

To celebrate 225 years of Lancaster newspapers, we present this weekly series of 52 front pages from throughout our history. Many feature events that would shape the course of world history. Some feature events of great local importance. Still others simply provide windows into the long-ago lives of Lancaster County residents. Make sure to check in every week, and enjoy this trip through time with LNP.

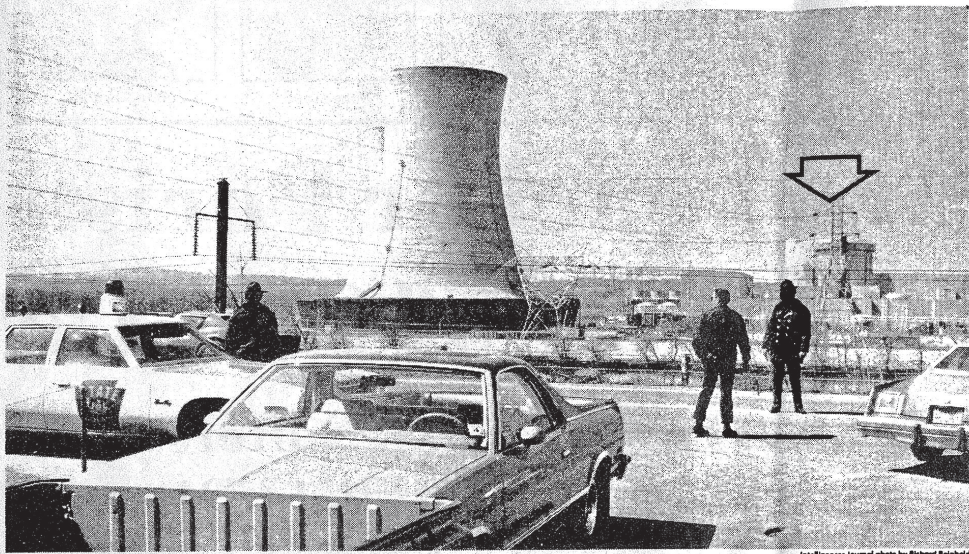
1979

Intelligencer Journal.

184th YEAR.—NO. 243 CITY EDITION LANCASTER, PA., THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 29, 1979. Price 15c — Daily Home Delivered 90c. A Week

Worst Leak on Record; Public Not in Danger

Nuclear Mishap at Three Mile Island Spills Radiation Over 16-Mile Area



Three Mile Island is in the background as state police keep a watch on things from Route 441 on the shore. Arrow at right points to Reactor No. 2.

3 Things That Shouldn't Happen Did

NEW YORK (AP) — A key valve that closed when it should have stayed open topped a complex chain of events that led to release of radioactive steam from the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, plant officials said late Tuesday.

The closing of the valve was the first of three things that weren't supposed to happen but did, officials said. But the subsequent release of radioactive steam during the delicate process of cooling down the hot reactor core was a deliberate management decision, the officials said.

Water In Air Line

The accident began a few minutes before 4 a.m. when water accumulated in an air line that controlled a valve in the reactor's power generating system.

The line is supposed to be dry, said John Hildish, supervisor of licensing for Metropolitan Edison, one of three power companies that owns the plant.

But when it filled with water, possibly from condensation from an unknown source, the valve closed.

That shut off water going into a heat exchanger that was pulling heat out of the reactor core.

The steam turbine that provides power for the 86-megawatt plant shut down automatically. Within one minute, the reactor itself shut down automatically and the 61 control rods that stop the nuclear reaction slid into place, Hildish said.

Alarm lights lit up in the control tower nearby.

A penetrating siren began to wail and technicians in the control tower used an intercom to order the 60 workers scattered around the plant to evacuate to safety, he said.

Then, in an uncertain order, two other things that weren't supposed to happen occurred.

—A leak developed in an 80-foot high heat exchanger known as a steam generator. That piece of equipment separates the radioactive water which is pumped through the reactor core from the non-radioactive water which is turned into steam to run the electric-generating turbine.

—Another leak may have developed in the 1/2-inch thick rods that contain the uranium pellets that power the reactor. This would allow the reactor coolant to come into contact with the uranium pellets themselves. Late Wednesday, a Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman said there had been no damage to the reactor core.

More 3 THINGS Page 2

Losing 700 Jobs

Army Pulling Out Of Indiantown Gap

Responsibility for the operation of Fort Indiantown Gap will be turned over to the Pennsylvania Department of Military Affairs and over 700 military and civilian jobs at the post will be eliminated or transferred to another Army base, U.S. Rep. Robert S. Walker was told Wednesday.

Walker and other area congressmen were briefed on the Army's plans Wednesday prior to the official announcement due today. The Army also revealed that it will phase out, over a four year period, its helicopter repair facility at New Cumberland Army Depot, which will mean elimination or transfer of just over 1,000 jobs.

Thomas Blank, Walker's press secretary, said the Army officials were "very fuzzy" about a timetable for their plans for Fort Indiantown Gap, but indicated they were expecting the changes to take two or three years to complete.

Under the plans revealed to the congressmen, the Army would eliminate 128 military jobs and 310 civilian positions at Indiantown Gap, and transfer 13 military and 270 civilians to Fort George Meade, Md. Blank said. Most of the transferred jobs involve the payroll operations now headquartered at the Pennsylvania military post.

Under the Army's plan, Fort Indiantown Gap would become strictly a National Guard and Army Reserve training facility. The federal government would subsidize those operations.

\$7 Million Subsidy Asked

Blank said the state Department of Military Affairs has asked for a \$7 million annual subsidy, with escalators built in and with an additional amount included to take care of a maintenance backlog at the installation.

Walker revealed that the Army is thus far only proposing making a \$4.7 million annual contribution toward operation of the Gap, a figure he termed "unreasonably low."

Congressional approval would be needed before the Army's plans for Indiantown Gap could be implemented, because the Army wants Congress to appropriate \$3.6 million to pay for new construction at Fort Meade to house the personnel transferred there from Indiantown Gap.

"Indications are right now that that money is going to be very difficult for them to get," Walker said.

Commenting on the Indiantown Gap proposal, the local congressman declared, "As far as I'm concerned, they have based their decision on wholly unreasonable figures, and it therefore makes their decision...unacceptable."

More ARMY Page 2

Alcohol And Drugs Killed Youth; DA Plans Inquest

By GILDELANEY
Intelligencer Journal Staff

An autopsy and laboratory tests have determined that Frank S. Doman III, the 17-year-old youth found dead outside a city taproom March 1, died of an overdose of alcohol combined with amphetamines, Dr. Thomas A. Quinn, deputy coroner, said Wednesday.

Dr. Quinn said the autopsy disproved the earlier belief that Doman had strangled on his own vomit as he lay comatose on the back porch steps of Kerchner's Cafe, 647 E. Chestnut St.

"The alcohol level (in Doman's blood) was .45, which would be a potentially lethal dose of alcohol, and the blood test also showed there were amphetamines in the blood system," the doctor said.

Will Hold Inquest

In a related development in the Doman case, District Attorney Ronald L. Buckwalter said Wednesday that a coroner's inquest will be held "to inquire as to whether there was criminal negligence in the death of Mr. Doman, and, if so, who was responsible."

Buckwalter said Richard A. Sheetz Jr., an assistant district attorney, has been put

More INQUEST Page 2

Labor Party Is Voted Out In Britain

LONDON (AP) — Prime Minister James Callaghan's minority government fell Wednesday night because his Laborites did not fetch one of their members from a hospital to the House of Commons for a confidence vote.

The defeat forced national elections that could bring Britain and Europe their first woman prime minister.

The vote was 311-310 on a censure motion by Margaret Thatcher's opposition Conservatives that amounted to a vote of confidence.

The latest polls have Labor trailing the Conservatives. If Mrs. Thatcher's Tories win the upcoming elections, she would become prime minister.

Disgruntled Labor Party members said they were ousted from power because they did not drag ailing Sir Alfred Broughton, 72, from his hospital bed, where he is recuperating from a heart attack suffered a week ago.

Had Broughton been taken to the Commons by ambulance to cast his negative vote, Callaghan's shaky government would have stood. The 311-311 tie would have been broken in Callaghan's favor by Labor Party member George Thomas, the non-voting speaker of the House.

Callaghan's government has been beset by crippling strikes in recent months. He is the first prime minister ousted on a confidence vote since Ramsay MacDonald, Britain's first Labor prime minister, was turned out 56 years ago.

The prime minister, 67, set no date for elections, but speculation is that the date will be April 26 or May 3.

Parliament's five-year term would have ended in October at any time when

Callaghan's Labor Party would have faced the electorate in scheduled general elections.

Called 'The Iron Maiden'

Mrs. Thatcher, 53, who has been called "a Tory glamor girl" by critics at home and "the iron maiden" by newspapers in the Soviet Union, opened the debate Wednesday by saying, "The government has failed the nation, lost credibility and it is time for it to go. 'Britain is now a nation on the sidelines. Rarely in the post-war period can our standing in the world have been lower or our defenses weaker.'"

Immediately after the vote, Callaghan said, "We will take our case to the country."

Mrs. Thatcher replied that her party believes the elections should be called "as a matter of urgency."

Callaghan will go to Buckingham Palace today to propose formally that Queen Elizabeth II dissolve Parliament as soon as essential business is cleared.

The Labor government's defeat was laid primarily to Callaghan's inability to hold support from all minority parties. Only seven minority votes were added to his support from the 303 Laborites.

The vote indicated two abstentions from the 86 members of the House of Commons. Those not voting were not immediately identified.

The breakdown was 311 for the censure motion and 310 against with three seats vacant through death or resignation, four non-voting officers of the House, four non-voting House tellers, one absent and the two abstentions.

Political observers had said the government's only hope of averting defeat rested with the votes of the 10 Northern Ireland Unionists.

Mrs. Thatcher's Conservatives swung the vote when most of the Unionists, who

More BRITAIN's Page 2

By CHARLES SHAW
Intelligencer Journal Staff

An accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station early Wednesday morning caused what one government official called "probably the biggest radiation leak" ever from a commercial nuclear plant.

No one was reported seriously injured by the radiation escape into the atmosphere from Unit No. 2 at the station. No residents near the plant, located on the Susquehanna River just north of the Lancaster County boundary in Dauphin County, were evacuated.

The accident that triggered the radiation leak was apparently due to a failure in the plant's cooling system. But just what happened and why, was not completely clear even by late Wednesday.

By late Wednesday night, low-level radiation traceable to the accident could be measured as far as 16 miles from the plant. But officials said there was no immediate danger to the public.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) officials said a helicopter measured a radiation level of 26 millirems from gas venting from a contaminated water storage area at the north end of the island late Wednesday night. The prevailing wind was northward. Three miles upstream at Harrisburg International Airport the radiation reading was 12 millirems. Sixteen miles away, near Harrisburg, the reading was 3 millirems.

Officials of Metropolitan Edison Co., Reading, the operator of the plant, and the NRC said earlier radiation readings at the plant compound ranged up to 70 millirems. Outside the compound, along Route 441, it was said to range from two to three millirems.

Stand By Record

Gary Snyder, assistant to the director for the NRC's eastern region, called the accident "probably the biggest radiation leak," but he quickly added that the safety record of nuclear power in this country has been excellent.

Rem stands for roentgen equivalent in man and is a standard measurement that relates the strength of radiation to the duration of exposure. A millirem is one-thousandth of a rem.

Normally, Americans are exposed to about 100 to 120 millirems per year from the sun and X-rays. A chest X-ray could give a person 30 millirems and a dental X-ray, seven millirems.

However, radiation inside the four-foot-thick containment structure at the plant, which houses the nuclear reactor, was reported by the NRC as being as high as 8,000 roentgens per hour, 1,000 times the normal level. Met Ed, however, disputed this and said the highest readings they received were about 200 roentgens per hour.

Even a roentgen per hour radiation level would be fatal to anyone being exposed to it for several hours, according to the NRC. Workers are not normally inside the containment when the plant is in operation and no one was inside on Wednesday.

Through Walls

NRC spokesman Joe Fouchard said "there's a hell of a lot of radiation in the reactor building." Apparently radiation was beamed through the walls of the containment. The high radiation levels within the containment also led to speculation that some damage had occurred to the nuclear fuel assemblies.

But late in the evening Wednesday NRC inspector Charles Phillips told a Harrisburg news briefing that there was no apparent damage to the reactor core.

Earlier, Fouchard said some of the fuel inside the reactor might have melted, while Snyder said he believed that it was more likely that some of the fuel assemblies may have cracked when the plant was suddenly cooled.

A spokesman for the General Public Utilities Corp., Met Ed's parent company, said "some damage to the fuel cladding may have occurred." Cladding is the insulation around the rods containing uranium pellets that make up the fuel assemblies.

But the extent of the damage to the

Winds Keep County's Dose To A Minimum

By DAVID STURM
Intelligencer Journal Staff

Preliminary reports Wednesday night said the dose of radioactivity received in Lancaster County from the shutdown at Three Mile Island was minimal.

Dr. William M. Connors, Lancaster County radiological defense officer, said prevailing winds Wednesday morning were blowing away from Lancaster.

Connors said he placed geiger counters at four locations around the city, but could find "no noticeable reading."

However, a reading taken on Route 441 near Three Mile Island registered 7 millirems per hour. Connors said that was not a dangerous reading.

"Now, if it was 10 or 100 times that, I'd head for the high hills," he remarked.

Connors said he believed Met Ed workers at the plant acted with credible skill and speed in stopping the leak, but added,

"The informational system (for alerting the public) was not very clear and concise. He was also disturbed that state Department of Environmental Resources officials and other authorities had to rely on Met Ed's equipment to measure the scope of the leak."

While the amount of airborne radiation remained an uncertainty, the possibility of contamination of the Susquehanna River and, consequently, the city water supply appeared negligible.

"We have no information that there was any contamination of water from the Susquehanna River," said Art Morris, city public works director and nuclear activist. "We have no notification whatsoever of any potential pollution."

Even if such contamination had happened, Morris went on, the city has the capacity to store a day's supply of water and, if necessary, could almost meet all daily water needs by drawing water entirely from the Lancaster filter plant, which is on the Conestoga River.

Was there a doomsday potential in what happened at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant Wednesday?

"We just don't know how bad it really was," said Dr. Chauncey Kepford, a State College chemist and anti-nuclear activist. "They (Metropolitan Edison of Reading) are playing very cagey."

Dr. Kepford had argued in front of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission against the licensing of the Three Mile Island plant and now has a suit pending before the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., charging that the plant is being operated illegally.

Kepford's suit, case 79-1853, contends that Met Ed filed an incomplete final environmental impact statement and should not

More WINDS Page 2

The Weather

Considerable cloudiness, breezy and milder today. Highs in low to mid 60s. Lows tonight in upper 40s to low 50s. Details, Page 4.

Index

Bridge 25 Lifebeat 13, 16, 17
Business 52 Movies 42
Comics 27 Obituaries 4
Crossword 54 Sports 45-50
Editorials 18 Stocks 53
Farm Markets 52 Television 26
Food Markets 22, 23 Weather 4

Information 291-8811
Home Delivery 291-8611
News Ads 291-8711
Intell News 291-8622
Intel Sports 291-8666
Lifebeat 291-8644
Other Dept. 291-8811

MELTDOWN

On March 28, 1979, a power plant on an island in the Susquehanna River became a flashpoint in the battle over nuclear power, and the name Three Mile Island became known all over the world.

The incident, described in the March 29, 1979, issue of the Intelligencer Journal as an accident with the cooling system, was later discovered to be a partial core meltdown.

The top headline here, "Worst leak on record; public not in danger," perfectly encapsulates the mixed messages in the immediate aftermath of the TMI meltdown, which remains the worst accident in the history of nuclear power in the United States. Residents were told that measurable radiation linked to the incident had been measured as far as 16 miles away; they were also told there was

no danger to the public.

Though prevailing wind directions favored Lancaster County, sending most of the radiation in other directions, thousands of county resident fled the area in a voluntary evacuation.

To this day, the question of whether anyone was harmed by the incident remains up for debate, as measuring health effects is an inexact science, and cancer inventories at the time were lacking.

One thing that's not up for debate is the extent to which TMI influenced the conversation — nationally and globally — about nuclear power. Existing plants were retrofitted with more safety features, and public perception of the safety of nuclear power was drastically reduced.

THE LIGHTER SIDE

The Three Mile Island incident reverberated through popular culture as well, with "I survived TMI" merchandise sold all over Central Pennsylvania. Bands all over the world referenced the event in their lyrics, including politically active Australian group Midnight Oil, whose song "Harrisburg" was a dirgelike indictment of the risks of nuclear power.

Locally, a board game called "React-or" was designed and handmade by York County residents Diane and Edward Sandnes with the help of their then-6-year-old son, Adam. The game involved players trying to move through an overheating reactor with as little radiation exposure as possible. Three hundred copies of the game were made, but only about 100 were sold in local shops. The game was never sold nationally.