Hydro Workforces
Brunelle & Polèse (2008)

- Looks at the Canadian electricity industry
- A legacy of Crown corporations, with some private participation
- A resource industry: periphery produces hydro, metropolitan cores consume it
Brunelle & Polèse (2008)

- Hydro workforces tend to be found in the non-metropolitan areas
Figure 2
Location curves. Employment in the electricity industry, Canada 1971, 2001
But the hydro workforce has been changing

More and more private contractors, seasonal employees

Production workforce shrinks, management & technical workers remain
  – employment shifts towards the metropolitan cores
Figure 3
Employment share by functions, electricity sector, Canada 1971–2001
The Changing workforce

• Three examples to illustrate:
  – Churchill Falls, Labrador 2009
  – Bai Verte, Newfoundland 2012
  – Radisson QC 2015
Churchill Falls, Labrador 2009

• Black Spruce Lodge full of contract workers cutting brush around the hydro lines

• NALCOR saving money by replacing its own crews with contractors
NOTICE TO HUNTERS

AS A COURTESY TO OTHER GUESTS, THE CLEANING STAFF, AND ALSO FOR SANITARY REASONS: PLEASE REMOVE ANY BLOOD COVERED CLOTHING AND BOOTS BEFORE ENTERING THE LODGE. ANY WILD GAME BROUGHT TO THE LODGE MUST BE KEPT OUTSIDE AND HUNTERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISPOSAL OF ANY ANIMAL REMAINS.

THANK YOU,
MANAGEMENT
Baie Verte peninsula, Newfoundland Aug 2012

• Hydro crews working to brush and maintain the major power lines
ROUTE 413
Burlington - Middle Arm
300 m
Baie Verte peninsula

- Hydro work was being done by Newfoundland Power, part of the Fortis Group a major private contractor in the utilities maintenance sector
Radisson QC 2015
Radisson QC

- Crew rotations to run the James Bay Hydro Quebec stations come in by air via La Grande Riviere airport.
- Some stay at Radisson, drive to site.
- Fly south at end of rotation.
Brunelle & Polèse (2008)

- Emergence of metropolitan-oriented functional clusters in hydro employment
- In hydro the core-periphery relationship has shifted further towards favouring the cores
Figure 6
Spatial functional specializations within the electricity sector, Canada (382 spatial units), 2001
The 2013 Ice Storm

- Major ice storm of 21-22 Dec 2013 disrupts power in Southern Ontario
- 300,000 homes without power in the City of Toronto
  - Often caused by broken trees falling on power lines
Over the past 20 years

- Ontario Hydro privatised and broken up
  - Brush-clearing and line maintenance awarded to private contractors
- Toronto Hydro’s antiquated despatch system fails during the emergency
  - Upgrades postponed to save money
- City of Toronto
  - Had reduced tree pruning to keep property taxes low
Hydro Systems

• The economic prosperity of C20th Canada was connected to cheap and abundant electricity
  – Gave Canada’s industry a competitive advantage
• Electrical mega-projects managed by giant publicly-owned electrical utilities
• Electrical projects dramatically altered the environment, affected aboriginal folk
Hydro Systems

• We are now in a different era
  – Big public utilities being broken up, privatised
  – Hydro workforces privatise, downsize
  – Reduced government spending
  – Few new megaprojects
  – Rising concern about the environment, aboriginal people
  – Energy costs rising rapidly
Hydro Systems

• People accustomed to cheap electricity resent increased costs
  – To address climate change
  – To repair/upgrade infrastructure

• Probably need to pay much more

• Governments in Ontario (Liberal, PC) using debt financing to subsidise electricity costs to consumers