

Workers Moving

the Industry Forward

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. The CNA should be commended for the theme of this conference and its forward looking direction. Over the next few minutes I will attempt to give you a better understanding of the feelings of the front line workers in the Canadian nuclear power sector, their industry and its future. I also want to explain to you what those workers are doing and how we can all support their efforts to make nuclear excel.

In turn, I hope to take away from this Conference *your* feelings on the same subjects. I have faith that the more we communicate within the industry, the more common ground we will discover. And the more common ground we discover, the more we will look for new ways to cooperate. This is human instinct at its best. Communication is the cornerstone of cooperation.

The Power Workers' Union is well positioned to comment on the activities of workers in the nuclear industry. We represent workers at Ontario Hydro's nuclear stations and AECL operators at Chalk River. We have what many consider a non-traditional approach to labour relations. The success of the business is important to us because it keeps our members working. So long as the employer is committed to treating us as partners in the business, we are more than willing to co-operate.

We will certainly need unprecedented levels of cooperation within the industry in the years to come. The end of regional monopolies and the emergence of a continent-wide electricity marketplace will affect us all, in ways that can only be guessed at.

I have heard many opinions on whether a competitive generation market will be good or bad for nuclear and personally, I am in the optimist camp. But there are definitely serious reasons for concern. Depending on how low average prices go in the marketplace, there may be a stranded debt issue to address. And frankly, as everyone knows, nuclear performance at Hydro has slipped in the last few years. But there is no doubt that Hydro's nuclear facilities are highly competitive when they are managed well, which has not been the case for some time. On this, more or less

everybody agrees. Which is why the Magnificent Seven have been brought in to hopefully save the day and return Hydro's nuclear operations to their former glory.

And I want to take this opportunity to say publicly that we in the Power Workers' Union are impressed by what we have seen so far from Carl Andognini and his team. These folks clearly know what they're doing and they understand how to communicate effectively in that complex operational environment. They are one of the reasons I am optimistic about the future of our industry.

Whatever the future may bring, however, the present is not really pleasant for nuclear workers generally. The work itself is very demanding technically and must be carried out with the highest level of diligence. The responsibility for public and station safety is enormous.

And despite a virtually flawless safety record over three decades in Canada's nuclear power industry, it continues to be attacked by a small but vocal band of critics who specialize in scare mongering and misinformation. As one example, they worked up a frenzy about the internal heavy water spill at Pickering in late 1995, even though it was a great example of how well our safety mechanisms do work. To make matters worse, the media often does not show balanced reporting at such times. They give as much airtime to poorly informed alarmists as they do to highly qualified nuclear specialists, who cannot possibly explain in one or two sound bites exactly why there is no danger to the public. So the media reduces them to simply giving vague-sounding assurances, when what is needed is a little more public education on the subject.

No one likes to have their work attacked, especially if you know your critics are unfair. So the misunderstanding and unwarranted public fear of their work is sometimes discouraging to nuclear workers.

Politicians can be even worse than the media. Take for example, Dalton McGuinty, The Leader of the Ontario Liberals. He recently said in the Legislature that Homer Simpson would have felt right at home in an Ontario Hydro nuclear plant. He was responding to a peer review report that was, as it should have been, brutally honest in detailing shortcomings in the nuclear operations. But by reducing the complex issues dealt with in the report to a witty little sound bite, McGuinty contributed to public ignorance and needless fear and, along the way, insulted thousands of Ontario's most skilled workers by comparing them to an inept and stupid cartoon character. His whole performance reminded me of a cartoon character myself - a Disney character. I'll let you speculate as to which one.

And on top of misunderstanding and public insults, our members at Ontario Hydro have for years been under constant stress, which promises to continue for more years yet, from the impacts of restructuring and the coming deregulation of the

industry.

Still, they soldier on well and are anxious to do all they can to ensure their industry has a future. This is the motivation behind the Canadian Nuclear Workers' Council, an organization that is several years old now, and is dedicated to articulating the concerns and viewpoints of nuclear industry workers.

Some of you are no doubt familiar with the Council, as they have appeared at many public and legislative hearings related to the industry. And the unions who belong to the Council have themselves become more vocal and are speaking out on behalf of their industry. The Power Workers' Union uses these forums to ensure that the public record contains the view of the employees on the shop floor who do the actual work and who are the first line defense for both worker and public safety.

All this has led to a fairly dramatic increase in the participation of workers at these public hearings, which gives the different panels a unique perspective of the nuclear workplace, one that is more balanced and realistic.

That's only the beginning of what the industry's front line employees want to do for their industry. They want to play as large a role as they can to better secure its future, because their own futures are tied to it.

It would be very unwise of industry management to neglect or downplay this growing sense of commitment among industry workers. Every successful nuclear turnaround story in recent history has happened because someone realized that asking the advice of those whose skills make the stations work is the best place to start when you want to find out what's gone wrong. Listening to and acting on what you hear from your employees is proving to be the surest way to create the good news stories of improving nuclear performance we all want to hear.

But is there more that workers can be doing to protect the future of the nuclear power industry? And are there also things the industry can do to encourage and support its employees in this regard?

Certainly, there's more those workers can be doing. In any industry, employees represent the largest single untapped resource for improving public understanding of their industry. Nuclear workers have even more potential than normal in this respect because they are generally well educated and can more easily understand and explain technical issues.

To tap this resource, we need to get information in the hands of employees that will make it very easy for them to discuss and explain our industry and its benefits to others. This is the focus of a project now underway which the Power Workers' Union and the Council are sponsoring. We have just finished the first drafts of a series of

fact sheets that explain, in non-technical language, nuclear industry issues such as:

- Transporting radioactive material
- The burning of plutonium from dismantled weaponry,
- Deep geological storage of nuclear waste, and
- The sale of Candu reactors to China

We are striving for two things in these communications tools: to be current and to be concise. While you can judge for yourself (and we welcome any comments and suggestions) I think we are on the right track. Interested lay people will easily understand these fact sheets. And they are easily duplicated and distributed to employees.

To date, this project has been self-funded by the PWU and the Council, but to sustain it and make it a success, we will need the industry's assistance with ongoing funding, technical support and, most importantly, broad circulation.

Ideally, we envision having the materials you see today available electronically through a web site where nuclear workers can access and distribute a growing body of information aimed at communicating our story better. I hope we can count on you for support in this.

But we all know that it will take a lot more than good public relations to ensure a more secure future for our industry. It will take better performance from our facilities, which cannot happen, I suggest, without a noticeable refinement in labour/management relations. So let me spend the few minutes I have left making some broad-brush comments on this subject, which I hope will stimulate more discussion after this Conference, back in our respective domains.

In the early days of nuclear power, there were some that believed that this new industry could grow to become a new model for labour/management relations that other industries would emulate. There were several reasons for this optimism. First of all, it was a brand new industry that could easily reject the traditional rituals of confrontation and conflict between management and workers. And why not? The people who worked in it were, for the most part, very well educated and focused on technical solutions that stood the test of time. They were long-term thinkers by nature that would surely see the importance of mutually beneficial long-term working relationships in nuclear operations. And the very nature of nuclear power made it critical that every person did his or her job right the first time.

These factors, some believed, should have led to a nearly classless workplace in which everyone supported each other's work as important and necessary. Looking back in our Union's records from that time, it was clear that many workers hoped for such a new era in workplace relationships in the nuclear division. And

there is evidence that some in Hydro management felt that way as well. The fact that this did not happen should not surprise us. The simple hope that relationships would get better was not followed up with any action. Apparently, it was supposed to just happen. So no real effort was put into making the nuclear operation distinguishable in its labour relations practices from the rest of the corporation. And even if there had been, it would have been difficult to keep such an experiment afloat against the powerful gravitational pull of the traditional Hydro management culture.

And so for the last thirty something years, labour/management relations in Hydro's nuclear operations have been up and down and, frankly, in recent years, more down than up. This is regrettable of course, and the Union recognizes that turning around unproductive workplace relationships is absolutely essential to turning around nuclear as a whole. We want to do our part.

The Union is a human institution and therefore reflects the normal range of human shortcomings. But we feel, nonetheless, that we have clearly signaled our willingness to work hard towards better, more cooperative working relationships with management. Hydro's restructuring over the last four years has been the largest in Canadian corporate history. I think the record shows that the PWU has done a lot to make this great change happen smoothly and without any disruption in operations, while still representing the working interests of our members, which is, of course, our main role in life.

And we are willing to do much more in the months and years to come to build a more cooperative framework for labour/management relations in our industry. So in anticipation of your feeling the same, let me end with a few observations on this subject from the workers' point of view.

You must understand that unions in all industries have over the years become quite cynical about management-inspired plans to promote employee participation in the business. We've lived through quality of work life programs, quality circles, quality this and quality that. All of these schemes are based on flattening the hierarchy and giving more say on what happens in the operation to front line workers. In most cases, however, management's ambitious good intentions break down at some point and they speedily revert to their old authoritarian 'command and control' techniques. This has a predictable effect on the workers and I'm sure you can guess what it is.

But if you are really sincere about having your employees participate more fully in making your business a success, here are three common sense guidelines:

First of all, make it clear that you are committed to a long-term program of employee participation and you recognize that it will not always be easy. You assume that any

program will evolve and undergo fine-tuning over time but you will not abandon your commitment, even when the road gets rocky.

Secondly, try not to come to us with suggestions for cooperation at the last moment, after all else has failed to turn around your operation. If it looks like the employer is all of a sudden enlightened and progressive because he is running scared, it is difficult to win the employees' trust.

And finally, above all else, remember that management's main role is one of leadership. This means being as open and honest as possible with employees about the situation in the work place. It also means constant updates and information on anything that may affect their jobs or their public images. I know from personal experience that employees hate getting the latest news from the media. They want to be among the first to know, whenever that's humanly possible, and that includes the bad news too.

In closing, let me reiterate my optimism about the future of the nuclear industry. We have already provided Canada, especially Ontario, with many years of abundant, affordable, reliable electric power, without contributing to global warming. And we can continue to do so for many years to come. Especially if we all, workers and management alike, draw on the best parts of human nature and find ever more ways to cooperate in the pursuit of our common goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you.