

Tidbits & Outrages

IF YOU WISH TO REINSTATE YOUR THERMONUCLEAR LAUNCH CAPABILITY, A DEPOSIT OF \$32.50 WILL BE REQUIRED

The New York Times reports that last September, the Moscow electric authority without warning severed all power to Russia's Strategic Nuclear Missile Command Center because the facility had not paid its electrical bill.

OLD MCDONALD HAD A CONDO...

A computer analysis prepared by the Environmental Working Group shows that from 1985 to 1994, the Department of Agriculture paid nearly \$2 billion in farm subsidies to individuals living in or around the nation's 50 biggest cities.

IF IT PLEASE THE COURT...

Former Reagan administration solicitor general Charles Fried, who twice argued before the Supreme Court against *Roe v. Wade* but who is currently being considered for a Massachusetts judgeship by pro-choice governor William Weld, now says he is "entirely comfortable with the state of the law on abortion."

"YES, TODD, TAMMY FAYE AND I ARE VERY INTERESTED..."

Die, honest. Your call to 310-333-3333 leave message.

LIE FOR \$\$\$.

Fox Television wants you for a new show. Call Todd at 213-856-1627.

MASS-TRAINED Student/Therapist for ing 8y.o. victim's family in R-

"I DON'T KNOW, JED, I THINK WE BETTER HOLD OFF ON MUSKET CONTROL UNTIL NEXT SESSION"

Last March, 130 years after the Civil War, the Mississippi state legislature finally approved a resolution ratifying the U.S. constitutional amendment banning slavery.

BUT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH ALL THESE SOUVENIRS?

The California State Assembly had to correct a bill saluting Yellowstone National Park as one of the state's major tourist attractions when it was pointed out that it's located in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

—Scott Shuger

They Stopped the Sky From Falling

*The James Bay story explains
why environmentalists, having
created one of the most
successful political movements
of the twentieth century, still
aren't cheering in the streets.*

BY GREGG EASTERBROOK

The strangest place I have ever stood, in a fortunate life that has taken me to such ulterior locales as the freight-loading docks of Dar es Salaam and the cloakroom of the United States Congress, was a penstock at the LaGrande Two hydroelectric power complex near the Arctic Circle in Quebec.

Hundreds of feet underground, I looked up into the shaft, wide enough for a subway train, blasted and grooved from a shield of rock millions of years old, that would join the waters of a reservoir above to power turbines below. Shining upward, a strong flashlight beam diffused into a seemingly infinite blackness. Around a corner behind me sat the nearly completed turbine intake, an arrangement of descending curvilinear shapes similar in appearance to a conch. Thousands of hours of computer simulation had gone into the design of the angles in the receiver. Once the frigid waters poised above were released by the two-foot-thick steel doors that restrained them, they would tumble through generators making about as much power as one of the units at Three Mile Island. I asked my guide if there were any chance some technician would throw the door-open switch by accident. He laughed in an edgy way, then almost immediately suggested it might be a good idea to leave. When we emerged into the daylight above it was ten o'clock on a fine sunny morning, and minus-28 degrees Fahrenheit.

The LaGrande Two station is part of the vast James Bay hydropower project under construction in subarctic Quebec. The James Bay project, which has hewn dozens of dams into a region rich with glacial rivers, already generates about as much power as five Three Mile Island stations. Soon the number will rise to about nine Three Mile Islands. If all the region's hydraulic gradients are tapped, the output of about 25 Three Mile Islands would be realized.

Like other hydropower enterprises, the project burns no fossil fuel and emits no greenhouse gases, smog, or toxic or solid wastes. Older-generation hydropower projects were planned with output and low cost as their goals, with ecology an afterthought. The LaGrande portion of the James Bay

Gregg Easterbrook is a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly, Newsweek, and The Washington Monthly. This article is adapted from his new book, A Moment on the Earth (Viking).