

FOXES GUARDING THE CHICKEN COOP

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The citizens of the town of Atikokan Ontario here in North West Ontario have had to deal with the issue of the disposition of Canada's nuclear waste long before this Nuclear Waste Management Organization was created.

We have had to deal with this issue since long before its predecessor organization (The Canada-Ontario Nuclear Fuel Waste Management Coordination Committee) existed. In fact, we have had to deal with these difficult questions when the obligation was solely that of the old "Ontario Hydro" who then were able to fob off the responsibility to Atomic Energy of Canada, Limited. (A.E.C.L.)

In the twenty-five years we have been dealing with the questions of what to do with nuclear waste, we have to sacrifice time with our families and our own financial resources to inform ourselves on this issue. To deal with these issues, we had to use our own resources to bring in independent experts, travel to hearings to express our views, buy books, attend classes, make written submissions, and generally steal time from our busy lives.

We have also suffered the pain of the social fabric of our community being split over this issue. The federal and provincial government thought because our town was losing 2,000 jobs in mining, we would be desperate for anything that would promise jobs. Because half of the citizens *were* that desperate and the other half were doubtful, fathers were set against sons, brother against brother, elected officials broke their word, and deep divisions in our social fabric, not yet healed, bedevilled our town.

From the perspective of a quarter of a century, one major theme seems consequential. If the Federal, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick governments had listened to the independent ecologists, the problem would be much smaller and much easier to deal with.

If the promoters of nuclear power production had listened, we would not have giant, disused, radioactive heavy water plants and broken down and leaking nuclear power plants dotting the landscape with their pools of water filled with highly radioactive fuel bundles. We would have only the nuclear waste from the war-time nuclear program in Montreal and Chalk River and small eroding uranium tailings piles used to make the nuclear bombs that destroyed the two now famous Japanese cities.

If the governments of the time *had* listened to the ecologists of the time, perhaps Canada would be the world's leader in clean alternative power. Perhaps we would be selling efficient solar cells and windmills to China and India. Perhaps India would have not needed a Candu reactor in order to make their first nuclear weapons. Perhaps greenhouse gases from these giant and rapidly developing countries would not be threatening the atmosphere here in Canada. Perhaps Ontario Hydro wouldn't have felt right building a CANDU reactor with slave labour in Romania. Instead, giant subsidies were given to the nuclear power establishment and the quasi-military atmosphere of A.E.C.L. persists into the present.

It is certain that if the recommendations of the ecologists of the time had been listened to, the Ontario Government would not be so many billions of dollars in debt due to their gross mistakes in the nuclear power field.

It is not too late for the Canadian government, and the involved provincial and municipal governments to listen the poorly funded ecologists, naturalists and dissident scientists. These independent scientists, ecologists and naturalists have no axes to grind and no monetary advantage to promote the status quo. If they listen to us now, perhaps they will see that nuclear power is a dangerous bust, with as yet, the unknowable financial costs of decommissioning and disposal yet to be determined.

We find it ironic that under the guise of "user pay" that the people most interested in promoting nuclear power should be the organizations entrusted to seeing that their own nuclear waste is disposed of properly! This puts one in mind of the trial of a child molester where the jury is made up of other child molesters!

It is not comforting to think that *if the expense of dealing with nuclear waste* makes nuclear power obviously a technological dead-end, that there would not be pressure from the vested interests to *hide* these costs. They could hide these costs in order to make nuclear power seem viable. For years, Ontario Hydro, A.E.C.L., and The Canada-Ontario Nuclear Waste Management Coordination Committee told us, "It is not a technological problem that keeps us from disposing of nuclear waste, it is only a political problem."

Of course, they told us a lot of other bull blather also.

They called us, "backward, superstitious country bumpkins," and told us we should go along with nuclear fuel repossessing because, "even hippies are for recycling." They told us that if they were allowed to repossess the plutonium from their nuclear waste, we could have jobs in the "glass block vitrification factory" that would take the highly corrosive and highly radioactive liquid waste into safe glass blocks before disposal. They told us this even though they knew that the scientific efforts of the United States and Japanese and British governments have not been able to do this, except in the laboratory, despite having thousands of barrels of their own highly radioactive and highly corrosive liquid waste to dispose of.

They even told us that the high death rates among uranium miners in Elliot Lake were "inconsequential because those miners would have died anyway," and that "because they die toward the end of their working careers, very few man-years are lost." When faced with this high amount of callousness, you can understand when putting the question of what to do with their own nuclear waste in the hands of the organizations *most interested in promoting* nuclear power, there is no comfort.

Twenty years ago, we were told that soon, many office buildings and apartment buildings will be heated, illuminated and cooled with SLOPOKE III reactors. It seems that the janitor who cleans the walks and halls will not be qualified to operate these imaginary little safe reactors, if they existed.

“A national sacrifice area,” was what we were told to expect if some community didn’t volunteer to be the “host” community to nuclear waste.

As for NWMO’s assertion that, “For decades, Canadians have benefited from nuclear power,” is not entirely accurate. It can be just as easily said that only those with *a vested interest in nuclear power* have benefited. Those who have benefited would be among those suppliers belonging to the Canadian Nuclear Manufacturers Association. Those benefiting would be among those in the highly paid political appointments to the Chairmanships of AECL, Ontario Hydro, New Brunswick Power and Quebec Hydro.

You have only to consider the early deaths due to lung cancer of the uranium miners to realize that not ALL Canadians have benefited. You only have to consider the lack of benefit to the future generations left paying for the giant nuclear power mistake to know this is not true. Generations of people who derived no benefit from our generation’s use of electrically heated swimming pools will continue to pay, long after the broken down nuclear power plants are entombed in their cement coffins.

Other Canadians not benefiting from nuclear power are those who are not able to enjoy alternative power because all the subsidies that went to, and are still going to nuclear power. Those billions of displaced dollars could have made solar and wind energy viable, twenty-five years ago!

Our children and their children are another group of Canadians who will not benefit from nuclear power. Our decades old policy of subsidising cheap industrial rates and charging less per unit of electricity for more used, temporarily made our resources and few manufactured goods seem cheaper. At this time, we have determined no way to dispose of our nuclear waste, let alone the problem of accurately predicting how much it will cost.

Another group of Canadians who have not benefited from nuclear power are all those living in North Western Ontario. This was brought home to even those unaware of the problem when we could visibly see there in little inter-connection when we had the big power blackout. The electricity here in the North West ran merrily on its way without a hitch while the rest of the province was in the dark **because there is no interconnection**. What ever happens to the nuclear plants in Southern Ontario has nothing to do with us here in the North West, except we have to pay for them on our hydro bills.

The "old" Ontario Hydro would not even let us invest jobs in building and operating sulphur dioxide scrubbers ("unnecessary and too expensive") on our small coal fired plants here in Thunder Bay and Atikokan. They also drug their feet on developing further hydro power. We could have run just fine without an interconnection to nuclear power *or* dirty coal fired plants.

As an aside, speaking of interconnections, someone should explain to those isolated First Nations Communities near the proposed interconnection between the South of Ontario and the hydro power of Manitoba, that it is **highly unlikely** that anyone will be able to afford to build the huge step-down transformers needed to make this possible near every reserve. This is the only way that would allow them to be part of the grid. The transformer and distribution stations that would make this possible are very expensive. It is entirely possible that alternative sources of energy would be much more feasible. At this time, one can hear First Nations Communities supporting the Manitoba interconnection in the mistaken belief that they would benefit.

Getting back to the main issue, another irony is that if it is necessary that nuclear waste management "...be done in a way that ensures that future generations will be able to make decisions that reflect their own values and priorities. The preferred approach must be adaptable, able to make decisions that reflect their own values and priorities." If this is necessary, deep geological disposal of nuclear waste becomes out of the running because the waste would be impractical to disinter. If we become sold on repossessing the fuel for the plutonium in order extend the fuel cycle, the liquid waste or even glass blocks would be useless or at worst, useless and highly dangerous to future generations. If we are bound to make it possible for future generations to deal with our mistakes, both of these methods of nuclear waste disposal would be precluded. Thank you, Richard Hiner