Hydro
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
Pre-1960

- Quebec 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
Quiet Revolution

- By Mid C20th 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 nationalised (Hydro-Québec)
  - State modernized
  - Hydro began an ambitious expansion programme
Hydro Electricity

• Quebec forced Newfoundland to sell power from the Churchill Falls scheme at 1969 prices
  – 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
Hydro Electricity

• A key resource for the Quebec economy
• Essential to its Quiet Revolution
• Gives Quebec cheap, renewable energy for domestic use or export
James Bay Cree

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

• A mega-project for Premier Robert Bourassa
• Planned to divert 4 major rivers
  – La Grande
  – Rupert
  – Eastmain
  – Great Whale
James Bay Hydro Scheme

• Bourassa, Hydro Québec talked of opening up Northern Quebec
• Develop a unique high-tension power transmission system
  – Vulnerable to solar storms
• 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
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
James Bay Hydro Scheme

- Major disruption for the Cree
- Natural river regimes permanently altered
- The best fishing spots on La Grande destroyed by LG2 dam
- Fort George has to be abandoned, settlement shifted to Chisasibi
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
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

- 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
• An elder cleans sturgeon at Eastmain QC
Land Settlement

• Quebec had to reach a deal with the Cree
• Provides significant funding to the James Bay Cree
• Extensive tracts of land reserved for their use, non-Cree hunting and fishing restricted
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
Welcome
Bienvenue

84 km
Ralentissez
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
  – Hydro in Ontario largely privatised
• Quebeckers have little interest in following Ontario’s example
  – And privatizing hydro