

ICUCEC: A Brief History

Without our efforts Saskatchewan would have had been saddled with nuclear reactors, possibly a nuclear waste repository, an even more damaging mining industry and a public ignorant of the long-term environmental effects of radionuclides in Saskatchewan.

1976

ICUC arose from the hearings into the proposed Warman Uranium Refinery. The Bayda Enquiry in 1976 had recommended to the Saskatchewan Government to go ahead with uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan.

1976-1979

In 1977 Graham Simpson helped present a brief to the NDP Cabinet protesting uranium mining for the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation. The Blakeney Government was intent on going ahead--and played a subtle role in abetting the Warman refinery proposal. The Warman hearings came to a head in 1979 and the group of churches formed a committee called the Interchurch Committee which disbanded in 1980 after the Inquiry Panel recommended against the Warman refinery.

1980-1984

But it was becoming clear that uranium mining was expanding rapidly with new foreign companies investing large amounts of money in exploration. The public had become conscious of the mines from the Warman Enquiry so a group of people decided to establish a committee within the framework of the former Interchurch Committee.

According to John Kleiner, the first meeting was held on 25 June 1980 and a second on 18 August at which the following names were put forward for the first committee called the Interchurch Uranium Committee: Bill Adamson, Dennis Gruending, John Kleiner, Jim Penna, Irene Poelzer, Robert Regnier, Adele Smillie and Sister Irene Soprocolle.

The committee spearheaded a public education campaign about the dangers of uranium mining. The first major impact of the committee, following a number of public meetings and workshops, was a Joint Statement by Church Leaders in the Province of Saskatchewan (June 1983) calling for a moratorium on uranium mining until more was known about the potential consequences and because of the use of uranium in nuclear weapons. Thirteen church leaders, Anglican, Lutheran, United, Roman Catholic and Mennonites, signed the statement. In 1984

ICUC shifted its activities to include dialogue with northerners, particularly aboriginals who were starting to be affected by the presence of the mining industry.

1987

In 1987 ICUC initiated the Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Campaign in partnership with Ploughshares. The campaign got City Council in Saskatoon to place a Referendum vote in the next civic elections (1988). The citizens of Saskatoon came in with a resounding YES to make the City a nuclear-free zone. Council pulled some legal tricks to try to prohibit it and refused to put up the signs at the highway entrances to Saskatoon. BUT it was important in educating Saskatonians that they are at the hub city of the world's uranium industry, which continues to supply uranium for weapons and to create nuclear waste from the nuclear plants.

1989

In 1989 the nuclear industry, led by AECL, started a campaign to break into Saskatchewan with nuclear reactors. This began with a proposed Slowpoke reactor on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan. ICUCEC initiated a counter campaign and several other citizen and university-based groups (i.e., Pokebusters Citizens' Coalition, STOP=Students Opposing the Slowpoke) took part. AECL withdrew their 'magnanimous' offer not just because of the opposition but also because the plan for the reactor was badly flawed.

Not to be put off, AECL tried to sell the Province a CANDU-3 small reactor. ICUCEC worked to combat the propaganda and the bid for the CANDU-3 failed.

1990-1996

The 1980s ended with the discovery of exceptionally rich uranium pockets in the neighbourhood of Wollaston Lake. These discoveries called for a Federal Provincial Enquiry into whether a further expansion was permissible. A joint Federal-Provincial Environmental Assessment Committee was set up. These hearings were in full swing by 1996 and despite the recommendations in the final panel report NOT to go ahead, the Provincial Government approved the project in August, 1997.

This was a bitter blow to the anti-uranium movement. The government approved the McArthur River Mine, in spite of evidence of health and environmental threats.

1996-1998

In 1996-1998 hearings began into the AECL proposal to put nuclear plant wastes underground in the Canadian Shield. It appeared that Saskatchewan could be a potential site. ICUCEC and The Saskatchewan Environmental Society worked against the proposal at the technical hearings held in Toronto (1997-98). In Saskatchewan there was tremendous citizen opposition to AECL's proposal.

VICTORY

The Panel recommended NOT to proceed because of the unwillingness of the Canadian Public to allow it. They hedged the finding by saying that the proposal was technically OK, leaving it open for the Federal Government in the future to go ahead.

Twenty years later some of the original committee members are still active. The task of stopping the mines remains, and there are no easy solutions.