

Stupid is Our Name

Says Albany: Just a Gaggle of Gooses

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This article appeared in an earlier edition of the Niagara Falls Reporter.

I'd like to propose we change the name of our county from Niagara to Stupid.

Where else could you find a place that produces billions of dollars' worth of a commodity that everybody uses — a commodity that once made them rich — who signed their rights away for 50 years, exported it at cheap prices, then paid exorbitantly for the same commodity, descending during this time from prosperous to dead broke? Who elect leaders who — when their first, bankrupting, 50-year deal was up — signed another 50-year deal? And finally, the embellishment: the dunce cap on the pinhead of a fool — an apathetic, uninformed public?

They don't know, for instance, that the New York Power Authority — a quasi-governmental, Albany-controlled, "public benefit" corporation, now in the second year of a second 50-year license to control the hydro-electric energy of the Niagara — sells none of it to local residents. Niagara power goes to New York City and eight other states.

They don't know that — as their inexpensive local power crosses the state to enrich New York City, Rhode Island and New Jersey — only two places in the USA pay more for electricity than the Niagara resident: New Hampshire and Hawaii. According to *Electric Power Monthly*, 25 percent of the nation pays less than half.

A bankrupt people who have the greatest hydro-electric power in the world, who neither get use of their locally produced power nor get inexpensive electricity, is one stupendous irony.

Hearken back then, my friends, to its genesis, to 1957, when Robert Moses told the people here how NYPA, having exclusive control of Niagara's hydro-power, would ensure continued prosperity in this region. A skillful liar, Moses, deceiving an innocent, trusting, prosperous people into the loss of their asset, left a legacy of riches to ruin — a saga, spanning three generations, of genuine pathos.

It might be a story of innocent ruin, a people deceived by those elected to represent them, but it might also be bizarrely comedic, with a well-defined stooge: the people of Niagara.

Consider: NYPA's license expired last year. We could have regained local control of our power. Like we did when we were rich, when we were the world leader in power production, when they called Niagara Falls the "Power City," when we had inexpensive, abundant



Robert Moses (with halo) leads Niagara Falls officials to surrendering local control of Niagara's hydro-power to Albany.

WE ARE PLEASED: This charming woman and her country profit from the electricity that you purchase for your homes in Niagara. Happy also is the fact that the good people in New York City profit from the fact that the locally produced electricity from the Niagara River is not used by the people of Niagara but goes instead to New York City. Notable also is the feeling of felicity that informed people of New York City feel toward England's noble gesture of providing Niagara with electricity. They have been heard at times to exclaim: **God Save the Queen!**



MAP OF THE FOUR NATIONS OF NIAGARA FALLS

- 1. Niagara Falls, Ontario = Prosperous**
- 2. Niagara Falls, Seneca = Very Rich**
- 3. Niagara Falls, Albany = Rich (profits however go mainly to New York City)**
- 4. Niagara Falls, N.Y. = Bankrupt**

electrical power and businesses (and jobs) came rushing here.

But curiously, a shadowy group called the Niagara Power Coalition, comprised of representatives of what some were pleased to call the Stupid Seven (S-7) — Niagara Falls, Niagara County, the towns of Niagara and Lewiston, and the Niagara-Wheatfield, Lewiston-Porter and Niagara Falls school districts — agreed to gift NYPA with another 50-year license, until 2057, in return for a proportional pittance: \$233 million, paid over 50 years, and a tiny allocation of low-cost Niagara power, which some politicians of S-7 control.

And it is a proportional pittance: S-7 relinquished, on behalf of current and future residents of this county, a billion-dollar-a-year asset (in today's dollars) in return for a seven-way split of \$5 million annually, not factored for inflation. It will be \$5 million, split seven ways, 50 years from now.

Contrast that, please, with what a billion

dollars of electricity a year in today's dollars will be worth 50 years from now, and you will realize that S-7 was named quite aptly.

Apparently, however, NYPA executives know that ignorance (in Niagara) is bliss (for Albany). They know they don't have to sell Niagara power to Niagara. The obtuse ones here think they get their power from NYPA because NYPA power plants are here, offering free tours of the power vista and free parking for waterfowl observation.

Niagara residents, however, get their power from burning coal and other inefficient methods, purchased at high mark-up from a company owned by investors from England (including the Queen of England) called National Grid.

Ironic, isn't it? As we buy expensive electricity from the Brits and help make the royal family wealthier, NYPA takes our inexpensive hydro-power and sells it to New York City and elsewhere at low rates. Lamentably, the most ubiquitous of waterfowl, observed qui-

etly by NYPA executives, are colorful geese, living in homes throughout Niagara, paying high electric bills, unaware they are in a world-leading, electricity-producing region and getting none of it.

Still, even the denizens here ought to comprehend that NYPA is controlled by Albany and swells rich with "patronage" jobs. Instead of providing low-cost electricity for this region — which would create thousands of well-paying local jobs — the profits from our hydro-power pay for thousands of high-paying "administrative" and "consultant" jobs, most of which are in White Plains (a suburb of New York City) and Albany.

Although S-7 leaders might disagree, we don't have to honor the foolish, locally bankrupting relicensing of NYPA. If we had half the gumption of the Seneca Indians, who burn tires and blockade roads if they perceive an injustice, we could start a movement to take back our power. We could start an action to condemn NYPA property based on the genuine theft of our natural asset, based entirely upon the deception originally perpetrated upon us by Robert Moses: He said NYPA control of our hydro-power would prove a boon to Niagara.

It did not. Albany simply and quietly stole the power from us. The fact that we lost control of a vital, billion-dollar-a-year asset, more, perhaps, than any other factor has impoverished us.

Simply stated, a region has to benefit from its natural assets, just as it has to pay for its natural liabilities and disadvantages. To cite an example, we have to pay high heating bills in this region because it is cold. But why are we paying 44 percent more for electricity than the average resident of Sarasota, Fla., which has neither the natural disadvantage of high heating bills nor the advantage of a natural power source?

Or, to dilate further on the magnitude of the harm, consider this: Niagara Falls lost its two greatest assets to Albany — tourism (through Albany's "New York City-gets-all-the-profit" management of the state park) and the hydro-electric power theft.

Now imagine what your life would be like if you were to be deprived of the use or profit of your two best assets, whatever they are. Whatever it is you do best in life, your two greatest shining talents, imagine what life would be like if someone took all the profit away.

Then imagine that you didn't complain; were hardly aware of it. Then you'll understand what happened in Niagara. The stupefying, ultimate truth is this: There is no inexpensive electrical power for the people who live where electricity is generated. The people don't use their locally produced power, they don't know it and, when they learn about it, they don't complain.

They don't call us stupid for nothing.

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