

Queen's Park

Hydro marches through

By ALF STONG
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HYDRO RATES

The issue of hydro construction and the establishment of transmission lines through Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham seems to have been determined by the Ministers of Energy and Environment.

The Minister of the Environment has consistently and steadfastly denied any hearing into the environmental impact of such a line and has given the nod to proceed to Ontario Hydro even though there will be people affected along the proposed route.

At present a group of interested citizens of the Halton-Burlington area is contemplating a Court action before the Federal Court in order to obtain an injunction against hydro which would, if successful, prohibit hydro from constructing transmission lines for the purpose of exporting electric power.

Insofar as that application deals with Hydro's mandate to supply to Ontario consumers its ramifications are far reaching and could actually affect the construction now under way through the Town of Vaughan.

Dealing with the cost of hydro from another angle, my colleague Eddie Sargent (Liberal MPP, Owen Sound) has

re-introduced his Private Member's Bill on electricity rates.

This Bill incorporated the "Lifeline" idea (as it's known in jurisdiction where it's now in use), which provided a low, fixed-price for the amount of electricity used by each household.

Beyond that basic amount, the rates per kilowatt hour move progressively higher. In other words, the more you use, the more you pay.

It is to be hoped that this Bill will receive approval, particularly if the current Ministry review of hydro rates does not support such a change in provincial rate structure.

RACISM

The provincial government has created a separate race relations division within the Human Rights Commission to combat racial bias and discrimination in Ontario.

"As recent events have shown, we cannot be complacent about the imperative to treat visible minorities, who form such an important part of our social fabric, with fairness and equity," said the Minister of Labour, who is responsible for the commission.

The government has also established a special cabinet committee on racism, comprising the Attorney-General, the

Minister of Education and the Minister of Culture and Recreation.

In this connection, the new Solicitor-General's task force on racial and ethnic implications of police hiring, training and promotion won't arrive at any "Mickey Mouse package deal" solutions when it reports in June, according to its chairman, Reva Gerstein, a Toronto psychologist.

She stated that many people think police officers can be cured of prejudice through audio-visual aids and other devices.

Her approach is to try to make individuals understand the roots of their own prejudices and deal with them.

She said that police, like people in general, "are entitled to their prejudices — it's how they handle them that's important".

"Police are not social workers," she said. "They're doing a very tough job... You have to work on the premise that the more understanding and knowledge people have the less likely it is that their blood pressure will rise."

DISCRIMINATION

Legislation to prohibit discrimination against physically handicapped and mentally retarded people in housing, employment and in public places such as restaurants has been

introduced. This will be enforced by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Fines of up to \$10,000 are proposed.

The Minister of Labour said the bill would protect the physically disabled, including epileptics, the mentally retarded and others with learning disabilities, and people with a past history of mental illness from discrimination.

ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

The Minister of the Environment has defended the practice of setting pollution standards based on "hopeful thinking" rather than realistic possibilities, maintaining that many control orders were imposed in the hope of several things — "one being that better technology would be developed."

He acknowledged that sometimes the hoped-for techniques were not quickly available and less stringent standards were then ordered, and said "I don't think that's all that bad... better we should set a high level and hope to stimulate them to do something... I don't apologize for setting high goals."

On the other hand, the Ontario Liberal Leader accused the Minister of weakening the ministry's credibility by setting meaningless environ-

mental standards, then backing down. He asked the Minister to explain why an Abitibi paper company mill was originally ordered to limit pollution to 50 mg. per litre of waste dumped into the Sturgeon River, then told it could meet a standard of 190 mg. per litre.

The Minister responded "Fifty milligrams was a number that was put there. We asked the Ontario Research Foundation to tell the public whether it was possible to live up to that order... It wasn't."

JAIL GUARDS

More than 200 jail guards and their supporters demonstrated on the steps of the Legislature this week to dramatize their demand for a separate collective bargaining unit within the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

Organizers had asked the Chairman of the Management Board, responsible for administering the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, to address the demonstration, but no government representative appeared.

Jail guards were members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees before the Act's passage. Since their assignment to the health care category of the OPSEU, their wage levels have slipped badly.

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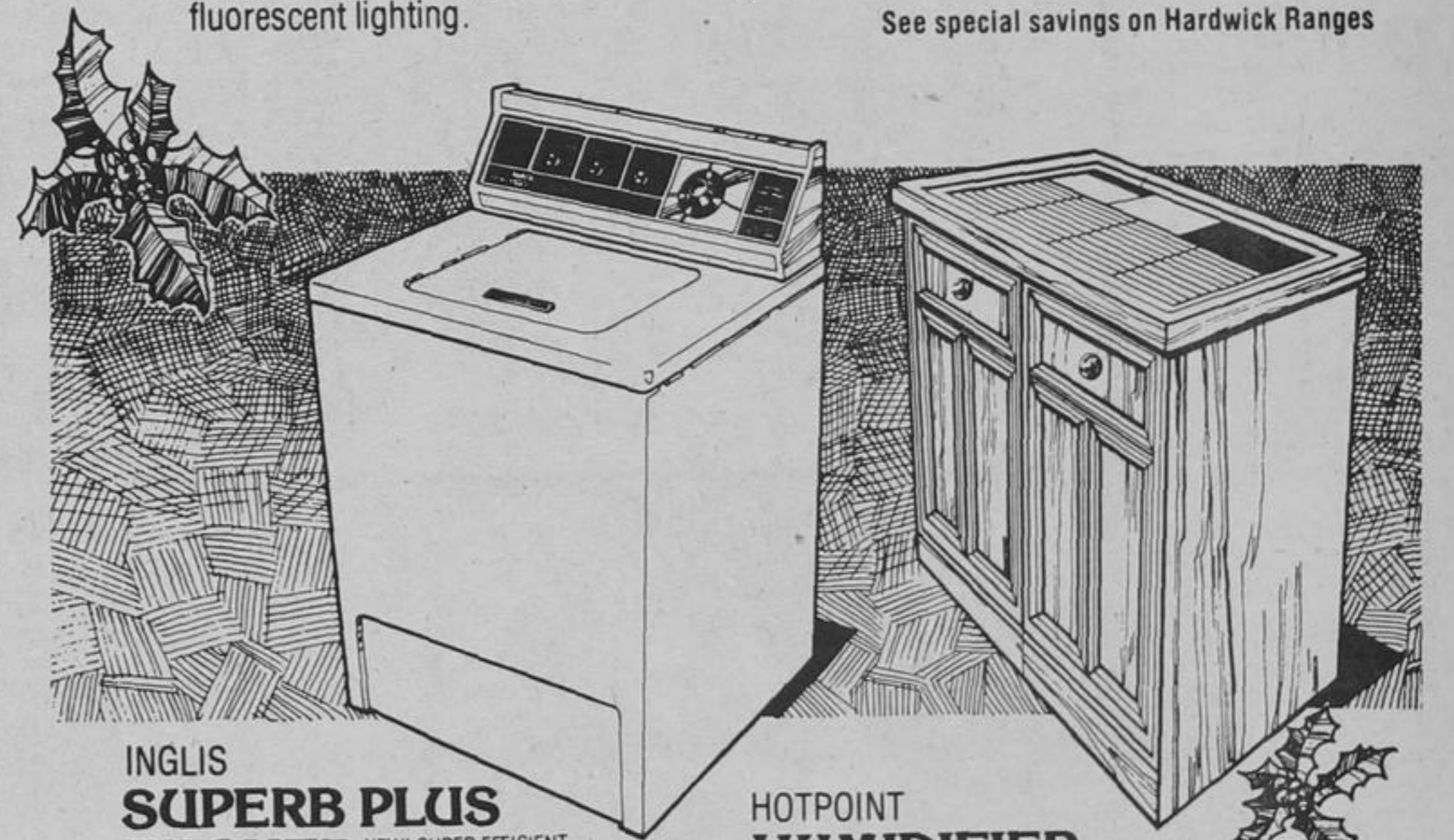
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