

NEWS

Students protest Vermont plan to obtain Hydro-Quebec power

By Kristan Schiller

By the end of April, the Vermont Public Service Board must decide whether or not to sign a twenty year contract to buy electricity from Phase II of Hydro-Quebec's James Bay Project. A group of Middlebury students have protested the signing of the contract by participating in a number of demonstrations and circulating a petition.

Vermont utilities see the hydro-electric power that the project generates as a cheap source of power that is less damaging to the environment than power from fossil fuels. Enacting Phase II entails the diversion of eight major rivers in the James Bay area and would cause wildlife destruction on a grand-scale and necessitate the relocation of the Cree Indians and Inuit Eskimos, who are among the last indigenous peoples in North America.

"They've already done Phase I. Phase II is what they're proposing to do if Vermont buys the power. If they don't have any support to buy into the contract, they might not go ahead with it. That's the whole thing we're basing our fight against," said former Environmental Quality President Susan Oddsen '90 who has taken action to prevent this environmental overhaul with a handful of other Middlebury students and Vermonters. Phase I entailed the building of a set of dams which has already caused "a lot of damage," Oddsen said.

"Some people in the government here say: 'Vermont's not the place for the fight. You should go up and protest in Canada.' But the thing is that Vermont *should* be responsible

to other parts of the world," Oddsen explained. "You can't just ignore Canada."

Acting on this belief, Oddsen teamed up with Greg Western, '91, and Corey Chase, '92, to urge the Middlebury community to sign petitions which will be presented to the government as a show in opposition to Phase II. In about two weeks, the activists have obtained at least 500 signatures from Middlebury students.

"A lot of students have been active, as far as going to the off-campus events," Oddsen said.

The fight against Phase II began for about thirteen Middlebury students on February 20, when they expressed their views at a public

from other students.

According to Oddsen, Assistant Professor of Northern Studies William Howland has been highly supportive of the issue because he understands its effects on the Indians and Eskimos. Howland is unable to take any concrete stance, however, as he has been called upon "by both sides" to be a mediator due to his expertise in Northern Studies.

The Cree And Inuit, the two cultures of the James Bay region of northern Quebec affected by Hydro-Quebec, have been historically at odds with each other over land and hunting rights. The impact of Phase II upon their lifestyles, however, has prompted them to put aside their dif-

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hearing held in Montpelier by the Vermont Public Service Board. Within a week, these students had also participated in a national rally that occurred in the state capitol that focused on Hydro-Quebec.

Since February, Oddsen and others have collaborated with concerned Vermont citizens, University of Vermont students, and other organizations such as the Vermont All Species Project and the Native American Solidarity Network. The Middlebury-based group EQ (Environmental Quality) has been integral in both initiating action and soliciting action

ferences and has brought them together in protest.

About forty Cree and Inuit travelled to the states together from a Cree village on the Great Whale River near Hudson Bay, about 900 miles from Vermont, in order to bring themselves and their plight closer to the consciousness of Americans. Leaving on a dog sled on March 7, the group paddled into Burlington on Thursday, April 5, in an "odeyak," a boat built by native elders that is half canoe and half kayak, to symbolize the union of the Cree, who use ca-

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Heterosexism

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every member of the group gets hurt, because each thinks, "It could just as easily have been me."

According to Russell, the Vermont State Legislature is in the midst of reviewing a Hate Crimes Bill which would impose additional penalties and/or the option of civil penalties in a case where a crime is hate-motivated.

Hydro-Quebec

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noes, and the Inuit, who use kayaks. They were welcomed by about two hundred people, including Mayor Peter Clavelle. Their goal was to paddle to New York City by Earth Day, April 22.

The Cree and Inuit came to the United States to draw attention to the destruction threatened by Phase II of Hydro-Quebec and to save their land. On Saturday, April 7, their "odeyak" pulled into the summer camp on Lake Dunmore and they ate a potluck supper near an tended fire with Oddsen and other Middlebury students and Vermonters.

The necessity for cultural relocation of the Cree and Inuit lies in the fact that both cultures live off of the land which will be demolished. They eat the caribou, white fish, pike, goose and seal meat that local hunters catch in the Great Whale River or harpoon in the bay.

In addition, the social impact resulting from Hydro-Quebec's Phase I foretells the same for Phase II. Matthew Mukash, a 39-year old Cree Indian, told Monica Allen, a *Sunday Rutland Herald* reporter about the village of Radisson, built next to the Indian village of Chisasibi, where the Phase I dam was built in 1975. Radisson, where white Hydro-Quebec workers live, has a shopping mall, new schools, and new houses.

In Chisasibi, on the other hand,

vated. Under the Reagan Administration the Hate Crimes Committee found the group most victimized by hate crimes to be gay men and lesbians. Despite this finding, the Vermont state legislature raised controversy over the appearance of the term "sexual orientation" in the Hate Crimes Bill.

Similarly, Russell explained, when the Gay Rights Bill suggested

drug abuse and suicide thrive. A road was built that connected Radisson and Chisasibi in the 1970's. It was though that this road would benefit the Cree, but it only introduced these problems, which were rare before the 1970's. The natives want to keep their villages free of outside influences to prevent these problems from further developing.

"After meeting the Cree and Inuit, I couldn't see myself being part of buying power from it [Hydro-Quebec] and to destroy their land," Oddsen said. "They'd be put on a reservation... they'd be moved from their community."

"They get compensated in money, but money doesn't help them because the money just leads towards gambling and drinking... things that city life brings to the Indian culture," she added.

After seeing a slide show and participating in a discussion with the Cree and Inuit the same night as the Lake Dunmore dinner, Oddsen and other members of the college community have written letters to the Public Service Board and to Governor Kunin urging them to reject Hydro-Quebec Phase II.

A "Black Out" was also organized on Wednesday, April 18, where students and faculty at thirteen colleges in Vermont, including about 50 people at Middlebury, boycotted power by not using electricity that day. A speak-out was staged on the

adding the term "sexual orientation" to the existing non-discriminatory clause, it failed because people claimed it would be a special privilege for gay people.

"When we included the term 'race,' was that special privilege for black people? When we included the term 'sex,' was that special privilege for women?" Russell asked. "Every one of us has a sex; every one of us

steps of a theater in Burlington which focused on energy efficiency.

On Friday, April 20, Oddsen and a few other members of the Middlebury community were able to meet with George Stierzinger, the Commissioner of the Public Service Department, to express their opposition to Hydro-Quebec. They talked for about an hour and a half, she said, but Stierzinger held firm in his support of the energy program.

has a race; every one of us has a sexual orientation. So every one of us is equally protected under that."

According to Russell, homophobia affects not only the behavior of straight people, but it also affects the behavior of gay people as well.

"I've had to learn what the risk factors are," Russell said. "I've had to learn what situations probably aren't safe and what situations are more safe, and what actions I need to take in order to keep me as safe as possible. That's hypervigilance. I can't turn it off."

Hypervigilance, Russell pointed out, is prevalent in oppressed communities. Women, too, he explained, are very aware of their environment

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