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
Manicouagan Hydro Scheme

- 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
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
• Capacity up to 27,000 MW
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
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 2,106 MW 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
- 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

- A major river in northern Quebec
- Headwaters now dammed for hydro
- Significant opposition from both environmentalists and the Cree
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
Chisabi 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

Gree Nation of Chisasibi

84 km
Ralentissez
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

- Québéçois 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