

APPALACHES-MAINE INTERCONNECTION LINE

Reparation or Confrontation, Say Pessamit, Wemotaci and Pikogan First Nations

THETFORD MINES, AUGUST 18, 2020 : During a meeting of the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE – Quebec environmental review board) held in Thetford Mines (QC-CAN) on Tuesday, August 18, the Innu of Pessamit, the Atikamekw of Wemotaci and the Anishnabek of Pikogan reiterated, through their spokespersons, their intention to oppose the proposed power line running through the state of Maine to Massachusetts and to do everything possible to derail this project if their rights are not respected.

"As long as we have not obtained compensation for the electricity usurped using production facilities, reservoirs and transmission lines built on our ancestral territories without notice, without impact studies, and without our consent, we will do everything to prevent the Appalaches-Maine Interconnection Line (in Quebec) and its American counterpart (in the state of Maine), the New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) project, from happening," said representatives of these three First Nations.

They explained to the BAPE commissioners that currently, 36% of the total hydroelectric power installed by Hydro-Québec, i.e. 13,200 MW, comes from traditional Indigenous territories which are protected by ancestral rights that have in fact never been respected. In total, 33 production structures, 130 dams and dikes, 10,400 km² of reservoirs, tens of thousands of kilometres of roads, transmission and distribution lines have been illegally put in place.

Enriching Quebec by Impoverishing Indigenous Peoples

These infrastructures are still operated by Hydro-Québec in violation, in particular, of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, various treaties, rights recognized by the Constitution Act of 1982, jurisprudence coming from the Supreme Court of Canada and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (see Articles 8, 20, 26 and 29). By allowing Hydro-Québec to take control of our traditional territories, the Quebec government has upset the family units and the socio-economic balance of the communities of Pessamit, Wemotaci and Pikogan. It has contributed to eliminating habitats, making food harder to find and water bodies more difficult to navigate, all while replacing the economic practices of fishing, hunting and trapping with social transfer payments. This is how our First Nations have allowed Quebec to industrialize, giving the majority of its citizens access to a better quality of life, while the well-being indicators for our communities are comparable to those in third-world countries.

Enough is enough!

In their presentation to the BAPE, the three communities affirmed that they will not allow Hydro-Québec to benefit from the Atikamekw, Innu and Anishnabek heritage in their deal with the United States without openly participating in the debate currently taking place in the state of Maine. "Hydro-Québec recently announced with great fanfare that everything was settled on that side of the border, but they're mistaking dreams for reality," said one of the representatives. This is a serious underestimation of the solidarity between the First Nations of Quebec and New England. In 2018, Pessamit made a major contribution to the derailment of the Northern Pass transmission line project that would cross New Hampshire from north to south. If

the Quebec government turns a deaf ear, Pessamit, Wemotaci and Pikogan will do their utmost to disrupt the NECEC project next!"

Remedial Measures

"Given that the electricity intended for Massachusetts was acquired unconstitutionally by Hydro-Québec with the complicity of the Quebec and Canada governments, and that the operation of the production works goes against the case law emanating from the Supreme Court of Canada in particular; given that the directive from the Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques (Quebec Ministry of the Environment) concerning the Appalaches-Maine project, as well as the Hydro-Québec impact study, do not even address the issue of legitimacy of 36% of the electricity that Hydro-Québec intends to sell in the United States without our consent; given that no account has been taken of the development of case law on Indigenous rights; considering that the systematic and uninterrupted invasion of our ancestral territories is based on a series of unilateral decisions allowing Hydro-Québec to occupy our territories indefinitely and without compensation, where the merits of our claims are nevertheless recognized by the Crown:

WE, the Pessamiulnut, the Wemotaci Iriniwok and the Abitibiwinnik, demand that remedial measures be put in place before any new export project is carried out into the United States. We confirm our firm opposition to the Appalaches-Maine Interconnection project as long as our rights are not respected."

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