

BC HYDRO: OUR MODERN DAY SCROOGE

by Richard Caniell

There is growing indignation at the effrontery of the BC Government and BC Hydro, for crafting their Smart Meter program to force them on people who don't want them. Recognizing a serious danger in this, many people have resisted. I'm not just talking about the danger of cancer, fire, or invasion of privacy. I'm referring to the extortionate tactics in which Hydro has levied a government-approved, punitive fee of \$32.40 a month, upon anyone who refuses the Smart Meter.

Refusal to pay the fee brings threats to disconnect one's electricity, and there is a growing number of disconnections in BC. Many people like myself recognize this is a dangerous assault on certain basic freedoms.

Hydro claims that it offers British Columbians an "option" of refusing the meters, but it's a stacked deck. Many people cannot afford to have \$32.40 (\$389 a year) tacked onto their electricity bill every month. As one person said: "When was the last time you paid to not have something? It's extortion, I refuse to do it."

The definition of extortion is agreeing to not harm someone by word or action for the payment of money. With the Mafia, one pays to avoid being beaten up or worse; with BC Hydro and the BC Liberals, one pays to avoid illnesses that have been linked to the wireless radiation used in Smart Meters (including brain cancer), or the possibility of having one's house burned down.

Of course, Hydro and the government believe that their demand is not extortion, because the fee they are charging is for a service, namely having meter readers continue to read your old analogue meter. But Energy Minister Bill Bennett has openly admitted in the press that the opt-out fees were purposely set high to force people to accept the meters ("Bennett said he expects, once smart-meter opponents are forced to pay the extra fee, that many will drop their objections", *Vancouver Sun*, March 21, 2014).

And if there's any doubt that BC's opt-out fee is swollen with the coercive, punitive, and exploitative intent of the Liberal government, consider that Quebec originally charged \$17 per month to opt-out, later reduced that under criticism to \$8, and then was ordered by the Quebec energy board to reduce it further to \$5. In the US, several states allow residents to keep their old analogue meters for *no fee*, and some of these allow residents to read their own meters.

Hydro and the government also claim that no harm is done by the meters — it's only the belief that they are harmful that produces the problem. Even if that were so, we don't excuse people for holding someone up with a fake gun. If the victim believes the gun is real, he/she has no choice but to hand over his or her money. It's still extortion! And, in the case of Smart Meter radiation, people's belief that the danger is real is backed up by numerous medical doctors and researchers, and by media reports of Smart Meter fires in BC and other provinces and states.

Disconnection in winter: the gun to our heads

When it comes to disconnecting people's electricity for failure to pay the opt-out penalty, there is no question that that is very harmful to people. These threats have an especially coercive force in winter. No one can live in our province in winter without a source of heat. People who don't have an alternative source of heat have no choice but to accept a Smart Meter or pay up. And even if they do have an alternative, they still lose their lights in

a season when the days are very short; they lose their hot water, as well as necessary appliances such as stoves, refrigerators and freezers. A generator cannot replace what electricity does; fuel costs for a constantly-running gas-powered generator would be prohibitive.

Hydro's notice of disconnection warns those who are to be thrust into the frigid winter darkness to save their pipes from freezing. Ann Findrik, in Kamloops, who had paid all her electricity bills but not the \$32.40 penalty fee, had her electricity turned off on November 19, 2014. During the subsequent cold snap, her water pipes burst.

In Kamloops, BC Hydro shut off the electricity of two families. In one case, the father was concerned with the meter impacts on health, with the fact that a power surge had blown seven meters as far as ten feet from the houses on which they were mounted, and with the numerous fires caused by Smart Meters. His own certification to work in electronics and electricity has led him to believe that even a Smart Meter with the radio turned off is not fire safe. Nevertheless, this family tried to pay to have their power reconnected, but Hydro refused unless they would accept a Smart Meter.

Several Slocan Valley residents are living through the winter with their electricity disconnected, including Craig Pettitt, Kip Drobish and David Butt. Why do some people feel *that* strongly about this?

I have refused to pay the penalty fee, and I live in the snow belt, up on Red Mountain, in a log house, alone, in my 83rd year, recovering from surgery. I have paid every electricity charge in full, but have refused to pay the penalty fee. That makes no difference, given the telephone taped message I received three days before Christmas Eve: "Your electricity will be disconnected within 24 hours."

This was Hydro's holiday gift. The threat was sure to generate worry, panic, and payment under protest from most people, because few can stand no light or heat in winter. It appears that if Hydro could control food and water, they'd stop that from reaching those they mean to punish, and make it more preposterous by warning people to be careful not to starve.

What else can they do to collect their punitive fees, one might ask? They could do what other businesses do: turn over the yearly accumulated unpaid fees to a collection agency, (but that would cost them a percentage). Or they could sue for it in court (but that would allow the defendants to present the reasons why they refuse to pay). So, the only way Hydro sees to force the payment is to deprive persons of the essentials to live, even while they are using power derived from rivers and lakes that belong to the electorate, the very people they are oppressing.

Dismissing the opposition

In two very brief broadcasts on January 21, 2015, CBC aired interviews with myself and Craig Pettitt. A BC Hydro spokesman claimed that we represented a very small segment of the population that is holding out — just a small disorderly group. This statement produced a very false impression, as if the Smart Meters had almost total acceptance. On the contrary, tens of thousands have been pushed into acceptance against their will by Hydro's exorbitant fees and notices of disconnection of electricity.

When Smart Meters were first introduced in BC, some 85,000 people refused them, outraged that they were given no choice. The government backed down and stated that homeowners could choose (up

to the next election). After being re-elected, the Liberals emerged with a plan to overcome the homeowners resistance with a high opt-out fee, \$35.00 monthly, and an order that the BC Utilities Commission could not consider any question but the amount of the fee.

Meter reading ruse

Hydro claimed it had to have this sum to pay its meter readers, but the BCUC, while not protesting how it had been hamstrung, reduced the fee to \$32.40. As has been shown in my earlier articles, it is charged only to those who refuse a Smart Meter. To the 46,000 who had Smart Meters but still required a meter reader because of their location, there was no charge. BC Hydro's spokesperson explained the exemptions as existing "because these 46,000 have accepted Hydro's standard (Smart Meter) equipment". Translated, this means those who don't accept Smart Meters are to be punished under the false claim that it is needed for meter readers.

According to the COPE Union, 70 of the nearly 400 meter readers in BC were retained — almost all the rest were fired. The remaining readers must service some 19,820 meters belonging to people who refused a Smart Meter. Of these, 19,000 of these households retain old meters and pay the \$389.00 per year penalty; the remainder have Smart Meters with the radio turned off and pay \$20.00 per month (\$240.00 a year). The total in approximate figures is \$7,640,544. This would mean Hydro would be paying each of the 70 meter readers \$109,240 per year in salary, or approximately \$9,000 a month. Does anyone believe this outside of BC Hydro?

More Smart Meters revoked for causing fires

In 2014 Saskatchewan, in response to fires caused by Smart Meters, ordered the removal of thousands of meters. And just recently, Ontario ordered some 5,400 meters removed. BC Hydro claims that it uses a safer brand of Smart Meter. Nevertheless, BC has had numerous Smart Meter related fires and failures, the most recent of which occurred in Chilliwack in January of this year.

Meanwhile, in May 2012 some 39 municipalities in BC opposed, by motion, the installation of Smart Meters. Hydro insists it will not abide by these motions or ordinances and has not done so.

Denials about health impacts of wireless radiation

As shown in previous articles, BC Hydro has supported its oppressive tactics with false claims. Its claim that the World Health Organization (WHO) had found Smart Meters to be safe was grossly untrue. But in addition, there is a huge government and industry campaign to deny and cover-up the impacts of wireless radiation.

The following is an excerpt from a letter by Dr. David O. Carpenter, M.D., Director, Institute for Health and the Environment, University of Albany, USA. It was signed by 50 medical doctors, professors and scientists from all over the world:

"We, the undersigned are a group of scientists and health professionals who together have coauthored hundreds of peer-reviewed studies on the health effects of electromagnetic fields (EMFs). We wish to correct some of the gross misinformation found in the letter regarding wireless "smart" meters that was published in the Montreal daily *Le Devoir* on May 24...

"The statement that 'Thousands

of studies, both epidemiological and experimental in humans, show no increase in cancer cases as a result of exposure to radio waves of low intensity... ' is false. In fact, only a few such studies — two dozen case-control studies of mobile phone use, certainly not thousands, have reported no elevations of cancer, and most were funded by the wireless industry. In addition, these reassuring studies contained significant experimental design flaws, mainly the fact that the populations followed were too small and were followed for a too short period of time....

"Wireless smart meters typically produce atypical, relatively potent and very short pulsed RF/microwaves whose biological effects have never been fully tested. They emit these millisecond-long RF bursts on average 9,600 times a day with a maximum of 190,000 daily transmissions and a peak level emission two and a half times higher than the stated safety signal, as the California utility Pacific Gas & Electric recognized before that State's Public Utilities Commission. Thus people in proximity to a smart meter are at risk of significantly greater aggregate of RF/microwave exposure than with a cell phone, not to mention the cumulative exposure received by people living near multiple meters mounted together, pole-mounted routers or utility collector meters using a third antenna to relay RF signals from 500 to 5,000 homes.

"People are exposed to cell phone microwaves primarily in the head and neck, and only when they use their device. With smart meters, the entire body is exposed to the microwaves, which increases the risk of overexposure to many organs....

"This is why so many scientists and medical experts urgently recommend that measures following the Precautionary Principle be applied immediately — such as using wired meters — to reduce biologically inappropriate microwave exposure."

The Liberal government and BC Hydro practice a total willed blindness to the research from which these scientists and medical doctors speak. What is exhibited is nothing but naked, heartless self-interest — greed and its use of unscrupulous means, decorated always with fine words about responsibilities and common welfare.

Frankly, I'm disgusted with the NDP Opposition. After a year's silence Adrian Dix recently took a good step with a press release urging reduced opt-out fees. But, after stating that the fee is punitive and grossly out of line with what other utilities are charging, the press release shows an appalling indifference to Hydro disconnecting people's electricity — in winter, no less — to collect it. Preposterously, it merely asks for "clarification" of Hydro's policy on whether it will disconnect people between November and March or not. And all the while, Dix *knows* that electricity IS being turned off in winter, so it needs no such declaration. Throughout one sees that cowardly political instincts, which avoid controversy, have replaced sympathetic instincts and courage. Who, that still possesses a mind and heart, and even rudimentary principles of fair-dealing and honesty, would not be disgusted by what has transpired in 2014 and transpires still?

(To be continued in the next *Valley Voice*.)