URANIUM
Highway of the atom

REPORTAGE BY SOPHIE TOUPIN
COMIX BY RUTH TAIT
THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR BEING HERE TONIGHT. I'M FRANCOIS LAPERRIERE, THE SPOKESPERSON FOR THE ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN THE UPPER LAURENTIANS. IT'S MY PLEASURE TO INTRODUCE TO YOU OUR GUEST SPEAKER: GORDON EDWARDS FROM THE CANADIAN COALITION FOR NUCLEAR RESPONSIBILITY.

GOOD EVENING. TONIGHT I AM GOING TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE SECRET HISTORY OF CANADIAN URANIUM.

I'M AUGUST 1943 IN QUEBEC CITY. CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER MACKENZIE KING, UK PRIME MINISTER WINSTON CHURCHILL AND US PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN SIGNED A SECRET AGREEMENT. IN IT, CANADA AGREED TO PROVIDE URANIUM TO WHAT BECAME KNOWN AS THE MANHATTAN PROJECT.

IN TOTAL SecRECY, CANADIAN URANIUM WAS USED TO DEVELOP THE ATOMIC BOMBS DROPPED ON HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI ON AUGUST 6 AND 9, 1945, RESPECTIVELY.

214,000 JAPANESE CIVILIANS DIED FROM THE BLASTS AND EXPOSURE TO RADIATION.
A portion of the uranium used for the bombs was extracted from the Eldorado mine at Port Radium on Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories.

The Dene people inhabiting the land hauled and ferried sacks of the dangerous ore.

Long ago, in North Bay, Ontario, there was a sacred island in the middle of a lake where young men used to go for their vision quests.

"Back then, they didn’t know that the concentration of uranium ore on the island was so high that prolonged exposure could poison them and burn their skin."

"After visiting the island, many suffered through long and painful deaths."

"When they returned, they spoke of frightening visions."

"In Dene who worked at the mine from 1942 to 1960 have now died of lung, colon, and kidney cancers, according to documents obtained through the Territory’s cancer registry. Few people have memories of this period. Madalaine Bayha is one of those people."
"OLD MAN FERDINAND, VICTOR DOLPH, JOE KENNY AND JOSEPH BAYHA, FOUR OF THE DECEASED MEN WHO AS YOUNG MEN HAUL
100-POUND BARS OF URANIUM ORE CONCENTRATE ALONG A 2,100-KILOMETRE TRANSPORTATION WEB OF RIVERS, RAPIDS AND
PORTAGES KNOWN AS THE 'HIGHWAY OF THE ATOM' FOR 13 DAYS. THEY ALL DIED OF CANCER."

"ON MAY 9, 2007, MINERS ARE STUNNED WHILE ENVIRONMENTALISTS CHEER OVER A NORTHERN REGULATOR'S RECOMMENDATION THAT
A URANIUM EXPLORATION PROJECT BE DENIED BECAUSE IT THREATENS THE SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL WELL-BEING OF THE AREA'S
PIGE NATION."

IN PORT RADIO, A SHRINE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD.

UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1940, LOUIS AVAHAH, ONE OF THE NORTH'S GREAT ABORIGINAL SEERS, REPEATEDLY WARNED US THAT THE WATERS IN
GREAT BEAR LAKE WOULD TURN A FOUL YELLOW. HE SAID THAT THERE WOULD BE SICKNESS AND OUR PEOPLE WOULD GO THROUGH HARD TIMES AND THAT THERE WOULD BE DEATH.

MY HUSBAND, JOSEPH, WORKED FOR YEARS AT THE URANIUM MINE AND DIED AS MANY WHITE MINERS DID: COUGHING HIMSELF TO DEATH.

THE ELDOVADO MINE WAS OWNED FIRST BY A PRIVATE COMPANY AND THEN BY A CROWN CORPORATION. IN 1988, THE OLD CROWN CORPORATION BECAME CANECO LIMITED, THE WORLD'S BIGGEST URANIUM PRODUCER.

TODAY, CANECO'S MARKET CAPITALIZATION REACHES $15.9 BILLION, WITH CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS IN SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN, THE U-CAPITAL OF THE WORLD.
In May 2007, Toronto graphic artist Ruth Tait and myself, Sophie Toupin, a journalist from Montreal, went to Mont-Laurier to interview key figures related to the uranium exploration in the area.

We had 220 people attending this public information session last year with Gordon Edwards.

People in town started hearing rumors about the possibility of an open-pit mine. We jumped on the Internet and saw that...

...a junior exploration company was evaluating the land for uranium near Mont-Laurier.

30 years ago, I followed the same issue. It is cyclical. At that time I thought uranium and the nuclear industry had come to a halt, especially after Three Mile Island and Chernobyl.

But I guess the nuclear industry is doing a pretty good job taking advantage of the Kyoto Protocol and the soaring price of uranium....

Right now there are about 40 U-exploration projects throughout the province...

...but no production.
LISTEN, RADON IS VERY DANGEROUS. WHEN THEY DRILL ON EXPLORATION SITES, PROSPECTORS ACTIVATE THE URANIUM, WHICH RELEASES TOXIC PARTICLES OF RADON INTO THE AIR AND INTO THE GROUND, POSSIBLY CONTAMINATING GROUNDWATER.

ARE THERE ANY DANGERS TO COMMUNITIES LIKE NONT-LAURIER THAT ARE RELATED TO THE Process OF URANIUM EXPLORATION?

WHEN I SPOKE WITH LOCAL GEOLOGIST, ALAIN TREMBLAY, HE SAID THAT URANIUM EXPLORATION BENEFITS THE COMMUNITIES...

"ALAIN TREMBLAY: "IN THE REGION THEY ISSUE HOUSING CONSTRUCTION PERMITS WHILE KNOWING THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH RADON, A TOXIC GAS..."

EXPLORATION FOR URANIUM IS VERY USEFUL, BECAUSE IT UNCOVERS RADON. WE DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO BUILD THEIR HOMES ON URANIUM DEPOSITS THAT LEAK RADON...."
ALAIN TREMBLAY, DOWN-TOWN MONT-LAURIER

THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF A JUNIOR COMPANY...

SOCIALLY, JUNIORS HAVE AN INPUT FROM THE MOMENT THEY HIRE PEOPLE. THEY PAY LABOUR COSTS. THEY PAY THEIR TAXES.

...IN OTHER WORDS THEY ARE GOOD CORPORATE CITIZENS.

WHY SHOULD THEIR RESPONSIBILITY GO FURTHER THAN ANY OTHER CORPORATION?

THE PRICE OF URANIUM GOES UP IT'S BECAUSE THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE THAN THE MARKET CAN PROVIDE.

A JUNIOR COMPANY'S ROLE IS TO FIND MORE WHEN THE PRICE IS HIGH TO SUPPLY THE DEMAND AND TO MAKE PROFITS FOR THEIR SHAREHOLDERS... AND FUTURE PROFITS FOR URANIUM MINING COMPANIES.
"I spoke to Richard Dufour, manager at Nova-Uranium. He's responsible for the exploration project in Mont-Laurier."

The region of Mont-Laurier is going through a forest crisis. A U-exploration company such as Nova-Uranium is bringing a lot of money to the region.

"In 2006, Nova spent about 5 million dollars in Mont-Laurier on gas, lodging, and on equipment rentals and purchases."

"And anyway, Québec is a pro-mining province. It's very favourable for exploration companies. The government reimburses 30% of the expenses done by U-exploration companies and up to 170% is given in tax credits to investors who buy mining certificates."

Mont-Tremblant is getting all the tourism that comes out of Montreal, not Mont-Laurier.

What am I going to say to the mayors at the mayors' council when I meet them?

"I am going to give them the facts: ...the April environmentalists are doing propaganda work!"
DESPITE WHAT DUFOUR SAYS, LOCAL POLITICIANS HAVE COME ON BOARD TO HELP STOP THE PROJECT, LIKE MAYOR CLAUDE MENARD OF LAG ST-PHILIPPE, AND SYLVAIN PASE, THE PARTI QUÉBÉCOIS MP FOR ANTOINE-LEBBEL AND A FOUNDING MEMBER OF APEHL.

LAST YEAR I ATTENDED AN INFORMATION SESSION ORGANIZED BY APEHL WHERE GORDON EDWARDS CAME TO TALK ABOUT URANIUM. THAT'S HOW I GOT TO KNOW ABOUT THE ISSUE.

SYLVAIN PASE, MP

"IN NOVEMBER 2006, I PRESENTED A PETITION TO QUÉBEC'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, WHICH ORIGINATED FROM APEHL, AND GATHERED 774 SIGNATURES. IT REQUESTED A MORATORIUM ON EXPLORATION, EXPLOITATION AND EXTRACTION OF URANIUM."

"I READ OUT THE PETITION AND NO QUESTIONS WERE ASKED. IT WAS TABLED, KEPT BY THE SECRETARIAT FOR 7 DAYS, THEN RETURNED TO ME WITHOUT A DEBATE. THE ACT OF PRESENTING A PETITION TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS A LITTLE SAD."

I SENT LETTERS IN FEBRUARY AND MAY 2007 TO MINISTERS CLAUDE BÉCHARD, PHILIPPE COULLARD, PIERRE CORBEIL AND LINE BEAUCHAMP TO INFORM THEM ABOUT THIS ISSUE.

I HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED AN ANSWER.

FOR THE MORATORIUM TO PASS, WE NEED STRONGER POPULAR SUPPORT. OUR EFFORTS SEEM TOO LOCAL. WE NEED TO DO PROVINCEWIDE.
"Claude Menard is the mayor of Lac St-Paul where the U-exploration is taking place."

"I have seen the dangers with Element 92."

"As an adjoining municipality, we support Mr. Menard’s request for a moratorium. There are many reasons to be opposed to this exploration project, especially if it leads to an open-pit mine."

"Claude Blain is mayor of les Chutes St-Philippe."

"Before retiring in the region, I worked for a long time at the Chalk River Power Station."

"There, I saw a man die in three days from exposure to radiation."
"To get another perspective, I phoned James Finch, an author and uranium analyst."

Quebec has one of the most prolific mining histories in the world. My God! Look how much mineral resources it supplies, it's amazing, and it's a great place for that. As for uranium mining, I don't know. It's so low grade...

"Junior uranium exploration companies, for the most part, are created for the sole purpose of giving jobs to unemployed people. There are so few legitimate companies out there."

"Once you start discovering uranium and actually go into production, that can take 10 to 20 years. Most of these guys will be dead by then!"

"As I reviewed my conversation with James Finch, I was reminded of an article in the journal Les Affaires that read..."
Uranium in Mont-Laurier was discovered in 1957. However, prior to 1973, uranium was controlled by the military and a market did not yet exist.

The petroleum crisis of 1973 caused uranium prices to surge from US$6 to US$45 a pound. But in 1975, the accident at Three Mile Island led almost to a full cessation of activities.

Between 1970 and 1984, U-production exceeded the demand. This was based on the erroneous predictions of the growth of the nuclear energy sector. From 1985 to 2003, liquidation of inventories dominated the scene.

Since 2004, several new mining claims, especially in the province of Quebec, were acquired.

In the Mont-Laurier region, Nova-Uranium Corporation, Strateco Resources Inc., Consolidated Pacific Bay Minerals Ltd., and Big Red Diamond Corporation, among others, have claims for U-exploration.
QUEBEC HAS A VERY GOOD JURISDICTION FOR MINING, INCLUDING ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FORM OF REFUNDS FOR EXPLORATION EXPENSES AND TAX INCENTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT.

AND JUST LOOK HOW CLOSE ONTARIO IS! IT’LL BE A NATURAL MARKET IF A MINE IS DEVELOPED IN MONT-LAURIER.

FINCH’S COMMENTS REMINDED ME THAT NUCLEAR ENERGY ALREADY PROVIDES ABOUT 15% OF CANADA’S ELECTRICITY, AND 51% OF ONTARIO’S ENERGY CONSUMPTION COMES FROM NUCLEAR POWER.

U-COMPANIES WORK ON LONG-TERM CONTRACTS WHERE MOST OF THE URANIUM TRADED IS CONTRACTED WELL IN ADVANCE. THE SPOT PRICE IS NOW AT $3.30 PER POUND WHEREAS THE AVERAGE 420-POUND DELIVERY PRICE... AGREED...

THE SPOT PRICE IS BASICALLY FOR THE END USERS OF URANIUM THAT DON’T HAVE ALL THE URANIUM THEY NEED. EITHER THEY WERE NOT CLEVER ENOUGH OR, THEY WERE SIMPLY NOT WELL PREPARED. THEY DRIVE THE SPOT PRICE HIGHER BECAUSE THEY NEED TO GET SOME NOW!

THEY NEED SOME FOR THEIR COMMITMENTS, LET’S SAY 2 TO 3 YEARS DOWN THE ROAD, WHICH IS THE TIME IT TAKES FOR URANIUM EXPLORATION TO ENRICH THE URANIUM BEFORE IT ACTUALLY GETS INTO A REACTOR.

THERE IS A LOT MORE VOLUME IN OTHER Commodity MARKETS—LIKE COPPER—Than IN THE URANIUM MARKET BECAUSE COPPER IS USED FOR EVERYTHING.

URANIUM IS USED IN TWO THINGS...

...NUCLEAR BOMBS AND NUCLEAR REACTORS.

84 • Extraction!
APPEL HAS DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS TO DEVELOP A COALITION AGAINST THE URANIUM MINING PROJECT. DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES HAVE MADE NO DIFFERENCE DESPITE SUPPORT FROM LOCAL/PROVINCIAL POLITICIANS. THE U-MINING PROJECT SEEMS TO BE MOVING FORWARD...

AT THE MAY 31, 2007 APPEL MEETING, ONLY FIVE PEOPLE SHOWED UP.

MR. RICHER, YOU HAD CONTACTS WITH AN INDIVIDUAL LOCATED NEAR OTTAWA THAT IS RESISTING A URANIUM EXPLORATION PROJECT. CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT IT...

I CONTACTED MICHAEL PÂTÉVAILAURI, A CITIZEN FROM THE VILLAGE OF LA PÊCHE, WHO WAS TOLD THAT THE LAND ON WHICH HE HAD HIS COTTAGE WAS CLAIMED FOR MINING ACTIVITIES.

MICHAEL WAS TELLING ME THAT ACCORDING TO ARTICLE 225 OF THE QUEBEC MINING ACT, THE HOLDER OF MINING RIGHTS MAY ACQUIRE BY AGREEMENT OR EXPROPRIATION ANY PROPERTY PERMITTING ACCESS FOR EXPLORATION WORK OR MINING OPERATIONS.

IN THE AVILAIRE SECTOR OF THE CITY OF GATINEAU, ECOWATCH IS LOBBYING TO GET THE QUEBEC MINING ACT AMENDED TO DIMINISH THE POWER OF MINING RIGHTS HOLDERS.

AT ANOTHER APEH MEETING ON JUNE 26, 2007...

WE URGENTLY NEED TO CONVINCE MORE MAYORS TO SUPPORT A MORATORIUM AND CREATE A COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE THAT WILL BE MANDATED TO DRAFT A STRATEGY.

WE HAVE TO DEVELOP MORE LINKS WITH GROUPS FIGHTING OTHER U-PROJECTS SUCH AS MIKAEL IN OTTAWA OR THE PEOPLE FROM KITIGAN Zibi RESERVE NEAR MANITOBA.

MAY 2007, FRANÇOIS LAPierre PRESENTS APEH’S CASE ON CKUT 90.3 FM AND RADIO CENTRE-VILLE, TWO INDEPENDANT RADIO STATIONS IN MONTRÉAL.

LAPierre LOBBED AT MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVELS BUT NO ONE SEEMS TO BE LISTENING. WHAT DO COMMUNITIES NEED TO DO TO GET HEARD WHEN POLITICIANS IN POSITIONS OF POWER ARE NOT INTERESTED IN THEIR PERSPECTIVE?


WHAT? PRIVATIZING THE CANADIAN ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY? AFTER ALL, THESE FUNDS HAVE BEEN FUNDED INTO RESEARCH AND IMPLEMENTATION? NO, I HAVEN'T SEEN THE TORONTO STAR ARTICLE, JULY 6TH. OK, I’LL CHECK IT OUT.

NOW WITH CO2 EMISSIONS BEING THE LATEST ENVIRONMENTAL BAD BUY, NUCLEAR POWER IS BEING PROMOTED AS THE ‘GREEN’ ENERGY. REMEMBER WHAT DALTON McGuinty, PREMIER OF ONTARIO, SAID IN FEBRUARY 2003: NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS GENERATE CLEAN ELECTRICITY...

...AND COMPARISON TO COAL AND OIL, THIS BRINGING DOWN GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND RESPECTING KYOTO’S PROTOCOL JUST WATCH AS WORD GETS OUT ABOUT NUCLEAR REACTORS BEING BUILT TO SUPPLY ENERGY FOR THUM SAND EXTRACTION IN ALBERTA.
"Uranium trading is a secret market. It's the most secret because it's the most regulated market."

"You and I can't go and start mining uranium, you need licences all over the place."

"Now that the Toronto Stock Exchange has just launched a global mining index, it will draw investment from commodity-hungry stock buyers."

"It's great news!"

"If I had to diversify my portfolio, I would buy stocks from some transnational corporations such as General Electric and Toshiba as they have new products on the market."

"I will conclude the evening quoting the Harvard Business School Task Force Report on Energy 2005 which has argued that 'we can live quite affluently without requiring more nuclear power, oil or coal, by investing in energy efficiency, energy conservation, and renewable forms of energy.'"