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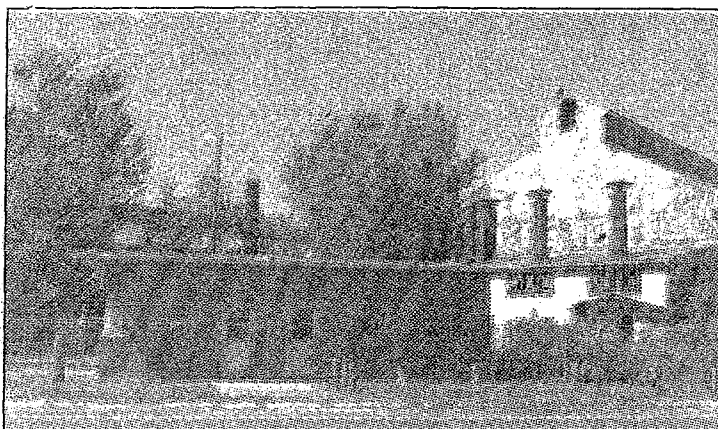


Photo by Dennis Stierer, Lockport Journal

Workers at the former Simonds Steel plant in Lockport may have been exposed to radiation during the Cold War.

## Labor secretary balks at nuclear workers program

WASHINGTON (AP) — In just four months, the government is supposed to start taking applications from job-sickened nuclear workers eligible for special federal compensation.

Congress gave the Labor Department \$60.4 million to set up the program.

But Labor Secretary Elaine Chao doesn't want to do it, and lawmakers with ailing constituents said Wednesday they're worried about people with incurable illnesses having to wait too long for compensation if Chao gets her way.

"Cancer is killing my constituents right now," said Rep. Ted Strickland, D-Ohio. "This will, in my judgment, inevitably result in a delay."

In a letter to the White House, Chao suggested that the Justice Department be put in charge of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program.

Chao's letter said that the department has the experience to do the job because it handles a small program giving one-time payments to uranium miners, millers and people who lived downwind of nuclear test sites.

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