By Leona Morgan

July 16th is a day of infamy for New Mexico, as it is the anniversary of the world’s largest uranium spill near Churchrock in 1979, and of the Trinity test, the first atomic weapon detonation in 1945.

Hibakusha & Internationals Commemorate July 16

In 2016, organizers in uranium-impacted communities have called for an international day of action every July 16, to spotlight the unaddressed consequences of the Churchrock Spill and the ongoing global genocide of indigenous peoples from nuclear colonialism. The first to respond were organizers [Nakewatch and Nonviolent Action for Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, Germany] protesting the deployment of US weapons at the German military base in Bückel in 2017. In 2018, solidarity events took place in the US, Germany, Spain, England, and France. This year, the local group Red Water Pond Road Community Association held its 11th annual day of remembrance of Churchrock. More than 200 folks attended from as far away as Japan.

The Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium (TBDC) hosted a town hall meeting and its 10th annual candlelight vigil to remember the lives lost due to the Trinity Test. Participants called out the names of all those lost to cancer, and read statements of support from Congressional offices and allies. Tina Cordova of TBDC reported that they “called out around 900 names. The list grows every year. We also held a tribute in memory of all the children that were lost as a result of the Trinity Test or were still-born. This is such a horrible legacy! Children died and the government still lied.”

Toshiya Morita, a second generation Hibakusha (people affected by the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), traveled from Kyoto, Japan to take part in both the Churchrock and Tularosa events. Morita recalls, “When I went to New Mexico I saw a lot of Hibakusha. Most of them are

Nuclear Governance in Canada: A Corporate Coup?

By Gordon Edwards

In November 2018, Canada’s Ministry of Natural Resources (NRCan) released a “Road Map” signaling its support for a group of multinational corporations, headed by SNC-Lavalin Corporation, to “green field” status, and defies warnings against reprocessing and waste dumping. [SNC-Lavalin is a $10 billion engineering, mining and nuclear conglomerate based in Montreal.]

There are no customers yet for these “Small Modular Nuclear Reactors” (SMRs), and the Union of Ontario Indians opposes them altogether. But NRCan wants them installed widely, mainly in uranium-impacted indigenous communities called for an international day of action every July 16, to spotlight the unaddressed consequences of the Churchrock Spill and the ongoing global genocide of indigenous peoples from nuclear colonialism. The first to respond were organizers [Nakewatch and Nonviolent Action for Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, Germany] protesting the deployment of US weapons at the German military base in Bückel in 2017. In 2018, solidarity events took place in the US, Germany, Spain, England, and France. This year, the local group Red Water Pond Road Community Association held its 11th annual day of remembrance of Churchrock. More than 200 folks attended from as far away as Japan.

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There are no customers yet for these “Small Modular Nuclear Reactors” (SMRs), and the Union of Ontario Indians opposes them altogether. But NRCan wants them installed widely, mainly in the north, to accelerate resource extraction ... and to replace diesel in isolated settlements including indigenous communities. This is the brainchild of SNC-Lavalin and its partners, Fluor, Inc. and Jacobs Corp.

In 2015, Canada’s government under Joseph Harper put the consortium of the three corporations in charge of federally-owned nuclear facilities and Canada’s $8 billion radioactive waste liability. Billions of tax dollars have been poured into the operatons of the consortium three times over, with no discernable progress. Projects for new reactors have ruined giant companies like Areva and Westinghouse. Nuclear energy’s share of global electricity production has plummeted from 17% in 1997 to 10% today. The “Nuclear Renaissance,” ballyhooned since 2001, is a flop.

How to keep the industry afloat? Maybe try manufacturing smaller reactors? But small reactors are more expensive per unit of energy; one has to sell hundreds or thousands of them to break even. Mass-production may partly overcome bad economics—but this brings its own difficulties. There are over 150 different designs for SMRs, each utilizing different fuels, different coolants, different moderators. The chance that any one design will corner the market and secure the sales volume needed to turn a profit is almost nil.

In July 2019, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commis-sions invited public comments on the first of several regulatory applications for SMRs to be built at Chalk River—a high-temperature gas-cooled molten salt reactor with a graphite moderator, and pebble-like enriched fuel.

The age of nuclear power is winding down, but the age of nuclear waste is just beginning. Public consultations with First Nations and other Canadians are needed to formulate policies regarding the characterization, segregation, packaging, labelling, transport and long-term management of radioactive wastes. Meanwhile, CNL’s plans and SMRs should be put on hold, and the consortium’s contract should be cancelled.

— Gordon Edwards, PhD, is a Canadian scientist, nuclear consultant, and co-founder of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility.