

'AMAX — AGONY IN ASTORIA'

BY MICHAEL SHADBOLT

So now the latest doublethink about LNG comes from Northern Star Natural Gas which is salivating over Bradwood Landing as an LNG site on the Columbia River. The company claimed the right to withhold information about safety risks from the public because it is "confidential commercial, financial and proprietary information exempt from Freedom of Information Act disclosure...and that it not be disclosed to third parties."

That is the same egregious argument used by Calpine LNG to invade the Columbia River in the first place, which the callow (or conniving) Port Commission agreed with, thus denying the rest of us who live along both shores of the lower river the opportunity to say yea or nay to LNG on the Columbia.

This is not the first time the lower Columbia River has been threatened with industrial use. President Richard Nixon declared in 1972 that the mouth of the Columbia would be "the light metals capital of the world," comparable to the heavy metals Ruhr Valley in Germany. Wall to wall aluminum plants were envisioned for both sides of the river. It seemed overpowering — public and corporate officials teamed with rural deaconry and denounced opposition. An outfit named AMAX wanted to be the first built, but its plans and inevitably the entire grand concept was foiled by a piqued and persistent groundswell of grassroots resistance.

The following article by Michael Shadbolt appeared in the North Coast Times Eagle on October 24, 1974. Most of it will probably seem familiar if the public hearing for an aluminum plant thirty years ago is compared with more recent hearings for LNG terminals.

~MPMc

Friday evening and Saturday morning at the AMAX hearing in Astoria probably proved a lot of things. But some things for sure. Opponents of AMAX are many, articulate, persuasive, sometimes lyrical, and not to be intimidated. Proponents of AMAX don't speak up for the plant except for a few highly-placed persons. And, public officials and agencies remain suspiciously absent and silent. But despite the almost one-sided display of logic and concern, after the hearing was over, Kessler Cannon, Director of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, commented that the hearing was "remarkable. Ten years ago you never would have witnessed this. I was a reporter following Mark Hatfield and all you ever heard was jobs, jobs, jobs."

Cannon, his staff and the Environmental Quality Commissioners had just listened to 7 hours of testimony taken in public hearing — testimony which was overwhelmingly in opposition to the plans of AMAX/Mitsui to build an aluminum plant on the shores of Young's Bay. Attendance Friday was estimated at 700, with between 100 and 200 attending the Saturday morning session.

Only a presentation by the AMAX attorney, Peter Keppler, a letter from the Mayor of Astoria, an endorsement by Dean Killon of the AFL-CIO, David Van Dusen of the Astoria Chamber of Commerce, a statement by Port of Astoria manager George Grove, and a vitriolic denunciation of the AMAX opposition by Captain Martin West, Port of Astoria Commissioner (and Commissioner of the Oregon Coastal Conservation & Development Commission) were offered in support of the development. None of the supporting presentations contained any surprises except perhaps for the nastiness of West's speech, the likes of which hasn't been heard since the days of Nixon/Agnew/Erichman/Sinatra at their best. All the proponents argued in favor of jobs and economic development.

The remainder of the time was spent listening to 36 persons argue that at least the plant should be delayed until more information is available if not put off forever.

The two principle arguments put forth were that nobody knows the effect of the fluoride and other emissions on the estuary and biotic community, and that the aluminum plant in consuming over half the power supply of Bonneville Dam is a bad buy. Other objections touched on the necessity of the industry to our coastal lifestyle and economy and some of the unsavory impacts likely to be associated with it.

The witnesses came from every walk of life — young and old, male and female, biologists, oystermen, fishermen, businessmen, high school and college students, newspapermen, attorneys and public officials, blue collar workers, and heads of environmental organizations. Finally at noon Saturday the head of the Environmental Quality Commission, Barney McPhillips, adjourned the hearing over protests that more persons were waiting to be heard. Phillips said that written testimony would be accepted from those unable to speak.

The testimony opposed to AMAX fell into two areas. One was a series of arguments providing legal grounds on which the EQC could turn down the AMAX request for permits. The other was a number of arguments designed to impress upon the commissioners the seriousness of the situation.

Presenting the legal defense were attorneys retained by the Clatsop Environmental Council, George Haugh of Portland and Richard Ayres of the National Environmental Defense Fund based in Washington, D.C. Haugh said that the "CEC thinks there are five grounds on which the discharge permits can and should be denied." 1) The estuarine area should be classified as a specific problem area for sulfur dioxide and fluoride emissions. 2) AMAX has failed and refused to implement the "highest and



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best" treatment and control technology. 3) AMAX would cause a significant deterioration of the air quality and be in direct violation of the Federal Clean Air Act. 4) AMAX has not met the burden of proof, since the AMAX Environmental Impact Assessment has been found to be both "inadequate and erroneous." 5) the AMAX development will require utilization and construction of additional fossil fuel plants.

Ayres questioned whether AMAX would be using the best technology since there will be no control technology for emissions of sulfur dioxide. He said it would be wrong for DEQ to proceed with issuing permits since the federal Environmental Protection Agency is now promulgating standards for Clean Air areas. Apparently, those standards may enable communities to decide whether to be designated as Class 1, Class 2, or Class 3. "If you move quickly," Ayres said, "you will forego the opportunity for the area to make a choice."

Furthermore, Ayres pointed out, there has been no preconstruction monitoring at the AMAX site for one year despite DEQ recommendations to the federal EPA to adopt such a standard.

Terry Durkin, a fisheries biologist, described the great variety of commercial species that spend part or all of their lives in the estuary and the food chain on which they depend. He referred to studies conducted near the Intalco Aluminum Plant in Ferndale, Washington, that show significant water quality deterioration although precise identification of the causative agent is beyond the ability of science. Durkin made it clear, though, that most investigators are confident that fluoride emissions from the Intalco Plant are responsible for sullyng the water and wreaking havoc with the oysters, crustaceans and other aquatic life.

Gary Mart, an Oregon State University graduate student, raised questions about the Cramer Report. This is the diffusion model used by AMAX to argue that the concentrations of fluoride emissions will not have harmful effects.

Botany professor Clarence Gordon of the University of Montana shared his research into the effects of fluoride with the EQC and the audience when he pointed out that even undetectable concentrations of fluoride have "known" lethal effects. He said that toxicity is greatest in damp areas.

He warned that there would be an increase in the acidity of rainfall due to the emissions of hydrofluoric acid.

He explained to Commissioner Ronald Summers the reason why one pine tree dies while another nearby doesn't, is because the dying tree is already under stress. (According to marine biologists, the entire aquatic community is constantly under stress.)

And in response to another Sommers question about the impact on Young's Bay, Gordon said that research on the effects of fluoride on the aquatic food chain was unavailable but he said, "The odds are high for damage. I expect the cycling will be different from what some people expect. I think it will occur around the edges. Fluoride will be absorbed by insects that will transfer it to the fish."

Russ Bristow, member of the Clatsop County Planning Commission and the Citizens' Advisory Committee to OSU (and a commercial gillnet fisherman), asked that no permits be issued until a comprehensive estuary study is completed and the effects of the pollution are known. He also raised questions about the effect of 640,000 gallons of water drawn from the Lewis & Clark River on the minimum stream flow.

A fellow gillnetter, Bill Puustinen, a commercial fisherman of 52 years, told about the broken promises of the Bureau of Reclamation when Grand Coulee Dam was built and a seasonal run of 70 pound Chinook salmon were wiped out. He received loud applause when he pointed out that he didn't think a slab of aluminum in the frying pan would be very tasty.

Many speakers hit on the effects of the power requirements, and at least two, Francis Ivancie, Portland City Commissioner, and Lloyd Marbet, a representative of the Coalition for Safe Power and the Environmental Education Group at Lewis & Clark College, scored the Bonneville Power Administration for misleading and contradictory statements about the impact of the AMAX power commitment.

Other speakers held up fishing gear and wondered whether AMAX would get into the business of manufacturing aluminum gear to catch fish that won't be there; told about experiences in distant waters where bauxite mining had wiped out a prawn fishery and asked, "What kind of closed buttoned-up system (water discharge) is it that will put 608,000 gallons into the air each day through evaporation?" They also read a stirring letter from an Indian chief to President Franklin Pierce commenting on the tragic ways of the white man in his pursuit of wealth. They cautioned that the aluminum plant would radically change our coastal lifestyle, and charged that the AMAX Environmental Impact Assessment was superficial and guilty of premature and self-serving conclusions in describing the fishing industry as no longer "viable." They questioned why the burden of proof for disproving AMAX claims rests with the opponents and confessed remission in not pursuing further possible zoning challenges to the AMAX development.

Other speakers read resolutions putting on record the opposition of their organizations. These included the Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, the Oregon League of Women Voters, the Izzak Walton League, Oregon Environmental Council, the Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition, and the Clatsop Environmental Council and Astoria branch of the American Association of University Women.

Several people drove across the Astoria/Megler bridge to get to the meeting but only one of them got a chance to speak. Dr. Carter of Oysterville said that his people were concerned about AMAX's impact on the oysters of Willapa Bay. He scoffed at the promises made by AMAX and said that the only purpose of a corporation is to make money. "You should be concerned about the way a multi-million dollar corporation can take over a small community," he said.

Had the hearing continued until all speakers had spoken, the audience would have learned that students at both Ilwaco and Warrenton High Schools voted to oppose AMAX in addition to the Astoria High School students and faculty that they heard about Friday night. Further, they would have heard a long-time Clatsop Environmental Council member ask where "the missing 538,230,000 pounds of effluent that we will inherit (annually) will be found — in the air, in the water, in us?" And on and on.

The next step in the unfolding drama as to whether AMAX/Mitsui will be allowed to build an aluminum smelter on the shores of Young's Bay is unclear. Representatives of the principle opposition groups, the Clatsop Environmental Council and NOMAX, appeared optimistic after the two-day meeting, but cautious. The weight of testimony, while much of it may have been "irrelevant and immaterial" given the strict statutory authority of the EQC, was overwhelming. But still the doubts remain.

For instance, the DEQ has not given the impression they are approaching the questions with skepticism. Their recently released "Staff Report" regarding "Proposed AMAX Aluminum Plant, Warrenton, Oregon," implies that permits will be issued and contains an optimistic tone despite serious informational gaps. The procedure for conducting the meeting was blatantly favorable to the few people who offered testimony in support of the plant, coming at first as they did while television cameras from Portland were still whirring. Furthermore, at least one DEQ employee confronted opposition spokesmen in a manner that hardly seemed objective.

What the DEQ will do next and when they will do it is also unclear. Cannon said his staff will sift through testimony and each significant point will be responded to. The "Staff Report" says "it would be the intention of the staff to proceed to draft proposed permits for consideration by the Commission at a later public hearing (probably after the first of the year) after the following issues are further considered and satisfactorily resolved." One of the following (six) issues is the matter of "Receive and evaluate calculations substantiating the claimed minimal effect of fluoride emissions on Young's Bay."

Cannon said that requiring a completed estuary study as a condition for issuing permits to AMAX is a decision that can only be made by the EQC. Despite the fact that Cannon's predecessor, Diarmuid O'Scannlain, called for an estuary study before permits are granted, Cannon said he would go along with requiring a completed estuary study only if "all sides agreed to abide by the results."

Cannon said that commissioners would be watching the results of upcoming elections as an indication of community support for AMAX, but he hedged when asked which races would be watched.

But perhaps the near total absence of public officials and public agencies provided the greatest cause for puzzlement. With the exception of a Cannon Beach City Council member, three persons on municipal and county planning commissions in Clatsop County, a port commissioner and a city commissioner from Portland, no other public officials came forward. Official representatives of affected federal and state agencies were not officially present.

Oregon is a state that has gained a reputation for clean politics with considerable citizen participation. The part about citizen participation was not damaged by the weekend's events. On the other hand, the part about clean politics may have suffered a setback over the weekend. If the DEQ routinely supplies answers to the many questions and issues permits with no more vigilance than it showed at the hearing, the scent of scandal will rise. It would be ironic in the DEQ were responsible for this stench.

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