh.

"After a few minutes, I pulled out the drager meter, held my breath, and moved back into the gas cloud. I loaded the long grey tube into the instrument. According to gas content, the tube turns white from one end, up a scale towards the other.

"The maximum reading on the scale is 200.

"I moved to the centre of the walkway — not near the furnace flues — but within a few feet of the men who were incredibly working there. The test took one minute, during which I didn't breathe.

Gas exceeds safe limits

"I moved quickly to the window, gasped air, and looked at the drager meter tube. It was completely white. Off scale.

"The air contained over 200 parts of sulphur dioxide per million. The guidelines said five was the recommended safe limit. "Goggles made no difference to my eyes. A gas mask was useless there — you'd need a scuba tank and pure oxygen. And as we moved into the cleaner air on the west side of the building, I stared at the silhouettes of the men who spent hours there in that shiny blue-white cloud. And I knew I'd do my share of coughing and spitting that night, as these men did every night of their lives.

"After a few weeks, you can stand it, said my guide.

"But what does it do to you later, I wondered. "The morning after my clandestine visit I telephoned assistant general manager of INCO, Don Fraser, and said I wanted to tour the areas the workers were complaining about.

"I was told it was 'irregular', but after some pressing and three hours waiting for a decision they agreed to give me a tour. They refused to admit my photographer, however, saying only 'It is against company policy'. Any photographs I needed Fraser said, I could be given from the public relations files in Toronto.

"Official" tour much different

"In the executive offices, which are air-conditioned by passing the air through a special chemical solution to cleanse it, I was started on my tour. My guide was

Norman Spears, another assistant manager. I was taken on a broad tour of the plant, and when I asked to see the reverberator building, I was shown all along the fresh and tidy west side, where tourists are taken through every hour.

"Standing on the clean and well-ventilated side of 'M' floor I asked Spears if the spot we were standing in was the vicinity the workers were complaining about.

"Yes", he said, "and you can see there's nothing to those complaints. We take tourists through here every day."

"So I pressed him to take me to the east end of 'M' floor which is the actual area the workers are complaining about. The air was bearable, and there wasn't a worker in sight. My guide had predicted that the dampers would be opened for my visit, allowing all gases to escape-flattering, considering that costs INCO a few thousand dollars in sulphur dioxide. As I stood over the same spot where I had collapsed the night before, the INCO executive was speaking:

"Workers are a bunch of lazy bastards"

"Oh, sometimes on a bad day when the draught blows it here, you might get a reading of ten, but that's all. There's nothing poisonous about conditions here. Those workers are a bunch of lazy bastards."

"The air was bearable now, even without a gas mask. It was 2 p.m. Thursday.

"Later that day I asked two workers I knew were on that afternoon shift if the dampers were open or closed at 2 p.m. They told me the dampers had been opened at 12.30 p.m. I had asked Spears if these were normal air conditions, and he said they were.

"Once in a while," he said, "if a leak is sprung, it might get a bit gassy. But that happens very rarely, and of course we pull the men out."

"As best as anyone could remember, there hadn't been a leak of 'M' floor for several months."

That is the end of the quote; that is the end of the statement from Mark Starowicz. And, Mr. Speaker, what a scandal that is; what a scandal it is for INCO; what a scandal it is for Sudbury, what a scandal it is for the member for Sudbury; what a scandal it is for the Ministers of Mines Health (Mr. Dymond), for this government; and what a scandal it is for everyone in this House, that no one has done anything about this in all these years; that this terrible company has been able to lie and lie and lie and nobody over there cares. Where was the Ministry of Mines all these years?