

Greenwashing

Annual Report from the Chairperson, June 2009

“Environment Minister Jim Prentice intends to deregulate federal environmental assessment in much the same way that George Bush deregulated the financial services industry and Mike Harris deregulated control of drinking water supplies.” These are the opening remarks of the executive director of the Sierra Club Canada, Stephen Hazell, in a January 14, 2009 press release. These proposed actions by the federal government have provided the context for much of the work of the Inter-Church Uranium Committee Educational Cooperative (ICUCEC) this past year and imply some alarming consequences for our future work. The government is using the economic stimulus package and public anxiety over the economy as a smokescreen to dismantle federal environmental assessment. The Provincial government has adopted the same irrational scorched-earth mentality in its mandate in constituting the Uranium Development Panel, such that irremediable exploitation rather than environmental, social, and economic sustainability will be the incalculable cost of these nuclear degenerative proposals.

Whether in our encounters with the uranium mining industry, the proponents of nuclear generated electricity, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), or the provincial government of Saskatchewan, there is a policy shift to remove environmental protections in the name of short-term economic recovery or growth, on the one hand, and efficiency and harmonization between federal and provincial agencies for “shovel ready” projects, on the other hand, such that we are placing our environment, our health, and our long-term economic and social well-being at risk. In meeting with other members of the Canadian Environmental Network in September 2008 and March 2009 Eleanor Knight and I learned how the federal and provincial governments appear ready to accept a *regulatory decision-making process* in the place of the currently legislated *environmental planning and assessment process* which is distinct from and properly precedes the regulatory decision. This shift will fundamentally dismantle the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. This change will impact some large-scale projects of great public concern such as uranium mining and refining, and nuclear generation facilities which are currently subject to National Energy Board and Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission approval under the current Act. Another alarming implication, gleaned from leaked documents outlining the Harper government's proposals, is the absence of meaningful public consultation since participant funding will be cut as will the mandated time for public input into project proposals.

ICUCEC is seeing the beginning evidences of this shift in the limited public participation and mandated unwillingness to consider alternative energy proposals in the Uranium Development Panel. ICUCEC as a part of the Coalition for a Clean Green Saskatchewan is working very hard with other concerned environmental groups in the province to garner more opportunities for public

participation, to inform the public about the devalued qualities of life from these proposed uranium and nuclear projects, and to expose and to oppose the greenwashing by both the government and industry concerning these projects. In addition, ICUCEC was integral in developing the January 2009 statement released by the Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic bishops of Saskatchewan calling for more information and public participation with regard to the nuclear issues facing this province. ICUCEC has also maintained its contact with leadership within the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. The concern here is to look at how the uranium mining projects affect First Nations' and Metis' lands and people in terms of principles regarding the Creator as well as the health and happiness of the people.

In what seems interminably longer than the half-life of the radioactive elements which emit our concern, we continue to submit briefs and to appear for CNSC hearings on the licensing, review, renewal and decommissioning of uranium mines and facilities in the province. The major hearings included the Rabbit Lake Solution Processing Project, the Key Lake and McArthur River facilities, the Cigar Lake, McClean Lake and Midwest mines, and the Beaverlodge, Gunnar mines, and Cluff Lake decommissionings. Rabbit Lake, Key Lake, and McArthur River licensing renewals were approved without question by the CNSC despite significant modifications to the original licensing projects and safety questions concerning their current operations. The Cigar Lake mine, which ICUCEC pointed out has been literally “flooded” with regulatory violations, engineering blunders, and environmental spills and degradation, had received an indefinite extension to repair all the leaks in that deluge of disaster. However, with its second flooding, it has had its licensing “postponed” by Cameco's request and has been “temporarily” closed. All of the shortcomings and hazards of this mining development, which ICUCEC pointed out at the initial hearing, have come to pass despite the proponent's assurances that all their modeling and study indicate an assured technological success and safe operation. The project had been approved, naturally, or one should say artificially, for the CNSC does not consider good science or environmental health and safety arguments in making decisions, but exclusively the ideological, short-term economic, and political bases for promoting and enhancing the uranium and nuclear industry in Canada. Meanwhile, the health and safety of workers and the well-being of the environment continue to be jeopardized. [For your information: The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission hearings are now on live webcasts and saved for three months. You can go to their website and witness the genesis of pseudo-safety and pseudo-regulation in the Commission.]

ICUCEC is in continued discussion with the various agencies concerning the major new project, the Midwest Mine and McClean Lake Development; it is a huge open pit mining proposal. Already in February of 2008 we presented our own questions and concerns regarding this project as well

as careful studies by Dr. Gordon Edwards and Dr. Christopher Busby. Dr. Busby is a world renowned epidemiologist who studies the effects of radiation on human populations. In his submission, "The AREVA Midwest Uranium Mining Project, Saskatchewan, Canada: Public Health and Ethical Implications," Dr. Busby notes how the proponents' documentation does not even consider the effects of uranium oxide particles and uranyl salts on biological systems. "Uranium exhibits serious radiological genotoxic effects through its affinity for DNA, for nervous tissue, and because of its high atomic number which makes it preferentially absorb natural background gamma radiation and release that energy into the DNA as photoelectrons.... This aspect of its radiological behaviour is entirely absent from the conventional risk model which underpins the Environmental Impact conclusions of the AREVA Midwest Project." Dr. Busby, later in his report, provides a tracking model of the dispersion of the uranium dusts from this mine and notes that the dust will move southeast and impact Winnipeg and populations in the Great Lakes states of Minnesota and Wisconsin. The industry claims there will only be "near field environmental impacts." As usual the agency dutifully took our information, but the information has not been transcribed into public documents, nor has the information been passed on to the commissioners of the CNSC or within the environmental agency. It seems as if any and all damaging information to a proponent's proposal must be sealed within a bureaucratic vault of inaccessibility and silence. Perhaps we should consider this as the government's and nuclear industry's first trial run for long-term, deep disposal and storage of volatile material.

Currently, we are in the midst of procuring participant funding in the Gunnar Mines Decommissioning Environmental Assessment. Again, the government agencies seem to be in complete confusion regarding the timelines for completion of the studies, hearings, and assessment of the decommissioning process. Obfuscation seems to be the tactic to frustrate and to discourage public participation. Monitoring the health, safety, sustainability, and viability of ecosystems and citizens does not seem to be a governmental priority.

One other facet of ICUCEC activity is education. ICUCEC continues to research and write, publish, post on our website, and distribute many pamphlets and papers around the issues of the nuclear industry. Jim Penna, Graham Simpson, and Bill Adamson are our stalwart leaders in these endeavors. Also during the past twelve months we have continued our website redesign. With the input of an IT consultant we have made our website more user friendly and easier to access and to navigate in finding information. Linda Murphy and Eleanor Knight are the "webmistresses" and have the daunting task of keeping the site up to date as well as archiving as much material as we can on our site. By all means, I encourage you to be a regular visitor to the site. Finally, members of ICUCEC have been involved with the Engaged Service Learning Project at St. Thomas More

College. Engaged Service Learning enables students to fulfill certain requirements of a course through working in projects in the community. Three ICUCEC members served as “supervisors” working with eleven students from an Environmental Philosophy course on various projects. The response from supervisors and students was positive. This has been the second year ICUCEC has participated in the program and it seems as if this may become a regularized activity for ICUCEC.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation and gratitude to the other members of the Executive Board of ICUCEC. Linda Murphy, who serves as our secretary and treasurer. Eleanor Knight, who keeps us up to date with the proceedings of CNSC. Bill Adamson, who currently is taking the lead in participant funding for the Gunnar Mines Decommissioning hearings. Jim Penna for his tireless communication and publication efforts. Graham Simpson, who has the richest deposit of information concerning the uranium and nuclear industry and is a great resource for us. Sylvia Thompson, who despite serious health issues, provides tremendous support for our organization. Neil Sinclair, who reminds us of the links between the educational, environmental, and political. To all of you, many, many, many thanks.

The issues keep arising, the work seems endless, the industry continues to fight for its life. But we too are fighting for lives, the lives of the environment, plants, animals and humans affected by this industry whose operation does not result in sustainable development, but in the sustainable demise and devastation of life and its habitat. I admire the tenacity of all the members who constitute and support this activist acronym known as ICUCEC. Your fortitude, energy, hope, and humour are truly what sustain an eco-community who values life, justice, and peace. I thank you all for your participation in the organization and look forward to another year of working with all of you.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Poellet, Chairperson