Hydro official rips premier on James Bay

Bourassa's refusal to hold hearings 'stinks,' senior geologist says

By ALEXANDER NORRIS
of The Gazette

GREAT WHALE RIVER — Premier Robert Bourassa's refusal to hold wide-ranging public hearings into the environmental impact of Hydro-Québec's James Bay II hydroelectric megaprojects "stinks," says a senior official with the provincially owned utility.

"We've got a premier who's sold on electricity," Jean-François Rougerie told *The Gazette* in an interview in this isolated native community on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay.

"Where's the public debate on that? What's the only forum that (is obliged to) . . . discuss that? It's the environmental impact assessment process.

"That's the only public forum people have to discuss public policy on energy," he said.

"It stinks."

Rougerie, a 38-year-old geologist, heads a team of Hydro-Québec scientists assessing the probable environmental impact of the proposed mammoth Great Whale dam project Hydro-Québec plans to build 80 kilometres east of Great Whale River.

He believes "there should be a public debate" on Quebec's energy policy.

"They have public debates (on energy policy) elsewhere in the world — in Europe, in the United States, even in Ontario. But we don't have them here."

Rougerie said that Bourassa and Energy Minister John Ciaccia try to direct the utility to put their personal philosophies into practice. "We're getting orders from the premier and the minister of energy and resources saying, 'This is my issue: economic development through hydroelectricity.' "

Still, Rougerie insisted Hydro-Québec and Bourassa do not always share the same views on energy policy.

The giant utility plans to begin building an access road for the Great Whale project next summer. Hydro-Québec wants to complete the dam complex — part of a $7.5-billion investment — by 1994.

Critics of the project have said hydroelectricity from Great Whale will service Hydro-Québec's multibillion-dollar hydroelectric export contracts with New England states — and not Quebec's own energy needs.

The utility insists growing demand for elec-

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JEAN-FRANCOIS ROUGERIE
Heads impact assessment team

The whole thing started when Norris — for my money the best young reporter in town — spent an October day touring the Great Whale River area by helicopter, in the company of geologist Jean-François Rougerie, a Hydro-Québec public relations flack, and MPs Charles Caccia and Robert Skelly.

When they were finished, the flack went to pick up his bags and to catch a flight, leaving Norris alone with Rougerie.

Presumably, Hydro has bundled the flack off to Siberia for not sticking around to be sure Rougerie didn't say anything interesting. When the man departed, Norris whipped out his notebook and did what any journalist worth his byline would have done under the circumstances. He started interviewing.

Question of loyalties

Rougerie, a 38-year-old geologist who heads a team of Hydro-Québec scientists assessing the probable environmental impact of the proposed Great Whale dam project, talked to Norris for 45 minutes.

The key question was why someone in the employ of Hydro-Québec is in charge of the team doing the impact study. It is, as Norris pointed out to Rougerie, like being the judge in your own court case. Rougerie apparently didn't take it kindly when Norris suggested that when your paycheque comes from Hydro-Québec, you would tend to produce the kind of impact

paycheque comes from Hydro-Quebec, you would tend to produce the kind of impact study Hydro would like to see.

"It was in that context," Norris recalls, "that he started slagging Bourassa."

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"It stinks."

Rougerie went on to insist that "there should be a public debate" on Quebec's energy policy.

"They have public debates elsewhere in the world — in Europe, in the United States, even in Ontario. But we don't have them here."

Bourassa and Energy Minister John Ciaccia, Rougerie said, try to direct Hydro-Québec to put their personal philosophies into practice.

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Explanation doesn't wash

Obviously, this isn't the kind of stuff Ciaccia and the Bou are going to want to read about themselves, but the last time I looked it was a free country and a man was allowed to speak his mind.

The *Hydro-Presse* a

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The *Hydro-Presse* article on the story, however, makes it clear that someone must have leaned on Rougerie to get him to back off. Rougerie (the article revealingly calls him "our comrade") produced a memo saying that he used the most offending phrase, "it stinks," not in describing his own attitude, but in describing how environmentalists feel about the lack of public hearings.

Like they say in Saskatoon: horse hockey.

I don't blame Rougerie for wriggling like that — heck, the man's paycheque is on the line. But Norris is absolutely certain that Rougerie was expressing his own opinions when he said: "It stinks."

Now if Hydro is that sensitive about that one comment, how do you suppose they'd react if Rougerie produced a report saying that the Great Whale River dam was an environmental disaster? What would they do if he concluded that the dam was, as MP Charles Caccia called it, "an environmental Frankenstein?"

If Hydro reacts to one comment in a newspaper with a two-page story in its house organ, complete with a piece by a flack named Jacques-André Couture on how to deal with the media, how would they react to an unfavorable environmental impact report?

Somehow I get the feeling that report would never see the light of day, which is why it's fair to ask for an independent study in the first place.

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Somehow I get the feeling that report would never see the light of day, which is why it's fair to ask for an independent study in the first place. But we won't see one. Like Jean-François Rougerie said:

"It stinks."