

Introduction

ONE WORLD, ONE FUTURE

Saskatchewan is currently the largest uranium-producing region in the world. It accounts for about 30% of annual world uranium production¹ and exports uranium to most of the world's major nuclear powers. In September 2004 Saskatchewan's NDP Minister of Industry and Commerce, Eric Cline, giving the keynote address to 500 nuclear delegates at the annual meeting of the World Nuclear Association in London, bragged about this and called for even more production of uranium from his province.² In February 2006 Cline and NDP Premier Lorne Calvert met with U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney to secure more U.S. investment in Saskatchewan's uranium and oil industries. This rise to the pinnacle of uranium production, of which the Premier and Minister were so proud, took several decades to develop, beginning with the first uranium mines in the 1950s near Uranium City in Saskatchewan's north.

Polite, peaceful, benign Canada is not a country that readily comes to mind when the topic of the world's nuclear powers comes up, but few realize that the uranium for the bomb that instantly killed over 100,000 people in Hiroshima came from the Port Radium mine in the Northwest Territories. And few would be able to identify the province of Saskatchewan as the initial source of substantial amounts of the depleted uranium (DU) that is now routinely used in modern "conventional" weaponry.

Though hunting and gathering has been largely displaced by agriculture and agribusiness, I consider myself — along with most Saskatchewan people — to be a member of a "land-based people." Born on the experimental farm south of Swift Current (aka Speedy Creek) and now living in my retirement on an ecology preserve in the Qu'Appelle Valley, the land has consistently nurtured and deepened my ecological activism and spirituality. When I enrich the gardens, where my spouse Janet and I live, with our organically grown alfalfa hay or nutrient-rich compost, and later taste the delectable food the cared-for land has brought forth, I sometimes think of uranium mining and its end-uses contaminating lands far away that have produced good food and livelihoods for thousands of years.

I am not only referring to atomic attacks, or atmospheric testing, or reactor accidents, nor is the contamination I am thinking about limited to my home province. In Iraq olive groves dating back 6,000 years have been contaminated with DU bombs, some of which likely have their source in Saskatchewan's north. A week after the Shock and Awe pounding of Baghdad

in March 2003, uranium aerosols from DU weaponry found their way into the English atmosphere — and I presume the lungs of Englanders — some 2400 miles away.

Driving through the populated cities and rural areas of southern Saskatchewan there is nothing to indicate that much of the world's uranium began its journey here in this province. The DU in “conventional” weapons, the uranium in stock-piled nuclear bombs, the uranium used in nuclear energy and the millions of tons of highly radioactive mine tailings littering the landscape — these all form part of a single intertwined global nuclear system. And Saskatchewan now holds the distinction of being the world's major front-end supplier of that system.

In the southern part of the province, things look more or less the way they have for decades. Yes, most of the grain elevators are down and gone, and the Big Box stores continue to amass near the spreading suburbs as they do elsewhere on the Prairies. But there are no nuclear power plants, as there are around the Great Lakes near the city of Toronto, nor are there any nuclear missile launching pads to remind us of the bigger nuclear reality, as there are south of us in Montana.

You have to travel to the far north, well past La Ronge, which is mid-way between the U.S. and the Northwest Territories border, to see the ecological scars created by the huge uranium mines at such places as Rabbit, Cluff, Key and Cigar Lakes, or McArthur River. The huge pits and the sheer magnitude of radioactive tailings are heart-stirring to anyone who has eyes to see.

But even the deep scars and radioactive wastes left on the land do not tell the whole story; to fully realize what the uranium industry is doing to the planet, you'd have to trace the yellowcake, shipped from the uranium mills in the north to Cameco's refinery and conversion plant in Ontario or to enrichment plants in the U.S. or France. You'd have to trace its conversion into fuel used in Candu and other nuclear power plants in many countries and its consequent transformation through nuclear fission into long-living toxic nuclear wastes like plutonium, a substance never before seen on planet earth. And, if you've got the stomach for it, you'd have to trace the fuel being converted to the fissionable material that ended up in thousands of nuclear warheads; you'd have to witness the DU left from the enrichment processes going into the uranium bullets now being questioned by the United Nations³ but used nonetheless by the U.S. or NATO in its four most recent wars, and used in the casings of H-bombs ready to play their part in any number of possible genocides brewing in the war-rooms of nuclear weapons powers. Only then, driving through this Canadian heartland armed with such knowledge as is presented in this book, would you begin to comprehend the full ecological and moral implications of mining uranium in Saskatchewan.

The historical narrative of Saskatchewan nuclear politics begins with

the Manhattan Project and the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, after which the U.S. began to build its nuclear arsenal; a few years later the Canadian government used the *War Measures Act* to expropriate Eldorado Gold Mines. In 1946 a new Crown corporation, Eldorado Nuclear, staked its chief uranium claims in the Beaverlodge area of northern Saskatchewan.

In 1952 the U.S. exploded the first hydrogen bomb — and the Saskatchewan uranium boom was under way. After President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" speech in 1953, expectations for uranium-dependent nuclear-generated electricity rose considerably, and from 1962 to 1966 the Canadian government took steps to stabilize the uranium industry, including stockpiling uranium. The nuclear weapons-based industries in both Ontario and Saskatchewan hoped to make the transition to the growing nuclear reactor market. This looked promising; from 1964 to 1967 there were sixty orders for commercial reactors placed from the U.S., and between 1966 and 1970 several orders were placed from Europe, Japan and other countries.

But the price of uranium collapsed in 1971, and from 1972 to 1974 a uranium cartel, which included Canada, was created to keep the price of uranium artificially high. By 1973 the Saskatchewan Blakeney NDP government was looking more seriously at an earlier suggestion to establish a Crown corporation to stabilize uranium development.

In 1973 the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, holding a monopoly on enrichment facilities in the western world, changed its system of providing enrichment services to long-term fixed commitments. This required reactor companies to place orders by 1974 or risk going without fuel into the 1980s, creating a surge in reactor orders and a new market for uranium fuel.

In 1974 the newly elected Australian Labour Party put uranium mining expansion on hold due to social and environmental impacts and concerns for Aboriginal rights; across the Atlantic political unrest in Gabon and Niger threatened France's uranium supplies, and as a result the French uranium company Amok announced their plans to develop the Cluff Lake mine, rich in uranium deposits, in northern Saskatchewan.

Scientism is the ideology that turns self-critical scientific inquiry into a religion that worships a technological priesthood of corporate "experts" who are out of reach of democratic processes. The propaganda of the nuclear industry, in both its energy and weapons manifestations, relies heavily on such rhetoric and on the collective historical and ecological amnesia of the general public, which sustains it. This propaganda is rendered even easier by the largely invisible effects of nuclear development. Most of us never come into direct awareness of the uranium mines in Saskatchewan's north, and if we do, these are described neutrally in terms of resource development bringing royalties to the province and employment to the region. They are not described as producing tailings or spent fuel for millennia or continuing

nuclear weapons proliferation. And without deep curiosity and knowledge about the end uses of uranium mining, it will never be seen as anything other than just another resource industry.

The sole purpose of the pro-nuclear lobby is to create a lucrative short-term market for uranium fuel and Candu reactors, and the global ecological stance taken in this book presents a challenge to their short-sighted self-interests. This narrow parochial economic perspective has been adopted by the Saskatchewan NDP, which has repeatedly used this short-term rationalization to defend their political, bureaucratic and even corporate interests. But this rationalization, couched in the language of economic necessity, is comparable to the amoral rationalizations used in the past to justify the economic benefits of slavery. Or, to use a more contemporary example, to rationalize the economic benefits of exporting illicit drugs, for example, cocaine (from Columbia) or opium (from Afghanistan) to a lucrative market of desperate people abroad. Out of sight, out of mind, with a dollar in hand: this is the psychopathic amorality described in the 2003 book by Joel Bakan *The Corporation*, and film of the same name. But for present and future generations, the export of uranium has far more devastating consequences than illicit drugs; there is really no comparison when you consider the millions of people, worldwide, already victimized by the nuclear industry and the millions more for generations to come.

A conversion strategy, not political correctness, is required for moral-ecological awareness to grow. This strategy involves a phasing-out of nuclear power and uranium mining and a shifting of society's resources to conservation and sustainable energy systems, which can actually prevent further pollution, radioactive contaminants included, and reduce the impacts of global warming. Saskatchewan could now be a leader in this had it not stubbornly stuck to the nuclear path.

Canada's Deadly Secret is a testament to the creation of transformative political ecological consciousness out of an ongoing collective engagement. In giving shape to this story, I was startled — after three decades of activism — by the magnitude of the resources that the uranium and nuclear industries had thrown at the province. This includes the full weight of the seemingly bottomless corporate coffers and the propaganda machine of the entire nuclear system, from extraction to end-use; both federal and provincial states with the Crown corporations and multinationals they created; and the near-monopolistic media that uncritically supported, and still support — even worship — economic growth and energy consumption at any cost.

But perhaps more importantly I was struck by the fact that those enormously powerful and manipulative conglomerates, acting with government and media collusion, have gained so little ground. The effectiveness of our clumsy and hesitant resistance to their unholy plans is impressive.

The intention of this book is to connect the dots between Saskatchewan's uranium mining and the other vital issues along the nuclear industry's global pathways. I hope it will bring historical context to the continued necessary resistance to the government of the day — the NDP or its replacement — as it seeks a quick fix to its economic struggles, obscures the broader threat of global warming and continues to ignore the challenge of sustainable development, by laying plans to expand the nuclear industry in Saskatchewan.

Notes

1. See Saskatchewan Eco Network <<http://econet.sk.ca/issues/mining/index.html>> accessed July 20, 2007.
2. "Saskatchewan's Uranium Resources Promoted in London," News Release, Saskatchewan Executive Council, Sept. 10, 2004.
3. Leuren Moret, "Depleted Uranium is WMD," *Battle Creek Enquirer*, August 9, 2005, available at <<http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0809-33.htm>> accessed June 2007.