

## ... Higher Safety Standards Opposed as Costly by Nuclear Industry Spokesmen

tribution in whole populations. The IRPC figure of one-thirtieth for somatic and one-hundred for genetic hazards would go a long way toward protecting against the uneven distribution of radioactive poison uncovered by the Swedish study of radiostrontium in the bone.

But the adoption of these MPC's for general populations would create problems at once for the military and for industry. If the population safety standard is to be one-thirtieth or one-hundredth respectively of the occupational MPC instead of one-tenth, then milk and water supplies in certain parts of the country will turn out to be uncomfortably close to the danger limits, perhaps even above them in some localities. This will add to pressure against further testing. From an industrial point of view, the adoption of the recommended population MPC's would be expensive. These, like all industrial safety regulations, add to costs. In nuclear industry they mean more shielding, medical supervision, finer filter and purification methods, higher insurance costs, more waste disposal expense and workmen's compensation problems.

### Like Self-Regulated Industries

The National Committee on Radiation Protection, which recommends the basic safety standards for the growing nucleonics industry (as of last November 30, there were 1,463 industrial concerns licensed by the AEC to handle radioactive materials, an increase of 23 percent in one year), resembles the self-regulatory industry committees set up during the war.

### Does Secrecy Cloak A Worse Danger Than SR 90?

A tantalizing reference in a newly published scientific article seems to indicate that military censorship is hiding from the public a radioactive bomb debris danger greater than strontium 90. The article is "Strontium 90 Fallout in Minnesota" by Dr. W. O. Caster, Department of Physiological Chemistry, University of Minnesota. It has just appeared in the March-April issue of the *Minnesota Chemist*.

In discussing the radioactive debris of a nuclear explosion, Dr. Caster writes, "Biochemically we know very little about most of these elements. . . . Biologically the most dangerous among these may well be the unexpended fuel elements, U [Uranium] and P [Plutonium]. Detailed information on these is lacking—PERHAPS BECAUSE IT RELATES DIRECTLY TO BOMB EFFICIENCIES [emphasis added]. Next comes SR90."

This suggests that data on unexpended uranium and plutonium in bomb debris is withheld because it would provide intelligence on the efficiency of the bomb exploded.

It is heavily weighted with representatives of nuclear industry, of the military agencies and of scientific agencies which work closely with them. Labor is not represented, though several hundred thousand workers are now employed in nuclear plants and they and their families have a life-and-death interest in safety standards.

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### Full Text of the AFL-CIO Protest Against the New Strontium Safety Limits

On April 24 the following letter of protest was sent by Benjamin C. Sigal, chairman of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Dept. Atomic Energy Technical Committee to Senator Clinton P. Anderson, chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. Since it was ignored by most of the press, we give the full text here:

"On April 23, 1959, a report was issued by the National Committee for Radiation Protection setting forth its latest revisions of the maximum permissible concentrations of radioactive materials in the human body and in air and water.

"These revisions gravely disturb us. They raise basic questions not only of scientific method, but of governmental procedure as well. While the NCRP has no governmental or official status, its recommendations are relied upon by government agencies as well as private organizations. You will recall that a short time ago questions were raised in testimony before you regarding the procedures followed by NCRP, and the validity of the standards they have set. The latest action of NCRP again brings this problem to the fore.

"The recommendations of the NCRP purport to be based on a 5-year study. The inference certainly is that sufficient information has been collected to warrant reliable scientific conclusions necessitating the revision of the previous standards. The fact of the matter appears to be, however, that the Committee does not have adequate information on which to base its conclusions. Its own statement declares:

"When we can measure more accurately the body burden of radioisotopes in the various body organs, we will have advanced further towards a practical solution of the problem."

"This appears to us to be a confession that criteria and knowledge do not now exist by which reliable maximum permissible concentrations in the human body can be set. Under these circumstances it appears to be a highly dangerous business to double the limits for occupational exposure.

We are constrained to suspect that issuance of these revisions at this time, following wide public concern over the extent and speed of radioactive fallout, is not a mere coincidence. If our suspicions are justified, the procedures of this Committee, to say the least, are open to question.

"In the past, the method of calculating the maximum permissible limit for each radioisotope was described by Dr. [K. Z.] Morgan as follows:

"For the most part these values are based on the assumption that the permissible amount of a radioisotope in the body is one which will result in the accumulation of the radioisotope in the critical body organ, such that the critical organ will be exposed at a rate of .3 rems per week."

"In 1957, the permissible exposure rate was reduced to .1 rem per week. If the Committee were consistent, it should then have recalculated the permissible level of concentration based on that reduced exposure standard. They failed to do this.

"The release of the Committee fails to state, except in the most general terms, the nature of the information on which it has based its revisions. It is our understanding that this information is not now available to the scientific community.

"In the light of the extreme importance of this whole problem, we urge the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy to make a thorough investigation, at the earliest possible moment, into the methods by which the NCRP arrived at its conclusions. We urge the committee to demand that Dr. Lauriston Taylor present to your committee for publication the information upon which the NCRP revisions were made. We also urge your committee to examine the problem of whether or not the NCRP, a private organization, should provide the standards by which government agencies determine the possible limits of radiation exposure. In our view it is imperative that such a group should be under governmental direction."

## Strauss, at Commerce as in AEC, Master of Misleading Press Releases

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### The Key Scientist Regulator

The key scientific figure in the regulatory picture is Dr. Lauriston S. Taylor. He is chairman of both the International Commission on Radiological Protection, which recommends world safety standards, and the National Committee on Radiation Protection, which recommends the way they shall be applied at home. Dr. Taylor is chief of the Atomic and Radiation Physics Division of the National Bureau of Standards, which is in turn part of the Department of Commerce, always a business-oriented part of the government. The Bureau of Standards publishes the safety handbook embodying the NCRP's recommendations. Since Admiral Lewis L. Strauss, formerly head of the AEC, is now Secretary of Commerce, awaiting final Senate confirmation, he is a commanding figure in this sector of the nuclear policy field, and Dr. Taylor's superior officer. The way the latest safety release was handled bears the familiar earmarks of the Admiral's press relations skill at the AEC. On the eve of the Joint Committee hearings, without scientific explanation, two months in advance of publication of the new handbook, the release was handled in such a way as to create quite false public impressions of the fallout danger.

Dr. Taylor himself has the nuclear industry point of view when it comes to safety problems. As chairman of the International Commission, he has been fighting a rear guard action against the promulgation of population MPC's and against the recent reduction of the general exposure level for radiation workers from 15 rems to 5 rems per year. On September 9, 1957, he told a Unesco conference in Paris that this reduction (which has since been put into effect) "could be very costly and could seriously retard the atomic energy industry." Last February 3, Dr. Taylor told the nuclear waste disposal hearings held by the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy that he saw "no serious risk" in suspending the application of the population maximums proposed by the IPRC last September 9. Of the proposed new safety standards, Dr. Taylor said "There is a very real danger if one keeps going down and down [i.e. lowering the permissible levels of exposure] that you will price us out of the adequate use of this new and

### The Men Who Set the New Standards Dominated by the AEC Crowd

The NCRP Subcommittee on Permissible Internal Dose which set the new safety standards for strontium 90 and other radioisotopes is made up of ten scientists. Four are AEC employees—K. Z. Morgan, the chairman, Oak Ridge; J. W. Healy, Hanford; L. D. Marinelli, and A. M. Brues, Argonne. Two others are well known for sharing the AEC point of view on testing and fallout: Lauriston S. Taylor of the National Bureau of Standards and Shields Warren of the New England Deaconess Hospital. The other four (we would appreciate hearing from any readers who know their basic point of view) are P. Durbin, Univ. of Calif.; G. Failla, Columbia; J. B. Hursh, Univ. of Rochester; and W. S. Snyder, Univ. of Tenn.

very valuable tool." Dr. Taylor said he was fully in accord with another witness, the chief sanitary engineer of the Illinois Dept. of Public Health, who had testified on the importance of a "common sense" approach to radiation dangers in waste disposal lest the atomic energy business be "economically purified out of business."

Dr. Taylor, judging from his past speeches, seems to conceive his task as in part the job of protecting atomic industry from public pressure for greater safety precautions. This attitude seems to extend to the point of withholding vital information from the press. Dr. Taylor has given reporters the impression that the ICPR report was an almost secret document—"it won't be available here until June or July"—although it was reviewed in the *London Times* of April 17 and 1,000 copies consigned to the New York office of Pergamon Press, the publisher, were being help up in the New York customs office as we went to press. Fortunately, despite Dr. Taylor, we obtained a copy from London and learned what seems to be the most important item of information withheld—that the ICPR had recommended a population MPC for such poisons as SR90 at one-thirtieth of the occupational MPC. We hope the Joint Committee will ask Dr. Taylor why this fact was not included in the Commerce Department press release which gave rise to that *New York Times* headline, "Panel Downgrades Strontium 90 Peril."

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