

## BC's River Piracy

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A select few industrialists and their politician friends are withholding vital information about BC Hydro that could destroy the Crown corporation and send power prices soaring. Billions of dollars worth of electric power contracts are being negotiated in secret and supporting legislation passed through orders in council, with no public debate.

Premier Gordon Campbell is not allowing the public, or even municipal governments which most closely represent the public, to have input on any private hydroelectric developments, following passage of Bill 30. As a result, various stakeholder and citizen groups are now organizing their own meetings to examine the facts.

On March 22, World Water Day, we need to talk about dividing resources among the populations of Earth as corporations increasingly "buy" public water assets. Canadians are no different from the people of Congo or Bolivia. To believe we are immune to water thefts will cost us dearly. Former prime minister Brian Mulroney started it when he agreed to a NAFTA provision which included water as a commodity, after promising Canadians he would never sign away our water.

If readers take nothing else from this article, they should be aware of this: The people of BC have been receiving 100 percent of the benefits from BC Hydro because of a system put in place in the 1950s. Now we will get only three percent because of private power purchase agreements. BC Hydro is being loaded with enormous debt, enough to eventually bankrupt it as future income from hydroelectricity is being diverted into private contracts.

The BC energy plan was imposed on us without debate and utility rates will never stop rising because of it. The Ashlu River power licence, for instance, was sold to Ledcor for \$10,000. The public overwhelmingly rejected Ledcor's zoning application to the regional district. The BC government signed a power purchase agreement between Ledcor and BC Hydro that guarantees that the people of BC will buy power from the licensee at inflated prices for 40 years. After that the licence holder can sell BC power for whatever the market will bare anywhere in North America.

Water licences come with ownership of adjacent lands plus the dams, turbines, tunnels and other facilities will belong to the company in perpetuity. If the Ashlu River project gets connected to the grid, it will initially generate at least \$50 million per year in income to the private owners.

Whether you know about TILMA, SPP, NAFTA, WTO or the US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission or not, BC is very close to an energy catastrophe.

Hundreds of rivers are at risk and we will never get back to an efficient, functional BC Hydro if we don't act now.

The BC Utilities Commission found that the premier's offer of \$203 million per year in perpetuity to Alcan for power was not in the public interest. The profit was 1,320 percent and there was an extra gift of \$100 million as a signing bonus for Alcan.

Currently, there are private purchase orders with BC Hydro worth \$24 billion, which need public scrutiny. The rule of law makes us different from other places in the world. It is time to invoke the rule of law. A fully transparent inquiry is necessary to avert what has the potential to become BC's crime of the century. In the simplest of terms the people of British Columbia are being defrauded of their energy sources and their water.

All across the province, work crews are assembling for an assault on more than 500 wilderness rivers and the premier is still trying to give Alcan the Nechako River. When Campbell announces his next move soon, he will say the Natives are supportive of the government. A public inquiry would allow time for the truth to come out, which is that the indigenous

people of BC are not nearly as supportive of these private hydro deals as the government would have us believe.  
Resources:

[www.worldwaterday.org](http://www.worldwaterday.org)

[www.ourrivers.ca](http://www.ourrivers.ca)

[www.hydrofactsbc.ca](http://www.hydrofactsbc.ca)

[www.publicpowerbc.ca](http://www.publicpowerbc.ca)

[www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org)

[www.citizensforpublicpower.ca](http://www.citizensforpublicpower.ca)

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