AM Advocate Mines **Internal Correspondence**

To: R. E. Sampson - Asbestos Date: July 21, 1975

From: J. G. Cole - Advocate

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Can you tell me what the battle really is against?

Martin Saunders - "The battle is against the principle of people being used."

Many people in this community of Baie Verte on the north coast fear they are being used. They say the health of the men, women, and children in Baie Verte may be in jeopardy because of over exposure to asbestos dust. The main source for Baie Verte is mining. There is one copper mine and an open pit asbestos mine.

The Advocate Asbestos Mine now in operation twelve years, and it takes about that time to develop asbestosis, a crippling deadly disease. Nobody has it, yet.

Asbestos dust could be a lethal poison as shown in Asbestos, Quebec where, now, miners are dying of asbestosis. Advocate is owned by Johns Manville, the same company that left that deadly scar in Quebec. The miners in Baie Verte fear the same thing could happen to them and the Union presented a brief to the Government demanding an immediate inquiry into the dust levels in and around the mine. But among the miners, there are already signs of what could be asbestosis.

Bill Breen - "The 23rd of May I went for my medical and the doctor told me, ah, I told the Doctor I was short breathed, and he said, ah well he said come back again on Wednesday now and have another x-ray. I said ok doctor and I went back on Wednesday, and he said we'll have to give you a few days off, he said, and that's all he said eh. So I ah, went back again Wednesday. Well, he took another x-ray, and he said you'll have to take another week off. So I got a letter, a form from the doctor to take to me foreman, eh, and ah, he told me to come back again next Monday, so I went back again the next Monday and he give me another x-ray and he said, 'you can't go back to work.' He said,'you don't feel well enough.' I said no I don't geel good doctor, I am short breathed. He said, 'How short breathed are ya?' I said I can't even walk up a hill right. He said,'what time will that happen?' Well I said about six months ago I found myself getting short breathed. Well I didn't mind that I said, thought it was smokin. But as I slacked up on smokin, I said, it didn't make no difference with me."

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Dr. John Ross, MUN Medical School - "The disease as it occurs, the asbestos is either well take it from the lungs. First this is probably the most common form of the disease. It's inhaled, the fibres is being relatively insoluble ah, can stay pretty well the lifetime of the individual. They undergo changes, the body tissue attacked the changes and causes fibrosis round about it. Ah, from the fibrosis, this collapses off portions of the lung, and you get the development of something like chronic bronchitis, emphasema, and obstructive lung diseases really the prime condition of asbestosis."

Bill Breen, Advocate employee - "Well, the doctor told me that I had pneumonia and bronchitis. I had the flu that long it turned into pneumonia and it shown up on me lungs, that's what the doctor said."

Do you think you have anything wrong with your lungs because of the dust?

Bill Breen, Advocate employee - "Well I'm not sure of that you know. I mean the doctor didn't tell me that I had anything wrong with me lungs with regard to dust. But I know that I have some stitches in me chest."

Dr. John Ross, MUN Medical School - "It's like all the industrial diseases. It's any disease that cripples a disabled human being and its most unpleasant. What's worse is that it's avoidable condition in the majority of cases, and this is the tradegy of it. It's what it does is totally damaging, unpleasant, and its wasteful because it can be avoided."

Asbestosis is difficult to diagnose in its early stages and when there is enough damage to the lungs to be seen on an x-ray, it's too late.

This x-ray shows asbestosis. To the trained eye, the scars and marks are unquestionable evidence of asbestosis. The same patient 5 years later. Irreparable damage has been done. The red marks have been added to indicate the penetrating deadly coating caused by asbestos fibres. The patient died shortly after but before he died, these scars and marks knawed at his lungs, breathing eventually became impossible. He worked at manufacturing asbestosis, ah insulating. He inhaled asbestos fibres for a few years and here are the lungs, which became cancerous and the patient is now on the threshold of death.

For men working in an asbestos mine, the same thing could happen if the dust levels are too high. There are parts of the Baie Verte mine where the Union feels there are far too many fibres for their health.

Martin Saunders - "Ah, what happens is that the dust is collected up into this ah the thing vibrates, the dust comes down and the, the dust falls down into a bin, the screw, the screw conveyor taken out and sent to tailings. That goes to the tailings dump along with the other undersize ah rock and that you see there and this is sent up the, ah you may have noticed the big mountain there, the big grey mountain. Well that's tailings."

Does the wind take that dust further down the coast?

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Martin Saunders - "Well, when its being shot off the conveyor belt, ah it depends on how the wind is blowing but is is blown for quite some distance depends on how the wind is blowing. If the wind is blowing in the bay you notice like today the wind is blowing in the bay, and it is blowing back towards the mine, ah back towards where the parking lot is there. If it is blowing out the bay,it blows down toward Coachman's Cove and Fleur-de-lys that area. If you go out the bay, you can see it blowin out the bay."

How about the stacks, what's coming out of the stacks?

Martin Saunders - "Well the stacks, ah some people may think its smoke but that's not smoke. There is a certain amount of smoke coming out there, but the, the, ah majority of that is dust. Dust comin out of the crusher. The area I am concerned about, the Union is really concerned about, is the crusher. Ah, the crusher, is ah, the dust is quite high there and we're, we're concerned about that. Ah, we are also concerned about the what's coming out of the stacks. Ah, we're concerned about ah samples where people take samples of dust, of samples of the ore in the Mill like people that work in Quality Control and those places. They have to take samples and we're concerned about the amount of dust those people are into."

Are you satisfied that the Mill is adequately monitored?

Martin Saunders - "The monitoring system, ah, I'm not satisfied with it."

Leo Barry - Minister of Mines & Energy - "The ah standards that are presently applied are much more stringent than the ones that were applied up until last year; and the company is in the process of ah corresponding to new levels that have been imposed by the department. But I'm still not satisfied, satisfied with the existing standards just because, as I say, it's the difference of opinion that exists between different countries and different parts of the world. We have for example at the present time, a standard applied in this province, the same as in other parts of North America, of 5 fibres/milliliter of air. Now when we look to England we find that they have a standard imposed there of 2 fibres/milliliter of air, and what we have to ask is whether our standards are adequate in the light of other standards set in other places in the world."

Did you have any results from your first study?

Leo Barry - Minister of Mines & Energy - "Well, ya we did get results, ya."

Can you tell me what you found under the specific microscopes and that kind of study?

Leo Barry - Minister of Mines & Energy - "Well, let me tell you something. I don't want to give out the number right at the moment because I can't, myself, relate them to anything and communicate what the significance of these are.

Why can't the counts be made public?

Leo Barry - Minister of Mines & Energy - "I think the counts eventually will be made public and what we will do when we have our results recorded we will give them to our minister and get her to release them."

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Is there any indication that the readings were high in any of your studies?

Leo Barry - Minister of Mines & Energy - "No there wasn't."

No readings were too high. That is a lie. One reading done by this kind of machine registered 15.9,more than 7 times an acceptable limit of 2. This reading was found on an island directly in line with the wind from the mine and during both tests, the winds were off shore. One can only assume what happens when it blows from the mine to the community. If such an alarmingly high reading is off shore, then conditions in the mine itself must be hazardous.

I.G. Sherkin - Environment Protection Services - "Well, basically, my reaction to seeing, particularly their milling operation, is that it is a very clean operation. Now, I think it still remains really to be determined whether there's a safe level of the people working in asbestos environment but their milling process does appear clean to me. I would say that we would have some concern over the large tailings pile that they do have and the effect of the wind blowing that around, but they do, are,plan to have some programs to contain that. The open pit mining does not appear to, to my own, to what observations I have been able to make out, hasn't been too much of a problem."

How serious a hazard does this big heap of tailings present to the city, to that area?

..G. Sherkin - E.P.S. - "At the moment, I don't think I am in a position to say. We are attempting to determine by the survey that we are carrying out."

When people come to see the mine with their dignitaries, do they clean up before people go in?

Gus Lewis, Advocate employee - "You would never get in there unless, I say, well I don't know how much. Always if there is somebody coming in, visitors, there's always a big cleanup program. Everybody gets three or four doubles, clean everything up shine, spit and polish, paint, sweep, and then maybe they run her at about say half production, can't run her right up full production because it is too dusty. They get about half way, it gets too dusty and they won't run her at all. So that's the way I see it. If somebody is comin in, it's nice and clean when they get there. But they want to come in without telling anybody around to see what it was like. That's what I'd like to see somebody do."

Leo Barry - Minister of Mines & Energy - "You have to realize that any standard implies a certain amount of capital investment on plant and on equipment to get the standard reduced. In some cases conceivably, this can mean, ah I doubt if it would in Newfoundland, but in some cases it could mean putting a marginal operation out of business. But in any event it means a greater investment by companies and we have to be able to establish ah to the companies that what we are doing is reasonable, and that we're not just imposing standards for the sake of imposing standards."

How expensive a proposition is it for the company, to cater to the demands of the department say having a reading of 2? How expensive is it to enforce that?

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J. G. Sherkin - E.P.S. - "Well, this will depend on whether or not the existing operations are meeting the level 2 fibres per cc which we like to feel will be recommended level advised for a federal guideline. Now, if they don't meet that, and there are other parts of the operation that don't meet that, could involve expenditures into the millions of dollars to achieve what is a safe level."

To make a profit from asbestos and not to kill the miners or nearby families costs dollars. Dollars that would otherwise go back to the company. We tried to film inside the mine and interview the manager but Head Office said "No". They felt the timing was bad. Maybe they had hoped what happened in Asbestos, Quebec will be forgotten. But that's a false hope. The miners are aware and afraid. But maybe it's too late and too much dust has already been inhaled.

Martin Saunders - "First when we came to work there nobody was told of anything, danger of the dust and the guys carried on like they would you know horseplay, and everything else. I ah even did it myself, carried on in the, in the fibre, throwing each other down into it and this type of thing, and had quite a joke out of it. Ah, but today people are, well they are more aware of the dust, the danger of the dust and you don't see too many doing this anymore so as a fact, the environment, the company has quite cleaned up the ah, the inside of the Mill especially, quite alot since that time."

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "And I was interested in Baie Verte because I was going to go up as the Department of Health Physician in change of the Baie Verte Hospital. It was subsequently taken over by the United Church and staffed by them, and I stayed on at the hospital I was. However, I went up to have a look at the community to see where we were going, and this is how I became interested in the place in the first place."

What did you observe from Baie Verte?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Well, when we went up to look at the hospital, ah, the major industry was the asbestos mine, and the greatest interest I had therefore, was ah outside the community in what made the community tick, namely the mine. So, of course, went over to have a look at it and ah, was quite perturbed at what one found. In those days the roads weren't paved, the place was very dusty, but there was dust everywhere, and nearby the mine was quite definite evidence of asbestos, asbestos fibres ah in the trees and in the general surrounding countryside. Now I'd like to emphasize again that this is a hot, dry, dusty day and this is what you would expect but it was a privation of asbestos fibres that one could clearly see."

You actually saw fibre on the leaves?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "One could detect the fibres in the vegetation round about, yes."

What was your medical reaction to that?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Ah, my medical reaction was of concern ah,

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because alot, alot of work on asbestosis had been coming to the floor at that time, and if, as I thought then, that I was going to work up there, I became quite acutely interested in, in what might or could possibly happen to the community and wrote a report, therefore, to the Department of Health."

What did you say in your report?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Ah, I pointed out that there was the new mine developing up there and gave him a visitation on asbestos, asbestosis, and what could occur and stated that I felt that there was a decided hazard and that there would be come government responsibility towards this or should be some government responsibility towards the monitoring of this."

What was the reaction of the Government?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Well the government at that time, was in a state of flux,and there was no reaction to it."

Martin Saunders - "Well, the first ah, inkling that I had about asbestosis was way back in 1963 when I came to work here. The Foundation of Canada was doing the final construction work on the, on the site there, and there was an old guy, a frenchman from Asbestos, Quebec, and he was watching a group of guys bagging A-15, which is a long type fibre Advocate started producing when we started up first, and those guys had no masks on. They were holding up a bag and the chute was putting it down into the bag, and the guy said to me he said 'look ah those guys,' he said, 'they're going to be dead in fifteen years,' he said. 'It's going to kill them.' I said what, what's the problem? He said, 'those guys' he said, 'should be wearing masks' he said. He said, 'that dust is bad' he said, 'real bad' he said. He said, ' I know, I come from Asbestos, Quebec', he said, and ah, so that was the first inkling I had, and then later on sometime in '64 or '65 ah, there was an article that came out in a mail magazine written by a doctor in New York and this doctor apparently described how bad asbestos dust was, and he had quite a right-up on it. Well, first when I read it ah, I went to the supervisor, my supervisor, and I showed it to him, and asked him what did he think of it, and he said'well if you're going to talk about that kind of stuff,'he said,'we'll close the place up'."

Gus Lewis, Advocate Employee - "It's not as bad there now. In the last four or five years we wear masks all the time. Before that nobody used to wear a mask. Very seldom wear one, just contraptions were something they had like a gas mask and you couldn't hardly put it on anyway. But now they have those medical new masks and encourage you to wear them."

How about before though, was there a lot of dust around before you started to wear the mask?

Gus Lewis, Advocate Employee - "Ah, there was alot of dust, yes. You spit it out of your mouth, lots of it. Cough it up and everything went black after you're out of it for a while. A lot of dust."

Gus Lewis has been working in Advocate Mines for 12 years now. He is a sick man and only recently he's found out why. This letter was found in the company dump.

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It was written by the company doctor to the company. It was read, discarded and found by a fellow employee. The letter said Mr. Lewis had increasing thickening and marking on the lungs which are suggestive of developing fibrosis. He has potential or incipient lung disease, and it is recommended that he be moved to an area of minimal dust or fibre content.

Can you tell me how you felt when you found out and read the letter?

Gus Lewis - Advocate Employee - "Well, I didn't mind it so much because I was pretty sure of it for a long time. You see, although I didn't see this letter I knew that I had to be picking up dust after 12 years in it, and I could find it burning here sometimes, still find it now sometimes. I guess it it there all right."

Can you tell me how you feel beside the burning? Do you get tired?

Gus Lewis - Advocate Employee - "Yes, I am not much good to work. I work for about an hour around home, and I have to go and lie down. Sometimes I get dizzy, I don't know what that is, I'm sure. Have to catch hold to something and hold on."

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Asbestosis is a disease that caused by asbestos fibres in the first place, ah both the long and short asbestos fibres. It's a disease caused by ingestion or inhalation of these. It's a disease that takes a variable time to make its effects obvious in varying individuals. That is the incubation period may be anything depending on the individual from 16 to 20 years, or perhaps less in some cases. It's a disease that's dependent on other factors, ah, whether the individual smokes, whether there is metals and other contaminants in the asbestos. It's a disease that is crippling ah in all its forms."

Does it affect other parts of the body besides the lungs?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Yes it affects the elementary tract, the stomach, the intestines, the large bowel, ah in fact any ingestion taking it in either by mouth or into a respiratory tract by lungs will produce asbestosis or mesophyllioma - the two conditions ah very separate mesophylliomas are associated with is a kind of tumor associated with asbestos fibres."

What does it actually do the body?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Ah, in the case of the lung disease, it causes chronic ah lung characters and obstructive lung disease and with other stimulants, can cause cancer. Carcinoma of lung. Ah, by itself can produce mesophyllioma of the lung; of the bowel, the intestinal tract, it can cause mesophyllioma which is very closely allied to cancer."

What happens to a person physically if they have a chronic case of asbestosis?

Dr. John Ross - MUN Medical School - "Ah, chronic broncitis, its the disease of chronic obstructive lung disease which is the diminution of all your physical capacity, ah they get short of breath, wheezie, respiratory difficulties, chronic cough, and generally the misery that is suffered of respiratory crippling."

Mr. Lewis, do you want to leave the mine?

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Gus Lewis, Advocate Employee - "I would like to leave the mine, Jennifer. If I could afford to leave it. But I've got five children. I've also got nice large installments to make to the bank. If I leave the mines something got to go. I could never feed the children. I'm too old to move on to work somewhere else, I'm 56 years old. I could get a Workmen's Allowance if I get a medical discharge but that's too small. I couldn't live on that, without a lot of help from somebody."

How does your wife feel?

Gus Lewis, Advocate Employee - "Oh, she'd like for me to get out, sure. She want like me to get out of the mine. Regardless, she'd say, we'd live somehow. I'm not accustomed to that. I'd like to have whatever is going."

A man has not risked his health for a trade unless he has little choice, and for most of the 550 miners at Advocate, that's the case. Their families and their lives are in Baie Verte. The miners earn an average of $10,000. a year. It's useless if the work also brings asbestosis. It's dirty, hard and noisy work.Then there's always the dust. Most men would probably leave if they could. They know the job and its hazards. They know too much asbestos dust can kill. It can kill them, and it can kill their families.

Q. Do you pick up much dust where you're working?
A. Yes, far, far too much. The tolerance is always above what it should be, by my estimation.

Q. Do you think that you breath in much of that dust?
A. You wouldn't if you had a mask on. It's not too bad with a mask on eh.

Q. Do you wear a mask?
A. Sometimes, not all the time. We should but it's hard to wear, you know.

Q. How much dust around where you work?
A. Oh, there's dust everywhere.

Q. Do you wear a mask?
A. Oh yes most all the time. You have to go out on the floor anywhere, you have to wear your mask, can't get them off at all.

Q. Is there much dust where you're working?
A. Yes, very much.

Q. How old are you now?
A. 18.
Q. Do you plan to stay with the mine for many years?
A. No.

A. It'll soon be serious to fellers that have been here for 10 years. Within another five years I think we'll all be off the job.

EMPLOYEE COMMENTS

Well, any place like an open pit mine like here you got to expect dust.

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When your working, exerting yourself, ah your glasses steam up. Now it is either the matter of removing the masks or removing the glasses, so ah, the Company tells us that in lots of cases, in our case, we're not allowed to remove our glasses.

Whether it's a health hazard or not, well that's something I don't know. Everywhere where there's dust it could be dangerous, even stood up here where the road dust is at, but ah, I guess that's one of the penalties of working.

Martin Saunders - "It makes you wonder sometimes you know that in industry people are being used. They pay a certain amount of money for your labour and tell you to go to work and you work and ah when you get something wrong with you, you're just cast on the side and nobody cares about you."

"It's ah, it's not only in mining, it's ah I think, it is pretty near in all industries. Ah, people work in industries. They don't really know the danger involved in the stuff they're working with and this is what and this is another thing that we ask for in the brief, and the thing that I'm, we're concerned about, and I'd like to see the government really work on it, and that is to set up some kind of a research into industrial diseases to find out exactly what people are working with, what dangers are, are involved with people who are working. You know, I'm, I'm, I don't want to be paid $10 per hour you know, to work in an area where there's dust or where there's anything. And they say, well ok we'll pay you to work there. You know, money to me is not that important. I'd like money as well as anybody else, but I certainly don't want to, I'd rather have my health than have the money, put it that way."

Are you frightened?

Martin Saunders - "I suppose you could call it that, ya."

Mr. Saunders and his fellow miners have reason to be frightened. Asbestosis is a crippling disease. An asbestosis patient has 20 times the normal risk of getting cancer. Well it's not known if the surrounding communities are in danger or how many miners might contract asbestosis. But there are now signs to warrant alarm. Miners are showing mysterious medical signs, a dust reading registered a dangerous 15.9, and there's fibre on the trees, but nobody knows the extent of the harm. Well, there's enough asbestos to keep Advocate Mines going at least some 20 years. When Advocate came to Newfoundland they took the minerals, and they'll leave, but they'll leave a scarred and ugly sight. What they leave in the lungs of the miners who gave their years and possibly their lives is only speculation. But it's wrong to speculate with lives, and it's right to object to the principle of being used.

Jennifer Davis,
CBC News.

J. G. Cole - Advocate