

Activists gather at Queen's Park to protest rising cost of hydro

By Nate Smelle

As the cost of energy continues to rise more and more people are now finding it difficult to keep the lights on in their homes. When the news recently broke that Premier Kathleen Wynne planned to sell-off the publicly-owned company Hydro One, many already having problems keeping up with higher prices for electricity began organizing to take their message to Queen's Park in Toronto to tell Wynne and others in government that privatization is not the answer to this energy crisis.

Buses from all over Ontario loaded up early on the morning of Wednesday, May 13 before making the trek to Toronto to make their voices heard. A bus left Bancroft as well, shuttling 18 activists from the area to the demonstration. Kimberly Sargent rode the bus from Bancroft on this day to be part of the protest.

Sargent says the rising costs of hydro are making it increasingly harder for people to afford to go about their daily routines. Like many others in Ontario she has had to make adjustments to her schedule in order to keep the costs down. This means baking and doing laundry on the weekends when the fees for time-of-use are lower. It also means wearing an extra sweater and slippers around the house in the winter instead of turning up the electric heat. Pointing out that the OPG and Hydro One had 11,376 employees on the Sunshine List (\$100,000+ annual salary) in 2013 she believes the cutbacks need to start with the top executive salaries.

"It's ridiculous the salaries that these people are making," said Sargent.

"It is a monopoly that is getting rich off the little man, the farmer, the single mom and the working class."

Rather than forcing consumers to carry the weight of the rising cost of electricity, Sargent would like to see Hydro One re-structured to better serve the Ontario taxpayer. The first step, she said is to stop any further privatization and put hydro back in the hands of the public before things get any worse.

"Bay Street will be the only ones to gain," she said, "the ones that are given shares."

Although countries like Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark have had enormous success in producing renewable energy by harnessing the power of the sun and the wind, some of the protesters still think the Ontario government needs to scrap its European-inspired Green Energy Act. According to Sargent the province would be better off if it cut its ties to wind and solar farms that are selling electricity back to Hydro One through the Feed-In-Tariff (FIT) program.

While everyone in the crowd of protesters agreed that the privatization of hydro in Ontario will not be a good thing for Ontarians, not all of the demonstrators saw eye to eye on the role of renewable energy in solving this energy crisis. Renewable energy activist, Petra Boshko also made the trip south to Queen's Park on May 13 to make her voice heard. Rather than driving the cost of electricity up, she believes adding wind and solar power to the power grid will help bring the price down.

"The longer we wait to get onboard with these technologies the more it is going to cost us," said Boshko.

"When you look at how far ahead countries like Germany are you start to realize how far we have to go in Canada. Without wind turbines and solar panels powering our homes the cost will only continue to rise. Nuclear power plants are far too expensive to build and maintain. And who wants that waste in their backyard anyways? Not me."