

Fortis and Chalillo

By **Herbert Panton**

I must admit that I started out as an environmentalist. Going through primary school and high school I was fascinated by the natural beauty and wonder of this country. When I visited the Mountain Piné Ridge as a boy scout for summer camp back in the early eighties, I was totally captivated.

There is a saying that youths are idealistic and when you become older you become realistic. Realism has now set in and I am not as idealistic as I used to be. My conservative hard line approach to the environment has been replaced by a sustainable development co-existence philosophy. I am of the opinion that man and nature must work hand in hand for the betterment of all.

It makes no sense to have over half the landmass in this country designated as national parks when land is an essential component of development.

The land and environment should not be protected from people; they should be protected for people. It is the sustained, sober use of our environmental resources that will dictate how long we have on this earth.

It is from this perspective then that I personally leaned towards the belief that Chalillo should be built. I was perfectly willing to sacrifice that small portion of the environment so that development could proceed. In researching Chalillo over the last few weeks, however, I have come to understand that environmental concerns are but a small component of the Chalillo debate. Unfortunately, because the environmentalists are the ones leading the charge against Chalillo, a lot of the message is lost because of who the messenger is.

BACONGO has a wealth of information on the entire energy sector in Belize and has done a remarkable job of fighting against Chalillo. Unfortu-

nately, because it is an environmental organization, a lot of what BACONGO puts out is lost.

Chalillo is about Globalization, it is about big business, it is about monopolies. It is about a questionable economic future for this country, and it is about millions of dollars. Fortis, the parent company of BEL is a multinational with one thing in mind - profit. That would not be so bad if that profit was acquired by hard work, taking risks and taking on the challenges of an ever-changing market. Fortis' profit, however, is to my mind about monopoly, and an elbow throwing business ethic that could never be practised in Newfoundland, home of its Corporate Headquarters.

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC), the statutory body charged with responsibility to protect the rights of customers, is of little or no help. The amendment to the Electricity Act, which clearly defines 'Licensee' as any legal

person or entity licensed to produce, generate, store, transmit, sell, deliver or supply electricity to or for the public, is already being broken. The Public Utilities Commission lists the Belize Electricity Limited as the only Public Utility provider involved in the production, generation and transmission of electricity.

Under the amendment, BECOL, should also be treated as a public utility provider but BECOL still continues to operate with impunity. This is only one of many shortcomings of the Electricity tariffs, charges and Quality of Service Standards Byelaws. This amendment to the Electricity Act, outlines the rate setting methodologies for electric utility companies. True to form, it rationalizes every penny of profit made by BEL, even protecting the company from downturns and upturns in the cost of fuel and other operating costs; and calmly overlooks the millions being raked in by BECOL.

In last week's Amandala CEO of BEL Lyn Young stated that if Chalillo is not built, rates will have to be increased. The fact of the matter is that with or without Chalillo there is no guarantee on rates either staying where they are or going down. Chalillo according to CEO Lyn Young himself, is only part of the answer to our energy needs.

The cost benefit analysis of Chalillo then, must take this into account, and considering the economic, environmental and all the other factors, Chalillo should not be built.