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SUDBURY SOIL STUDY

LOUIS ETIENNE VIGNEAULT : The Sudbury Soil Study committee is continuing its work. The public was invited to participate in a meeting last night at Cambrian College, to know more about this. But there were more questions about politics than the environment. Rachel Desaulnier, CBON reporter was present and she has been following the issue for some time now. Good day, Rachel.

RACHEL DESAULNIER: Hello, Louis Etienne.

VIGNEAULT : First of all why is it that this Sudbury Soil Study Committee believed it was a good reason to come back with main questions of procedures?

DESAULNIER: Well, from now on, there is worry of transparency. A controversy was underlined by the unions, here that feel a bit excluded out of the process. I will explain to you, Louis Etienne, who was at the meeting yesterday. It was a public meeting. Residents were allowed to be present. The Citizens Committee was present, six members of that committee were present, and the Technical Committee, or the advisory committee. But in this case, the Technical Committee which is made up of representatives from the Health Centre of Sudbury, one representative from the municipality of Greater City of Sudbury, a person from Ontario Ministry of Environment, Federal Ministry of Health, and the two mining companies, INCO and Falconbridge. In this process, the Technical Committee makes the decisions.

VIGNEAULT: So, Rachel, the presence of the two mining companies as participants, seems to have upset some people yesterday.

DESAULNIER: There had been an open door session at Science North, at the beginning of summer, where the labour representatives had launched this question of being worried, over the transparency. Yesterday, a long time union member, Mr. Omer Seguin, gave a letter to the Citizens' Committee, a letter he had sent to Premier Eves, asking for the two companies to be removed from the decision process. Mr. Seguin used the comparison of INCO and Falconbridge at the negotiating table, is like Dracula at a blood bank. The two companies are both judge and accused. So, the unions say there is a conflict of interest, a possible abuse of power, and this letter is signed by the union representatives, the Steelworkers, the two companies that deal with INCO and Falconbridge.

VIGNEAULT: And yesterday, the lawyer who represents a citizens' committee in Port Colborne, was present. Port Colborne residents filed lawsuit against INCO, over soil being contaminated. Why was the lawyer present at the meeting, yesterday?

DESAULNIER: Well, Eric Gilletby (sp) was there, to share his services and to make sure the process is transparent, so the residents do not do the same errors as in Port Colborne's case.

VIGNEAULT: And you talked of the role and the mandate of the Sudbury Soil Study Committee with the president of the Citizens' Committee?

DESAULNIER: If you don't mind, we'll listen to Yvan Filion, he reminds us of the responsibilities of the two groups, and the way they communicate.

YVAN FILION: There must be a liaison between science and the public and the community, so it can be done in an efficient manner. There must be ways to ensure that the communication is precise and clear. Our role is not necessarily to survey science. There are other ways to do this. What we do is we ensure that the communications that will evolve from the scientific studies will be then presented to the public in a clear and precise manner, so that the public can form its own opinion, in regards to the information, and then react according to their needs.

DESAULNIER: Tell me, who is the Technical committee, some of its members?

FILION: Members of this committee, have been working together for a long time to study soils in Sudbury. There is the Ministry of Environment, two big mining companies, INCO and Falconbridge, Ministry of Health, Sudbury Health Unit, and also the city of Sudbury. These people have been studying the soils for a long time, also with Laurentian University. Often the university will use students to do soil analysis. So, it's not really a group that was formed suddenly, but this committee was formed a long time ago. So, at this time, now that we looked and studied the results of some samples, we now go to the next question, being, now that we know a bit what the toxic levels are, what does this mean, when it comes to our health and the environment? So, I think it's an evolution of a process that goes back 10 to 20 years, and we now think it should be these partners working together for 20 years, to make a decision.

DESAULNIER: The technical committee, even if city members are involved, or companies, it seemed that questions were about the legal responsibility, the transparency, and then, the selection process. Why is it that all of a sudden, it would be the Technical Committee that would be worried?

FILION; The Technical Committee was always worried about transparency, because it knew very well, right from the beginning, I am involved in this project for two years now, the Technical Committee is serious in wanting to ensure that the public gets the information in a transparent way. This was a worry right from the beginning, it stays a worry, but it's not all of a sudden. We always wondered, the results would worry the public. The public may doubt of our intentions and the intentions of the partners, so we must ensure that the process is transparent. So, we always come back to re-evaluate our goals. Is the goal set at the beginning, which is being transparent, are we succeeding with this? So, I think it's simply to once in awhile, look at the big goals of the project.

DESAULNIER: Mr. Filion, tonight there was more questions about politics than environment. When will we be in the process of talking about environment?

FILION: I hope we get to this real soon. I came here to assist in the process, because being a scientist; I thought we needed to ensure that the community

could get precise information, when it comes to scientific results. More and more the samples are coming in. We're analysing gardens, the food we buy in stores, other samples were done, and this will come in, the analysis are being done at this time, and so, once we get all the samples, the companies and their consultants, must then analyse, when it comes to risk factors, towards the environment and our health. At this time, I think we will have contents that will come to us, with scientific factors, with environment and health factors. I think we will look at these questions. I think we're still waiting for the information, so people are wondering about the process, but I think it's simply a question of a sequence at this time. There will be discussions on the environmental substances and the health risks, soon.

VIGNEAULT: Thank you very much, Rachel Desaulnier, in Sudbury.

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