Hydro Quebec
Caroline Desbiens (2004)

• For Quebeckers Hydro-Québec is essential
  • As practical, economic reality
  • As symbolism
Hydro Electricity

• Derives from the topography of northern Quebec
• Shield country with major relief and river systems
  • Can be dammed, tapped for power
• Quebec willing to impose impacts on the north
  • Environmental
  • Cultural, social on First Nations
• Hydro discharges interfering with North Atlantic drift, ice cover in James Bay?
Quebec
Angliers QC, 1947 hydro dam, Temiscamingue
Pre-1960

- Quebec in some respects lacked modern institutions
- Education, health care run by the churches
- Lacked a modern taxation system
- Quebec nationalism backward-looking, conservative
  - Trying to resist the challenges of industry, cities, immigration
- Quebec takes over private hydro systems in Montreal, Beauguarnois in 1944 to form Hydro Quebec
Quiet Revolution

- By Mid 20th Quebec had industrialised
- Culture becoming secular
- Early 1960s: Jean LeSage’s Liberals come to power
Quiet Revolution

• Rapid liquidation of the Duplessis legacy
  • Education secularised
  • Hydro-Québec nationalizes private hydro firms
• State modernized
• Hydro began an ambitious expansion programme
Daniel Johnson Dam, MANIC V
Manicouagan Hydro Scheme [MANIC]

• The 1,528 MW Daniel Johnson dam
• The first major Quebec construction site to work in French
• Visitor’s centre showcases the triumph of French-speaking Quebeckers in building the dam
• Ignores the Innu
• MANIC hydro scheme 5,108 MW
MANIC system hydro lines beside Highway 389
Lake Manicouagan, behind Johnson hydro dam
Hydro Electricity

• Quebec forced Newfoundland & Labrador to sell power from the Churchill Falls scheme at 1969 prices until 2041
  • Because Quebec controlled the only transmission lines which could get the electricity to market
  • Quebec refuses to update the deal
  • Quebec nationalism placed ahead of fairness to Newfoundland & Labrador
Hydro Electricity

• A key resource for the Quebec economy
• Essential to its Quiet Revolution
• Gives Quebec cheap, renewable energy for domestic use or export
• Most Quebec homes heat with hydro
James Bay Hydro Scheme

• A mega-project for Premier Robert Bourassa
• Planned to divert 4 major rivers
  • La Grande
  • Rupert
  • Eastmain
  • Great Whale
• Capacity up to 27,000 MW
James Bay Cree

- Want to stay in Canada
- The North a vital economic resource for Quebec
Building LG2 1980s
James Bay Hydro Scheme

- Bourassa, Hydro Quebec talked of opening up Northern Quebec
- Develop a unique high-tension power transmission system
  - Vulnerable to solar storms (1989)
- Create the James Bay Road
  - And the town of Radisson
James Bay Hydro Scheme

• Key construction jobs go to big Quebec-based engineering and construction firms
  • SNC Lavalin

• Southern Quebecers brought in to build and run the scheme

• Airport at La Grande Riviere flies the shift changes in and out

• Town of Radisson created as an outpost Quebecois community
James Bay Hydro Scheme

• Began its James Bay developments without proper consultation with the Cree
  • La Grande River 1971 12,000 MW capacity
• Quebec, Canada forced to negotiate a deal with the Cree in 1975
Radisson QC, switches 10% of Quebec’s Hydro
James Bay Hydro Scheme

• Major disruption for the Cree
• Natural river regimes permanently altered
• The best fishing spots on La Grande destroyed by 2,106 MW LG1 station
• Fort George has to be abandoned, settlement shifted to Chisasibi
LG1 dam, La Grande River
James Bay Hydro Scheme

- Main Cree communities were on the coast
- Hydro Quebec deliberately leaves them off the James Bay Road until mid 1990s
- Now connected with long, dirt roads
Great Whale

• Hydro-Québec announces another round of hydro development in 1989
• James Bay Cree assert their claims over the territory, with international support
• Scheme killed in 1995
• But Whapmagoostui still shares in the Hydro money
Eastmain, Rupert

• Another round of major hydro development in James Bay watershed
• Follows 2002 agreements between Hydro-Québec and the Cree
• Diverts the headwaters of Rupert and Eastmain Rivers into La Grande system
Rupert River, James Bay QC
Rupert River

- A major river in northern Quebec
- Headwaters now dammed for hydro
- Significant opposition from both environmentalists and the Cree
ROUTE DE LA BAIE JAMES
Hydro Electricity

- Quebec still has major northern rivers untapped by hydro resources
  - Rupert River in 2009 diverted into a hydro scheme
  - Part of James Bay II
20Km lake, Chisasibi QC
• An elder cleans sturgeon at Eastmain QC
Chisasibi QC
Land Settlement

• Quebec had to reach a deal with the Cree
  • The Peace of the Brave 2002
• Provides significant funding to the James Bay Cree
• Extensive tracts of land reserved for their use, non-Cree hunting and fishing restricted
Ralentissez
Land Settlement

• Coastal Cree communities now comparatively well funded
• All sorts of new construction, infrastructure
• Chisasibi (pop 5,000) one of Canada’s largest Aboriginal cities
• Housing and employment shortages
• Outside contractors get most of the key construction jobs
Land Settlement

• James Bay Cree start up Air Creebec, with main hub in Val D’Or QC
• Create a trucking company to haul in supplies along the James Bay Road
Wemidji
Caroline Desbiens (2004)

• The waters of northern Quebec are essential political ground
  • Vital to the Cree and other indigenous groups
  • Vital to southern Quebec
  • Vital to at least two competing nationalities
Two Separatisms

- Québécois from Canada
- Cree from Quebec
Hydro-Québec

- Hydro-Québec remains a public asset, although restructured into a joint-stock company in the 1990s
  - Hydro in Ontario largely privatized
- Quebecers have little interest in following Ontario’s example
  - And privatizing hydro
- Less burdened by cost of nuclear power, Hydro Quebec remits $4 billion/year to Quebec government