

## Energy Insider by William Engdahl

### Who's wrecking the uranium industry?

*New U.S. clean air proposals will be a boost for the London-centered mining multinationals.*

In June, President George Bush flew to the Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming to unveil his administration's new plans to revise the so-called Clean Air Act of 1970, and Jimmy Carter is reportedly grinning from ear to ear. But one little-noticed part of the new proposal has certain mining interests in London licking their chops, and privately chortling at U.S. foolishness, since they are about to take control of the world's largest market for uranium.

Let's look into the "politics of ecology."

Under the new Environmental Protection Agency rules, if Congress is foolish enough to allow it, airborne emissions of radon and other radionuclides would have to be kept to levels smaller than levels of normal "background" radiation present in the atmosphere—restrictions which have correctly been labeled "bizarre" by Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.). Senator Simpson argued that since the universe is radioactive as a natural state, the bogeyman of "radiation" must be studied carefully to determine if a genuine threat to public health, possible cancer, or other illness can be linked to specific sources.

Many others agree, including the American Mining Congress, the American College of Nuclear Physicians, and the National Council on Radiation Protection. Even the EPA's own Radiation Advisory Committee of their Scientific Advisory Board found fault with the EPA's new proposals.

Studies indicate that emission of radionuclides and radon from the na-

tion's entire nuclear industry contributes less than 0.1% of the average American's total exposure to radon and other radionuclides. The EPA plan would limit emissions to 10 millirem, 3 millirem, or .03 millirem per year for a hypothetical "maximum exposed individual," depending on circumstances.

EPA's defined measure for the new standard of "maximum exposed individual," is someone who remains at the point of worst exposure, outdoors, for 70 years without pause! Furthermore, there is no demonstration that even such a hypothetical person actually increases his risk of cancer. And even the National Institutes of Health warn that the EPA rule would probably *increase* numbers of cancer deaths by banning radionuclides used to treat cancer patients.

Now, I'm not a radiation health expert, but I know a skunk when I smell one. The EPA guidelines on radon are not about protecting anyone's health. According to a U.S. nuclear industry trade association, the U.S. Council for Energy Awareness (in more courageous days they called themselves the U.S. Atomic Industrial Forum), the new rules, if enforced, will quite simply force the closing of the entire remaining U.S. uranium mining and milling industry. Who could possibly benefit from this?

True, there are a bevy of diehard fanatic anti-nuclear nuts running around our campuses who can be relied on to rail against all nuclear energy. But today, despite all their efforts, nuclear-powered electricity in the United States provides fully 20%

of all U.S. electricity. It has displaced oil as second behind coal. This is sufficient electricity from some 111 licensed nuclear plants to give electricity to more than 80 million people. The United States today is the world's largest market for enriched uranium.

It doesn't take a Harvard MBA to realize that, with 20% of our electricity dependent on nuclear and the shut-down of domestic uranium mining and milling, the United States will have to *import* its immense uranium requirements.

The London-centered uranium cartel, meeting under the umbrella of the Uranium Institute, which reportedly had a major role in the near-bankruptcy of Westinghouse's nuclear business in the 1970s, is poised to jump into the breach. U.S. domestic uranium mines have been forced into bankruptcy over the past decade by regulatory restrictions and hostile government policy, reduced from 362 mines in 1980 to only 15 today. But, with cunning foresight, the London-centered uranium interests have quietly prepared a *de facto* monopoly on Western uranium supplies.

The world's largest uranium mining conglomerate is London's elite Rio Tinto Zinc, closely tied to the Trilateral Commission. It owns the world's largest open-pit uranium mine in Namibia, and huge deposits in Canada, which under the recent U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement, will enjoy tariff-free entry into U.S. markets.

The U.S. uranium market firm Nuexco predicts that even under present low growth trends, by the mid-1990s we will face a severe world shortage of uranium. It will mean that certain select foreign firms will hold life-or-death control over U.S. cost of energy fuel—a dangerous state of affairs for any nation, let alone the world's largest economic region.