

## **SADLY, VIOLENCE MAY BE ON THE WAY IN BATTLE FOR BC'S ENVIRONMENT<sup>1</sup>**

**Rafe Mair<sup>©</sup>**

I don't like the way things are heading in this province for I foresee violence.

**Damien Gillis and I, the "owners" if you will, of the Common Sense Canadian (TheCanadian.org) wish to make it abundantly clear that the very last thing we want is violence. At the same time we feel an obligation to assess what is happening and report that assessment to you. To be silent, in the face of the evidence we feel would be irresponsible.**

There are situations developing which past evidence clearly tells us that we must be deeply concerned. Violence happens when people, being so much less powerful than their oppressors - large companies and government - become frustrated with the inability to be heard and have their concerns listened to. Any who have attended one of the so-called environmental assessment meetings - as Damien and I have - will sense the deep anger and, that word again, frustration as they see the government and industry all but in each others' arms as they deny the public the right to be heard. If, God forbid, violence does come, the large companies and the senior governments will be clearly to blame but will piously cite the "rule of law," saying that they are merely taking what the law gives and that the public must accept that. The underlying truth is that the public is sick and tired of government and industry lying. If you look back in history, most civil disorder has been because the situation is not as the authorities and those who hide behind their skirts say it is.

First let's look at the fish farm issue. I know something about this subject because I involved myself in it from the beginning. For nearly 10 years now the Liberal government has known about the disastrous harm these fish farms do to migrating wild Pacific Salmon. Over and over the government has been shown by experts to be wrong in its policy and over and over the government has bobbed, weaved, and lied. Aggravating the situation big time has been the media who, rather than examine the evidence, have ignored it and given column after column on the op-ed page to supporters of the industry, especially to the environmentalist turncoat and failed fish farmer, Patrick Moore, and Mary Ellen Walling, the Executive Director of the Fish Farmers Association. Incidentally, Moore is now advising a large lumber company in Indonesia on how to wipe out their ever-diminishing rain forest and look "green" as it does so.

There are signs of life coming from the Cohen Commission on disappearing Fraser River sockeye, where the Commissioner has ordered fish farms to release data on sea lice. There is not, sad to say, similar action being taken by governments on Independent Power Projects (IPPs), nor pipelines and tankers on our coast. And this is where the violence will come, from unless a sea change is seen in government policy. The Axor Glacier-Howser undertaking in the Kootenays is the most serious IPP situation because the public has made it abundantly clear that they will do whatever is necessary to stop the project. I have no doubt that they mean it. I'll do more on that in columns to come but for today let's concentrate on the oil pipeline and tanker issues.

First, the pipeline from the Alberta Tar Sands to Kitimat proposed by Enbridge, whose safety

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record is appalling, is approximately 1200kms long over all with about 2/3 running across BC. In fact it's two pipelines – one to take the Tar Sands crud (aka bitumen) to Kitimat and the other to send back to Alberta in what they call "condensate," a liquid natural gas product. (Bitumen sludge is so viscous that it can't be pumped through a pipeline without first being diluted by condensate). Isn't this neat-o? We get twice as many chances for a spill!

Second, there is the issue of transporting the Tar Sands gunk down the BC Coast. (Don't forget that this shipping catastrophe in the making is already in place in Vancouver through the Kinder-Morgan pipeline, but that for another day). The governments involved (Federal, Alberta, and BC) and Enbridge don't want you to notice that the pipeline and the tanker are the same issue - like Doris Day used to sing about love and marriage, "you can't have one without the other." Let's not overlook another important point: These aren't risks involved here but certainties waiting to happen.

Imagine a revolver with 100 chambers and one bullet. If you put that to your head and say you'll just pull the trigger once, the odds are there and obvious. If you say you'll do it for a year the odds are shorter but still you're assessing a risk. If you say you will do it forever, it is no longer a risk but a certainty. Then there are the consequences to deal with. If the bullet is made of marshmallow, who cares? If it's a bullet, it's death!

The Tar Sands gunk is not marshmallow. If there aren't risks involved, why would the company concern itself with what isn't? But listen to what Enbridge spokesman Allan Roth had to say about tanker traffic: "There's been a tremendous amount of engineering studies and risk analysis studies. Extraordinary measures are planned with respect to marine safety and these are the highest modern standards for engineering...The risks have to tell us the probability (is) as close to zero or **very close to that** (my emphasis) before we would even propose the project." (The words "very close to that" must send a shiver down the backs of all British Columbians).

This reminds me of a story. Many years ago I was in the Anchor Pub in Greenwich, England and went into the loo. On the condom machine was etched "These condoms manufactured up to the UK's highest standards," over which was scribbled, "So was the Titanic." There you have it, Mr Roth, highest standards don't count when tragedy strikes.

Let us not overlook the pipeline itself. The ca. 800 km in BC transverse superb wildlife habitat including some 1,000 rivers and streams. Once permission - God forbid! - is granted Enbridge will go into its environmental protection mode, which is to do no serious inspections and, if tragedy strikes, bring help to bear in leisurely fashion as they did with the Kalamazoo River a few months ago, Of course they will explain their slowness saying that it's because the damage is in wild remote country – which is the reason they can't be inspected regularly and a very strong reason it should not be done. One need only look at the Kalamazoo spill to see what Enbridge's attitude is to spills – lethargic is too energetic a word to describe it.

In keeping with the morality of this industry, truth is no barrier to self-serving flackery. The usual corporate tactics have recently been exposed as Enbridge, with the airy wave of the hand, stated that First Nations are getting behind the projects. Really? Clearly Enbridge hasn't seen Damien Gillis' "Oil in Eden: The Battle to Protect Canada's Pacific Coast" (on this website), where President of the Coastal First Nations, Gerald Amos, and the formidable Gitga'at elder, Helen Clifton, made it abundantly clear that, in Chief Amos' words, these projects "are not going to happen." They were also caught off guard by an unprecedented joint declaration against the

project by over 60 First Nations last week, the day after they tried assuring the public and media everything was falling into place for the project with First Nations.

I sadly, but honestly believe that a showdown on the pipeline/tanker issue will raise tempers too short to handle. And there's another factor involved - the governments will point out that China has "invested" nearly \$2 BILLION in the Tar Sands and the bitumen is largely for them. Thus they will say we must give into China. Thus we will have the irresistible force meeting the immovable object. There is no compromise. You can't have a little bit less of a pipeline. It's all or nothing at all.

When the inevitable happens, the usual procedure will take place. Protesters will refuse to go away, the governments and companies will call the protesters nasty names and people will be jailed for contempt of court, a gross distortion of democracy that turns a civil dispute into a crime if that's what big government and big business so desire – and they will. The blame in fact will rest with the governments, joined as they are at the hip with environmental predators who keep their campaign coffers filled. The plain fact of the matter is that all three governments involved don't give a rat's ass for the environment or those who live in it and feel a sacred obligation to nurture it and pass it on intact for those to come.

How's this?

Times are changing and governments don't understand that. Citizens have little respect for what in my early days were called "our betters." I can't get my MP, Conservative John Weston, to talk to me about environmental concerns, and coincidentally the other day I received a letter from another of his constituents with the same complaint. Why the hell should he care? He'll win because the Liberals won't and that's all that matters.

I hate to talk about the "old days," but in my lifetime I've seen an enormous disconnect arise between the governed and the governors. When I was in government, my colleagues and I constantly faced a hostile media who didn't believe a thing we said. My home city of Kamloops had small town versions of the Jack Websters and Marjorie Nichols who would nail me as soon as I got off the plane. I had to answer for my actions or be found guilty in absentia.

Politicians now, hearing no tough questions from the media, and seeing and hearing nothing in the print or electronic media, assume that there are no tough questions to be asked. In many ways, the overflowing discontent I foresee can be blamed on the free ride politicians get from the media. Harry Belafonte once said in one of his great songs "don't turn your back to the masses, mon" – good advice that those who sit in authority over us should, in my not so respectful opinion, pay heed to.

If they won't, they must answer for the consequences, not the public that has been cheated of its democratic right to be heard prior to the decision having been taken. But they won't.