

ENBRIDGE PIPELINE: WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?¹

Rafe Mair[©]

The Enbridge proposed pipeline from the Tar Sands to Kitimat has been much in focus since the terrible spill by Enbridge into the Kalamazoo River recently. This is the same company - which has a pathetic safety record, incidentally - that proposes a *"1,170-kilometre pipeline moving petroleum from Edmonton to the deep-sea port of Kitimat on the central B.C. coast, and a smaller companion pipeline moving condensate along the same route."*²

British Columbians should be asking a lot of questions, which they no doubt will, which will be answered by the first class PR division of Enbridge. One of their favourite answers - and I'm not sure the example is right but it's only by way of illustration - is that there are only 300 barrels of oil spilled for every 1,000,000 shipped. As I say, the numbers could be different but they ignore, conveniently, that the oil/sludge isn't spilled 100 barrels at a time.

Let's look at what's in it for BC. In a word, virtually nothing. This isn't a BC company employing the people of BC. There are no taxes from Enbridge. At best perhaps some "peppercorn" rent for the right-of-way. And what do we get? A disaster waiting to happen! A gloomy prediction? Of course it is but it's a fact. It's simple mathematics and logic. If you took a revolver with one hundred chambers and just one bullet and started pulling the trigger with the barrel at your temple, and you decided to do it 10 times, you run a risk and you can calculate it. If you decided to do it steadily for one hour, you run a risk and can calculate it. If, on the other hand, you pull that trigger with no limit as to numbers or no time limit, it ceases to be a risk but is a certainty waiting to happen.

Thus it is with a pipeline. And thus it is with the Trans-Alaska pipeline which spilled 5,000 barrels last May, which is only one of many. The citizens of Alaska wish to God they'd never approved it in the first place. Now we're not only dealing with a certain rupture of the pipeline, we're dealing with the uncertainty as to where the breach will come, how much will be spilled, and what damage will be done. The pipeline traverses some of the most important grazing regions of caribou, not to mention our great wilderness which, according the Campbell government, is the "best place on earth". Enbridge presents this undertaking as great news for Northern BC and Alberta. No doubt it helps Alberta to move its product - oil sludge - to its market (China) but what does it do for Northern BC?

We hear of employment but never are told that most of that employment will come from outside the province - nor that it will come mainly as short term construction jobs. In this regard it's reminiscent of the so-called "run-of-river" projects where the projects typically hire only a third local, and they are the lowest paying jobs. Who's going to patrol this pipeline and make sure that safety measures are observed? Presumably the same people who police the fish farms and the private power people in whose interest it is to exceed their flow regimes.

It's interesting to note that the oil/sludge, when it reaches Kitimat, is no longer Enbridge's responsibility but that of the tanker outfit which probably flies a flag of convenience and is

¹ The Common Sense Canadian, August 09, 2010

² Fallout from Enbridge's Michigan oil spill spreads to B.C. Carrie Tait and Julie Fortier, Financial Post, July 28, 2010

effectively not only ill equipped to handle a spill but has no assets to speak of as well. Do you think for a moment that Gordon (Pinocchio) Campbell will insist upon a very large bond to be posted by Enbridge or the tanker companies? Right! And pigs can fly. This project, then, does nothing for BC and presents the certainty of oil spills both on land and, once it gets to the tanker to China, on our coast. This is, plainly, a great deal for Enbridge and oil/sludge producers but a lousy one for BC and ought not to be even countenanced