

Convenient Lies

Why Green Energy Projects (And Hydro From Quebec) Won't Save Us, Or The Planet.

Of course fossil fuels are terrible. Projects like the Alberta tar sands, coal mining and fracking threaten Indigenous territory and sovereignty and destroy forests, waterways and ecosystems. Burning those fuels emits greenhouse gases that are degrading our air quality. A lot of people want you to believe that environmental catastrophe can be prevented with a few simple actions. Some people focus on consumer choices like buying new lightbulbs, taking shorter showers, or driving hybrid cars. Others look to policy, hoping to change the source of our household and industrial energy to “greener” or “safer” solutions, shifting away from fossil fuels to supply the power grid.

In Ontario, the Green Energy Act means that companies receive subsidies to build “green” energy infrastructure, usually wind or solar. It has also eliminated any requirement that companies seek municipal or community approval prior to building, meaning that people have no say as to whether wind or solar projects are built in their communities. Groups like the Clean Air Alliance are promoting hydroelectricity from Quebec as a cheap, green option. This pamphlet looks at a few of these so-called “solutions” and their real implications for the environment and for our communities.

Hydro From Quebec Is a Land Grab

Large areas of Northern Quebec have already been flooded by hydroelectric dams. Selling power to Ontario is part of an economic strategy by Quebec that involves expanding that, damming new rivers and expanding existing projects. When forests are flooded, the plants and animals in them die. This leads to a loss in biodiversity, and their decomposition produces methane gas and carbon dioxide. Hydro dams contribute about 12% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. The rivers also become contaminated with mercury and other toxins, further contributing to habitat loss and threatening clean water supplies for humans and animals.

Hydro Quebec's expansion is also at the expense of Indigenous people in Northern Quebec. New projects are currently being planned on unceded Innu territory, and dams and power lines have already divided and degraded Indigenous territory in the North. Hydro Quebec is a colonial project that directly and immediately threatens Indigenous people and plant and animal species in Northern Quebec. It is also a dirty project that contributes to declining clean air and water. It is not a “safe” or “green” option. Groups advocating to replace Ontario nuclear energy with Quebec hydro are essentially lobbying to protect residents of Southern Ontario at the expense of the Innu people's land and livelihood.

Large solar developments are not ethical.

In production: Solar farms rely on mining arsenic, cadmium, coal, copper, iron ore, lead, and silica, to name a few. These mines are often brutally colonial, environmentally devastating and toxic to workers.

In construction and operation: Solar farms are often built against the will of local communities, who have good reasons to oppose hundreds of acres of land bulldozed for a megaproject. Tens of thousands of holes will be drilled for steel posts, which can affect drinking water. To replace Ontario's current grid capacity, thousands of square kilometres would be used for solar generation. This doesn't even begin to

address storage problems, since panels only generate electricity in sunlight.

In disposal: Solar panels have a life-span of about 25 years. Most panels end up in landfills where their toxic components will leach into groundwater or burn into the atmosphere. Most recyclers ship e-waste overseas to poorer countries where workers are exposed to harmful chemicals. Domestic e-waste recycling operations in the United States are largely staffed with prison labour.

Wind Energy: Same Shit

There is considerable resistance to wind farms in Ontario coming from a variety of groups. While the movement has some questionable ties to the PC Party and nuclear lobby, wind opponents shouldn't be easily dismissed as puppets or NIMBY reactionaries. The actual issues raised by anti-wind groups range from alleged human health impacts to bat and bird mortality. We won't wade into each issue here. Instead, we point out that every large development, green or not, impacts the ecosystem, and that local control is being further eradicated to enrich big construction companies and private generators.

As with solar, wind projects rely on rare earth mining. Direct drive turbines use permanent magnets made from neodymium, a rare earth element mined in China. The process produces radioactive sludge loaded with toxic acids, which inevitably finds its way into the water supply. Green energy advocates must know this because they will be the first to point out that the oil sands tailings ponds leak into the Athabasca River. In fact, rare earth minerals exist in Canada but they are not developed because of these same environmental concerns. Recently the U.S. Pentagon identified large deposits in southern Afghanistan valued at 7.4 billion dollars. Windmills in Ontario's back yards mean toxic mines in the back yards of those with less wealth and less global power.

The problem is scale.

None of these so-called solutions will help us avoid environmental collapse. None of them will help us build healthy, autonomous, sustainable communities that can withstand climate change. The promoters of these projects want us to believe that we can make small, easy changes to the power grid that will let us keep living the way we live now, with the energy consumption that we use now, with the capitalist economy functioning as it does now. They are wrong. No large-scale energy project will ever do that because the power grid as it exists now is incompatible with a truly just and sustainable society. It's time we abandoned these unsatisfying lies and moved on to more serious efforts to dismantle the systems that keep most people poor and destroy the planet. This will mean drastically redefining our energy "needs," and fighting the governments and corporations that are invested in maintaining the status quo. It will mean fighting colonialism, racism, patriarchy and all systems of oppression while we fight to preserve the planet and prepare to weather the changes that are already happening. We will need to make sacrifices and strive to build healthy communities that have the strength to fight corporate power. It may not sound easy, but it may well be the only option we've got.

Further Resources

Earth First! Journal
earthfirstjournal.org

Media Co-op on Plan Nord:
dominion.mediacoop.ca/tag/plan-nord

Orion Magazine:
Forget Shorter Showers

Peter Gelderloos:
An Anarchist Solution to Global Warming

Warrior Publications
warriorpublications.wordpress.com

Alliance Romaine (Quebec)
allianceromaine.wordpress.com

DecLine 9 Cataraqui (Kingston)
decline9.tumblr.com

Knowing the Land (Hamilton)
knowingtheland.com

Rising Tide North America
risingtidenorthamerica.com

Unist'ot'en Camp (BC)
unistotencamp.com

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Kingston, Ontario
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cleanairlies@riseup.net