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TMI aftermath leaves questions unanswered

By DAN READ

Two years ago, in the early morning hours of March 28, 1979, water pumps in the reactor building of Unit 2 of the Three Mile Island nuclear plant stopped working. In the harrowing days that followed, the problem of nuclear safety came vividly into the public eye for the first time.

Metropolitan Edison, owner and operator of the plant, made crucial mistakes in handling the accident and consistently downplayed its seriousness. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), the federal agency responsible for regulating the nuclear industry, had no real plan for dealing with such an accident or for monitoring its progress, and did not become fully involved for several days. The State of Pennsylvania had no workable emergency evacuation plan. A nuclear accident was considered too improbable to plan for.

At Large

Two years after the accident, what effect has TMI had on government and industry? Unfortunately, the solutions to the problems mentioned above and others have not been aggressively pursued.

The president's Nuclear Safety Oversight Committee (NSOC), formed after TMI, recently reported that the NRC was merely conducting "business as usual," an ambivalent game of promoting atomic energy and trying to regulate it at the same time. Ironically, this promotional bent resulted in TMI Unit 2 being allowed to go on line without a final operating license — some safety issues are still pending in federal court! The NSOC commented that many safety issues generic to the industry still have to be satisfactorily resolved.

Anti-nuclear activist Judy Jonsrud, who recently spoke at the Energy Symposium at UNC about her years of experience dealing with the NRC, stated that TMI, instead of making the NRC more responsive to public misgivings, actually caused it to become more secretive and

obstructive. The recent reappointment of Joseph Hendrie, who was removed in the wake of the accident as chairman of the NRC, seems to confirm this hypothesis.

The issue of how to safely dispose of radioactive waste remains unsettled. There is no known way to safely dispose of spent fuel permanently. Some of it, like plutonium, remains highly dangerous for thousands of years.

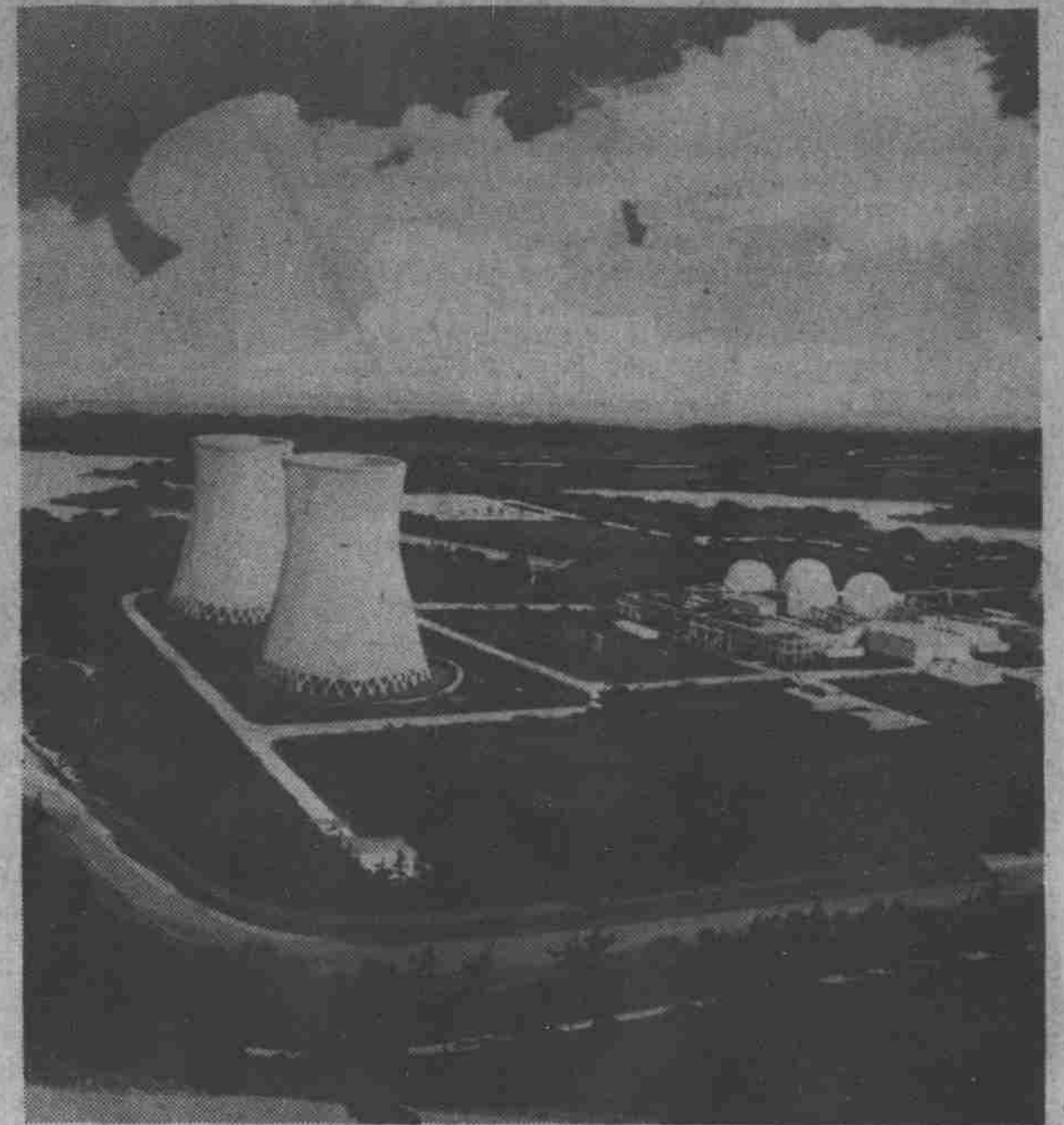
The nation's utilities, despite their large financial commitment to nuclear energy, are wavering: no new plants have been ordered since the accident at TMI, and one executive recently predicted that there would not be another plant ordered within his lifetime. Without some \$40 billion in direct and indirect government subsidies over the past 30 years, no utility could have profitably engaged in nuclear power.

Because new safety regulations since TMI have increased the cost of nuclear power, the utilities have a greater financial incentive to cut corners. A survey of workers at Ohio's Zimmer plant showed there few willing to live near the plant; a Duke engineer testified at a recent hearing in Charlotte that his superiors had tried to suppress and edit his report on faulty welding at the new McGuire plant here in North Carolina.

Public confidence remains low, a fact that is reflected in the difficulty utilities are having in attracting investment capital. Cost overruns and delays are endemic in the industry, and investors are increasingly unwilling to channel money into what they see as a risky venture. Some states, like North Carolina, have partially compensated for this by allowing construction work in progress to be included in monthly bills.

In the recent elections, nuclear issues were on the ballot in several states. Washington and Montana voted to bar importation of radioactive wastes; in Maine 40 percent voted to shut down the Maine Yankee plant, although it supplies half the state's electricity and no alternative sources were immediately available, and despite a 10-to-1 advertising spending margin in favor of the pro-nuclear forces.

Finally, the accident at TMI and the energy crunch in general have combined to cast doubt on whether nuclear energy is really needed in this country. A dollar



Shearon Harris nuclear plant under construction ... questions were raised after Three Mile Island

spent on conservation — insulation, weatherstripping, etc. — brings immediate energy savings at a much higher rate than the same dollar that would buy new nuclear generating capacity, which often takes 10 years to build. European countries with less favorable climates, like Sweden and Germany, enjoy similar standards of living while using only 60 percent as much energy — the potential for conservation is enormous in this country. In addition, alternative sources of energy, like solar power, wind power, industrial co-generation and geothermal energy, have barely been explored.

Unfortunately, it appears that the lessons

of TMI have largely gone unheeded. The Reagan administration apparently favors nuclear power, despite the unresolved safety questions, despite the economic problems involved, despite the fact that the alternatives have not been given the same chance to benefit from massive government support (many alternative energy programs have been eliminated from the budget). Hopefully, it will not take a "worst-case" accident, with catastrophic results worse than those of TMI, to finally bring those lessons home to politicians and the public alike.

Dan Read is a first-year law student from Chapel Hill.

Power play

President Ronald Reagan's struggle with Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig over foreign policy management casts doubt on a new administration that has tried to project an image of toughness and firm new direction.

Although Reagan is trying to downplay the conflict within his senior staff by calling press reports fabrications, members of the White House inner circle have made it clear in the past few days that there is a clear power struggle.

Haig, who reportedly has threatened to resign and "go back to Connecticut" about 10 times since Reagan took office, has voiced his displeasure that Vice President George Bush was chosen to head the crisis management committee.

There seems to be a popular sentiment in Washington that Haig has overstepped his bounds and is being checked for it by Reagan's recent move. The problem, as one White House aide so succinctly put it, is that "Haig thinks he's president."

It is certainly admirable that Reagan would attempt to restrain someone who had overstepped his power, but the president should have made Haig's role clear at the beginning of his tenure. And if he did not do so then, he most certainly should do so now in plain words instead of cryptic maneuvers.

There have been many conflicts between national security advisers and secretaries of state in the past — Vance and Brzezinski, Kissinger and Rogers — but the problem in the Reagan administration is potentially worse because of the involvement of yet a third party — the vice president.

By appointing Bush to head the crisis management committee, Reagan has redefined the role of the vice president. Now the president owes a clear explanation and job description to each member of his senior staff.

Haig is justified in seeking an explanation, but should not be so brusque, disgruntled and outspoken when he fails to get his own way.

If Reagan is attempting to cut Haig down to size, the president at least owes the Secretary and his senior staff his idea of what that size should be and the powers that each person should have.

Where's the fence?

Sen. Jesse Helms once said that the only solution for Chapel Hill was to put a chain link fence around it. He was referring, of course, to the fact that UNC had more commies, gays, civil-rights activists and other subversive elements than the rest of North Carolina combined.

Well, Jesse need fear no more. A recent poll indicates that UNC freshmen are continuing the steady trend toward the right of the past decade. Just under a fifth felt they were "liberals," compared to 35 percent a decade ago, while one fourth labeled themselves as "conservative."

The survey also marked the certain demise of college students' past preoccupation with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Although no specific reference was made to musical tastes, the disco-beach pop emanating from the likes of Jaspers is a far cry from the decadent beat of the 1960s. Meanwhile, only 38 percent of the sampled freshmen approved of premarital sex, a number well below the national average.

How is one to interpret this conservative shift? Could it be a passing fad, a youthful naivete soon to be discarded in a campus filled with hard-core partiers and English majors? Perhaps not. The survey also indicated the existence of a well-established conservative philosophy: Two-thirds of UNC freshmen feel criminals have too many rights while almost half would prohibit homosexual relations. Maybe when they graduate these same people can help Jesse lock us all up for good.

It is difficult to speculate on the future of Chapel Hill's traditional radicalism or the new conservative swing. Whether this year's freshmen will hold fast to their values or succumb to subversive influences such as the DTH is anyone's bet.

Drivers may get relief from insurance rates

By JIM HUMMEL

Drivers with good records who are tired of paying surcharges on their insurance should get some relief from auto insurance rates this spring if the General Assembly approves a bill that was submitted recently by a state legislator.

Under legislation established in 1973, approximately 25 percent of the state's drivers are assigned to the N.C. Reinsurance Facility, a pool set up for the state's insurance companies to share losses on "risky" drivers. The key problem with the law is that there are no specific criteria for assignment to the pool.

"There are certain categories (for assignment), but it varies from (insurance) company to company," said Bill Hale, committee counsel for the House and Senate Insurance Committees. "Among the considerations are occupation, age, marital status, hours that you work, and the kind of car you drive."

Because liability insurance is mandatory for every North Carolina driver, the Reinsurance Facility was set up for drivers who could not get coverage otherwise.

Of the 3.5 million vehicles in North Carolina, approximately 800,000 have been assigned to the pool. The controversy over who is assigned and how much they have to pay is the focus of a bill by Rep. Richard Barnes, D-Forsyth, that is gaining widespread support.

More than half of the people assigned to the facility

have no points on their records; points are levied for violations such as drunk driving, speeding or fault in an accident. Barnes' bill would shift surcharges — now levied on all 800,000 drivers — to only those drivers with points on their record.

Proponents of the legislation are correct in claiming that the bill is a fair way of charging the state's poor risk drivers.

"The people of North Carolina are angry at having to pay unfair surcharges," Insurance Commissioner John Ingram said at a news conference Thursday. "Rep. Barnes' bill is gaining the support of many state leaders, but without this support the bill will not be passed."

The State

Gov. Jim Hunt, Lt. Gov. Jimmy Green and Speaker of the House Liston Ramsey have all advocated the principle of the bill because they say it judges how much a driver pays by his performance behind the wheel.

The bill should go a long way toward a more equal distribution of surcharges, despite industry claims that the legislation would be unfair. An industry spokesman, appearing before the General Assembly this week, said he opposed the Barnes bill because many drivers with points are good risks while some drivers without points are bad risks.

"What is unfortunate is that about 80 percent of the reinsured risks have clean driving records," Ingram

responded. "They have been placed in the insurance facility arbitrarily." Ingram has been the center of controversy since he took over as commissioner in 1974 and many of his disputes with the industry have wound up in court.

Hunt, Ingram and Attorney General Rufus Edmisten consistently have fought industry surcharges that can be instituted over the commissioner's veto. But in his seven years as commissioner, Ingram has lost nine out of 10 cases that have attempted to keep the insurance companies from implementing surcharges.

Ingram claims that the surcharges are actually rate increases, and therefore fall under the commissioner's review. But three weeks ago the N.C. Supreme Court decided that the surcharges were not rates, which means the industry can charge the extra fee, subject to court review.

The Supreme Court decision may have one positive effect in that many General Assembly members realize it is time to take a careful look at the state's insurance laws, which in most cases are vague and confusing.

In the meantime Barnes and his staff are lobbying hard for passage of his bill. If adopted, the legislation will be the first step towards correcting inequities in the state's insurance laws. As one consumer advocate testified this week, "the present system is wrong because people have to pay surcharges even if they haven't done anything wrong. Companies should apply surcharges only when a driver causes an accident, not before."

Jim Hummel, a junior journalism and political science major from Grafton, Mass., is editor of The Daily Tar Heel.

Criminal justice

Professor has seen what system does to prisoners

By PAM KELLEY

The chairman of UNC's Criminal Justice Department is a nationally known expert in penology, but V. Lee Bounds refuses to teach courses on the subject. He said his strong views about the prison system would make it impossible for him to teach objectively.

"Prisons are not to me a concept," said Bounds, who saw the realities of prisons firsthand as the head of North Carolina's penal system from 1965-73. The 63-year-old Kenan professor has been away from North Carolina's prison system for eight years now, but he still clearly remembers its violence and atrocities.

"I think of things like finding a prisoner who had been of help to me on a bed in a hospital after his guts had been put back in. They'd been cut out by other prisoners who had found out he furnished information to me."

"Or I remember seeing a 19-year-old dead on the side of a road on a late April day. The sun was shining on his face, and there was a fly on his lip. He'd been shot because he had made a bolt — either for freedom or from custody. I never knew if it was the second reason, if he was willing to take the risk because he feared the dangers of staying in prison more than the danger of the guard shooting him."

Bounds said when he took control of the state's penal system, it was equipped neither to protect the public from inmates nor to protect inmates from each other. "As long as I knew the conditions of the prisons, I believed we were justified in minimizing the use of them," he said.

Bounds believes offenders must be diagnosed and given individualized treatments and sentences. He believes they must gradually be put back into society as they become willing and able to live within the law. He believes the

goal of a penal system is rehabilitation.

Bounds worked in the 1950s and 1960s to initiate reforms and programs that would aid rehabilitation of the state's prisoners. At the same time he took steps to tighten prison security and see that inmates responsible for prison violence and racketeering were controlled. "The least confining environment acceptable (for offenders) is what we should seek. We should never use within the prison system more control than that which is essential," he said. "But when prisoners need maximum control, we should have it available."

Bounds' attempts to implement his philosophies as head of the prison system were met with strong praise as well as strong criticism by North Carolinians. Most people would agree, however, that his work left an indelible mark on the state's penal system.

For example, North Carolina's work release program, which allows inmates to hold jobs outside their prison units, was designed by Bounds. Prisoners who prove themselves responsible enough to hold a job, use part of their earnings to pay the state room and board and also may accumulate savings to use after their release.

Similarly, Bounds created a program in which prisoners attend schools outside the prison during the day and return at night. Inmates attend this campus today through that program.

He also was responsible for instituting a weekend leave in the prison system which allowed prisoners to visit their spouses and families.

These programs were designed to lessen the impact of the change from complete incarceration to parole and discharge. Bounds said. By allowing an individual back into society gradually, he is more likely to adapt to it. The programs were first in the nation and not only earned Bounds his reputation as a national penology expert, but also provided models which were copied by the federal government and other states.

Less publicized prison reforms such as ending censoring of prisoners' mail and allowing the press access to all prisoners except those on death row also were instituted during Bounds' administration.

And his ideas did not stop with the programs that were actually initiated in the state. In 1966, he announced that he eventually wanted to do away with locks and keys in all state prisons except maximum security units and to expand the work release program to include about 9,000 of the state's then 10,000 prisoners.

Locally

Some people saw Bounds' methods as coddling criminals. "There was a large segment of the citizenry of North Carolina who thought this egghead from Chapel Hill was destroying the fabric of society," he said. But he had his supporters, too. A 1966 Raleigh News and Observer editorial stated "Mr. Bounds should be given the chance to make his ambitious vision a reality."

The citizenry never had the opportunity to see the outcome of Bounds' vision. In 1973, newly elected Republican Gov. James Houser Jr. appointed David Jones, a Republican who had been a Fayetteville television and appliance merchant, as the secretary of social rehabilitation and control, a post overseeing Bounds' position. Bounds soon complained that Jones was arriving at decisions on the basis of politics instead of good corrections policy and in July 1973 he resigned from his post. His problems with Jones were not so much because of differences in philosophy, he said then, but rather his suspicion that Jones had no philosophy at all.

Since then Bounds has occupied his time teaching at UNC. He still fits the description of "a slender, energetic college professor" given to him in a 1966 newspaper article. He

believes North Carolina's prisons are now following recent national trends away from individualized treatment and sentencing. "I see a return to the notion that everything should be predetermined, an increased emphasis on the belief of making more use of imprisonment, a decreased emphasis on probation, parole, work release and study release," he said.

Bounds dislikes the recent trends. "I know (individualized treatment) is very difficult to administer appropriately. The only way to do it is with very competent people. But I know personally that people benefitted from it. I saw it."

"No one can persuade me that what is appropriate for a rapist is appropriate for a bid rigger. That's manifestly so crude, so detached from the reality that the problem represents."

He also emphasized that North Carolina's penal system needs to work to change society's attitude toward convicts if rehabilitation programs are to work. "If the only place (a convict) can get acceptance is the place where he was subject to the same environmental pressures that got him into trouble, he's not going to be able to handle it for very long," Bounds said.

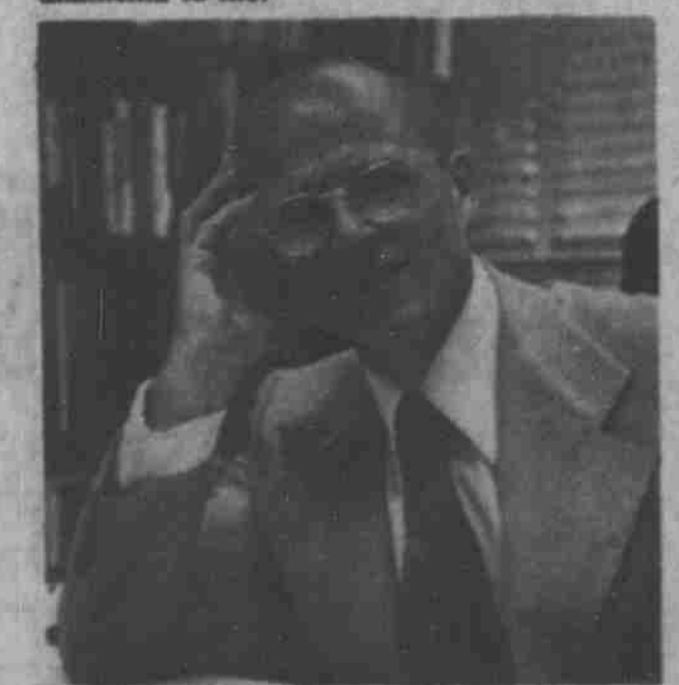
Decentralization of the prison system coupled with more community interaction with inmates is the key to changing attitudes, and though the large number of North Carolina prisons spread across the state make the goal attainable, no one is trying to reach it, Bounds said.

He also speculated that the Department of Transportation's difficulties with the depleted N.C. Highway Fund may prompt the DOT to look into using prison labor to save state road construction costs. Prison road crews had been used by the state since the 1930s, but at Bounds' urging the practice was ended entirely in 1973.

The rationale of the department for using prison labor would be that taxpayers' burdens would be lessened. Bounds said he doesn't see it

that way. He said the highway prison labor would not bring in as much money to the state as the work release program does, and it also would not recognize that an inmate's labor has value. If the plan were to be implemented as it was in the past, prisoners would receive no monetary compensation for their work.

Bounds was quick to point out that his criticisms and speculations are based only on what he hears and reads in the media. He said he has tried to divorce himself from the prison system completely because "it was such anathema to me."



V. Lee Bounds

But in spite of the professor's efforts to put the problems of prison administration behind him, allusions to his strong beliefs still occasionally creep into his class lectures. "When a criminal case could be decided either way, I usually come down on the side of the defendant," he told his criminal law class recently. "I've seen what prison does to a person."

Pam Kelley is a senior journalism major from Hamilton, Ohio.