

Crime of the Century: Who Took the Power Out of 'The Power City'?

Albany profits from our greatest resources, offering little in return

**FRANK
PARLATO
JR.**

*SA-SON founder
and owner of
One Niagara*



One of the cruel ironies of Niagara Falls is that Albany, under the guise of governing us, seized control of our two most important assets — tourism and hydro-electric power — and, consequently, bankrupted us.

It is well-known how the state controls the flow of tourists in and out of the Niagara Falls State Park and, through its clutching strategy, keeps tourist dollars in the park, to be absconded ultimately by Albany alone.

Albany also controls our other billion-dollar asset — hydro-electric power. We have an abundance of it, naturally, generated by the topographical decline of the Niagara River. Since 1957, the New York Power Authority (NYPA), which was created by the State Legislature to provide (don't laugh) "low-cost electricity for the people of New York," has controlled the Niagara's hydro-power.

NYPA sells power generated from the Niagara to utility companies, governmental agencies and neighboring states. Although the river generates more than \$1 billion (in true worth) of low-cost electricity per year, NYPA sells none of it to Niagara residents. In a stupendous irony, we pay more for electricity than almost everyone else in the nation.

Who has heard of another place that had a super-abundance of anything (hydro-power, water, apples, silver, gold; anything that came to it by the nature of its place in the world, its terrain, its soil or its climate) where the people living nearest got none of it, and paid more for a similar product than everyone else? It's an Albany-imposed cruelty that affects us in our homes, in the way we live, in the kindness and grace of our lives and the lives of our neighbors.

A region has to benefit by its natural assets just as it must pay for its natural liabilities.

Once we did benefit. When we controlled our hydro-power, we offered an incentive to industry and to the burgeoning peoples of early and mid-20th century America to come to Niagara: cheap, abundant electrical power. We were "The Power City."

Albany took over the management of our power officially in 1957. And we went from offering almost the cheapest electricity in America to the third-highest.

Tellingly, one year before Albany took over, the 1956 edition of "Compton's Encyclopedia" wrote of us: "Water power helped build the city of Niagara Falls. The falling of water provides a great and constant source of power for hydro-electric plants which supply the city and surrounding area with abundant and cheap electrical power."

Then, in 1957, Albany hero and NYPA Chairman Robert Moses came to



An Albany official shown managing Niagara Falls' affairs.



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

Niagara with opportunity beaming in his eyes: It began with a 50-year license, granted to NYPA, to control the American side of the Niagara. Within a few years, Albany quietly arranged that almost all of the hydro-power produced here, formerly used to enrich us, would go to New York City and other places far from here.

The city that helped shape the modern world when it introduced low cost, wide-scale hydro-electricity, the city of marvels, rising Niagara, was stripped of power, and, consequently, removed from the van of great cities.

The fall of Niagara — both the river and the city — are wonders to be remembered long

after these days have passed. We are history. A place of marvels. Where else do you find a tourist town that attracts 17 million people a year and is broke? And across the river is a boom town?

The people don't understand. They know, for instance, that they pay high electricity bills. But who would tell them these things? Would you care to know, for instance, that NYPA, an Albany-controlled "public benefit" corporation sells none of its low-cost power to you or I who live nearest the river? That Niagara's power goes to New York City and eight other states?

That, as our inexpensive, local power crosses state lines to enrich those who live in New

Jersey or Rhode Island, only two places in the United States pay more than we for electricity: New Hampshire and Hawaii?

Still, even the rank and file ought to comprehend: NYPA is controlled by Albany and NYPA swells rich with "patronage" jobs. Consider the gripping irony: Instead of providing low-cost electricity for this region — which would create thousands of good-paying local jobs — the profits from our hydro-power pays for thousands of high-paying, "administrative" and "consultant" jobs, most of which are in White Plains — a suburb of New York City — and in Albany.

Albany, however, knows the politics of ignorance. The people here think they get their power from NYPA because the power plants are here. But understand this clearly: Niagara residents get their electrical power from burning coal and other inefficient methods, purchased from a company owned by investors from England called National Grid. Consider how galling this is: As we buy expensive electricity from the British, NYPA takes our local hydro-power and sells it elsewhere at low rates. Stupendous, really, this Albany-style management of our affairs.

In fairness, the people of Niagara have been heavily burdened — laden where they expect and accept it as a fact of their lives: A once-prosperous, world-famous city rapaciously consumed and shattered to near oblivion by its state government. Obscene in magnitude, perhaps unprecedented in the history of the United States: Albany has been the great, detrimental, financial fact of our lives.

Yet, in Niagara — in the fall of the Niagara — lies hope for our rebirth and arising: tourism and hydro-power. These should not be in the care of Albany but in the hands of the people living near it, to restore our prosperity, our verve, our vigor, and the wondrous, elegant, glorious, daily grace of our lives.

We live near the river Niagara. We must, as we have in the past, profit from it. Ultimately, we must take back our great river assets and arise and reclaim our place among the van of cities — as the place of wonders, the city of Niagara Falls, at the fore once again — as "The Power City."

Frank Parlato Jr. is the founder, chairman, secretary-treasurer and sergeant-at-arms of The Committee to Suspend Albany's Stranglehold on Niagara. He is also the owner of One Niagara. He can be reached at frank@frankreport.com.



Paid for by the Committee to Suspend Albany's Stranglehold on Niagara (SA-SON)