

Open letter to Meb Cutlack

July 3, 2002

Dear Meb Cutlack,

Your weekly tirades against FORTIS, BECOL and the Chalillo project are clearly designed to deliberately misinform the general public, as none of your articles state the benefits Chalillo would provide the Belizean public. No one individual, presented so many times with the facts, can so blatantly ignore them unless that person has an agenda or his sole interest is to misinform. You have demonstrated week after week that you do not care about the truth and your disregard for the facts is a grave disservice to your readers. Your anti-*Amandala*, anti-Chalillo article in the Reporter of June 30, 2002 is a further example of your one-sided reporting and disregard for the truth.

In that article, you have reverted to using scare tactics, claiming that the dam would break under floods. Contrary to what you wrote, the damages that occurred from the floods on the Belize River last week would not have happened if Chalillo were in place. Chalillo is designed to ensure that floods are minimized. A director of the Belize Zoo, with no engineering qualifications, initiated the misinformation about the dam foundation being

inadequate. We have pointed out to you and the director many times that the geological characteristic of the site makes for excellent dam foundation. As far as we know, he is the only so called "expert" that believes that the foundation is inadequate. Every other competent geologist and engineer that studied the geology of the Chalillo basin agrees that the foundation is very competent and suitable for dam construction.

For the record, BEL and BECOL are both Belizean companies that are fully run by Belizean professionals. Yes, Fortis is the majority owner of both companies, but ownership can and does change from time to time. At any rate, it is a good thing that the Chalillo project is backed by a strong, independent company interested in doing what is best for its customers, such as FORTIS. The environmental extremists have demonstrated that they have the power to stop any government project in Belize by intimidating the banks and manipulating the local international media through "reporters for hire" (the landfill at Mile 27 is a good example.)

At 1 1/2 Belize cents per kWh, Chalillo will provide the lowest cost power available to us in Belize. You have yet to demonstrate that bagasse

or electricity from hemp (your highly touted recommended alternative to Chalillo) is less expensive. We challenge you to demonstrate that any of these alternatives is indeed cheaper, or quit mis-informing the public. You also conveniently overlook the fact that Belize has to pay out more money in foreign exchange, than would be the case with Chalillo (which will average 1 1/2 Belize cents per kWh), to purchase power from Mexico, or to purchase diesel engines, diesel fuel, and the spares needed to maintain the diesel machines. You also do not tell your readers that a bagasse facility, or any other generating facility for that matter, will require a large sum of US dollars to build the plant - money which will have to be paid back to some foreign investors or foreign bank in US dollars.

The Chalillo Project has been the most widely debated project in Belize. But despite all the negative efforts of yourself and others with similar agendas, the majority of Belizeans continue to support the project. Clearly, they see through the hypocrisy of "reporters" whose only apparent motive is to misinform. Belizeans understand the need for the project and the benefits that will accrue to Belize. We value and appreciate the confidence that the

public has placed in us and will continue to work in their best interest, notwithstanding the efforts of the environmental extremists from Washington, high paid lawyers and reporters with hidden agendas.

Sincerely,
Joseph R. Sukhmandan
Project Manager

cc: Belize Times, *Amandala*
Guardian

(Ed. NOTE: The letter reflects the opinions of the writer and not necessarily those of this newspaper. Meb Cutlack has the right of reply.)