

### *Consumption and Diversion Uses of Water*

The U.S. co-chairman of Committee III began the discussion of this issue by saying the problem of consumptive uses of Great Lakes water was not now a serious problem but that it would become more acute as population grew. He pointed out that the aquifers and water tables of North America, particularly in the southwestern United States, were continuing to drop and that, as a result, the demand for water diversion schemes would grow. The Great Lakes, he said, were a great attraction because they contained roughly 20 per cent of the world's fresh water. "We must manage this resource very carefully." A Canadian M.P. from northern Ontario agreed that the pressures in the short term were not severe and that it was possible to argue successfully against diversions but he felt the day might come when we would have to consider diversions. "We may not be able to say no forever." He then asked what reception Robert Bourassa's proposals for hydro sales and water diversion received during Bourassa's recent trip to Washington. The American co-chairman informed Canadian delegates that Mr. Bourassa had met with a group of Congressmen but that they had discussed only electricity sales and not water diversion. The Congressman's own view was that there should continue to be a strong presumption against diversions.

### *Toxic Wastes*

The discussion began with a brief exchange on the subject of PCBs. A U.S. delegate observed that the United States was having a terrible problem with PCBs, in part because organized crime had entered the picture. He reported, for example, that the mob was mixing PCBs with oil and selling the product as low price fuel oil. Another example of utterly careless disposal had been the practise of power companies giving PCB saturated materials to counties for dust control on gravel roads. These and other examples merely illustrated how important it was that legal and effective means of disposal be found. A Canadian Senator said that Canadian controls were every bit as slack as those in the U.S., witness the recent PCB spill on the Trans Canada highway in northern Ontario. There then followed a brief discussion of some recent advances in "mobile" disposal technology, such as PCB factory trucks and mobile burn units. By moving from place to place, this method of disposal avoided much of the violent public opposition to the location of dumps in particular communities.

The discussion had just turned to the problem of toxic wastes along the Niagara River when it was suggested that instead of just talking about the problem delegates should go and see the toxic dump sites, including Love Canal, just a few miles away. This suggestion was enthusiastically supported by all delegates and a visit to a number of sites in Niagara Falls, New York was quickly arranged by the Congressman for the district, John LaFalce.

The three hour trip began with Congressman LaFalce explaining the history of the Love Canal issue. In 1977 resi-

dents in the area began to complain of smells in their basements and dying plants in their backyards. The Environmental Protection Agency and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation commenced investigations but at that time there was little media interest and no legal framework or money to deal with the problem. By 1978, however, the magnitude of the problem was beginning to be recognized and a "health emergency" was declared. In December 1980, the first cleanup "superfund" was established by Congress despite some strident opposition that Love Canal was not a federal responsibility. During the next year the U.S. Government first recommended that pregnant women and children move out of the area and, following a public uproar, decided to buy out anyone who wished to move. To this day there are major law-suits claiming that health and other damages have been suffered over the years by residents of the area. The great problem remains—What to do with the toxic wastes?

The first stop on the tour was at the Love Canal office of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation where the group was joined by Mr. Peter Buechi, an engineer with the Department. He described the Love Canal toxic dump site as containing some 21,000 tons of waste from Hooker Chemical Company operations in the 1930s and 40s. The site had been shut down in the early 1950s and subsequently purchased by the city of Niagara Falls. Despite warnings by Hooker Chemical, the City allowed schools and houses to be built immediately next to the dump.

The dump site itself was completely unremarkable; a 16 acre grassy plain surrounded by chain-link fencing. The remedial measures taken to seal the dump—expanding a clay cap, installing a leaching collection basin around the perimeter of the site and the cleaning of adjacent sewer systems—were all invisible to the eye. What delegates did see were nearby neighbourhoods—about 1000 homes, as well as schools, churches and businesses—largely deserted. The tour bus slowly made its way through modest, middle-class streets, lined with shade trees, on which there were no people, no children playing. Perhaps strangest of all was the occasional occupied house which the people had chosen not to leave. The entire scene was empty and dismal.

The next step on the tour was "S" site, an 8 acre toxic waste site immediately next to the Niagara Falls, New York Water Treatment Plant. Congressman LaFalce remarked that this site was more worrying than any other and intense debate raged about remedial measures. It was his own view that while removal and destruction of material was the ideal solution, there were circumstances in which it was just not practical. In the case of "S" site there was so much, highly dangerous material that attempts to excavate and transport it might be very hazardous. The only solution in such cases, he suggested, was to contain the problem on site. He added that recent court decisions had supported on-site treatment over the objections of U.S. environmentalists and the government of Ontario. In his opinion Ontario was weakening its credibility by insisting on nothing less than excavation and incineration. He hastened