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The looming climate crisis is an incredible opportunity for us to come together. Not only is this a chance for us to struggle against the things that cause harm in the world, but it is a time of great possibility to create and fight for something better. Let us take this moment to break down inequalities and injustices in our society, and build a new one that is safe and healthy for all.

The largest tar sands pipeline in North America is about to be formally proposed, making this a historic moment for the climate movement. As members of Climate Justice Montreal, we have been watching the TransCanada Energy East proposal for a long time. For us, this pipeline represents a threat to downstream and downwind communities who are already affected by tar sands, oil and gas extraction, a threat to communities along the pipeline, and a disastrous expansion of climate-changing CO2 emissions, which will disproportionately harm people in the global south.

The negative effects of the pipeline are undeniable, but from a climate justice perspective, this isn't just about stopping additional damage from occurring. The fight that Energy East represents is a chance to radically change the direction of our society: from ever-increasing extraction and environmental devastation to alignment with the limits of the ecology we depend on; from ever-widening inequality and escalating oppression to relations of solidarity, an end to rule by a tiny minority and a process of justice that accounts for the crimes of exploitation.

What follows is not only about the things that we must fight against. Instead, we seek to be part of the larger conversation about what we can create and fight for as we build a better world for us all.

The Energy East Project and the National Energy Board

TransCanada Corp will be seeking approval from the National Energy Board (NEB) for their Energy East pipeline project. This project would convert an existing, decades-old natural gas pipeline between Saskatchewan and Quebec to a tar sands oil transportation pipeline, as well as add new pipeline pieces between Alberta and Saskatchewan, and Québec and New Brunswick to end at a port terminal in Cacouna, QC and at a refinery in Saint John, NB. The project's goal is to carry 1.1 million barrels of crude tar sands oil a day. As such, Energy East pipeline would be the largest energy infrastructure project in Canada since the construction of the CP railway system.

According to the Pembina Institute¹, Energy East represents:

- Between 900,000 and 2.5 million barrels of water per day polluted with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, benzene, arsenic, lead and other pollutants
- Thousands of tonnes of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compounds, all of which contribute to acid rain

Overall, the tar sands are:

- Draining up to 15% of the Athabasca River
- The fastest-growing source of greenhouse gases in Canada
- Creating tailing ponds 50% larger than the city of Vancouver
- Only 0.15% of mining area (715 km² so far) has been certified as reclaimed
- Tar sands refining alone is contributing 7% of Canada's GHGs (2010)

For these reasons, tar sands bitumen has been referred to as “one of the dirtiest, costliest and most destructive fuels in the world.”²

Once the project has been submitted to the National Energy Board, it will undergo a year of hearings and assessment. However, despite how “neutral” and “objective” the NEB may be portrayed as being, their assessment methods are skewed and citizen participation in the so-called public hearings has been increasingly stifled. Citizen intervenors must themselves undergo an arbitrarily long and complicated application process in order to testify. Furthermore, the NEB has ruled that it will not consider the larger issue of climate change³ as one of the cumulative effects of these projects, despite the fact that Energy

East's construction will inevitably lead to an expansion of the Alberta tar sands and increased burning of fossil fuels. Finally, even if the National Energy Board were to come out with a recommendation against the project, it has no binding power to that effect; a change under the current Conservative government means that members of the federal Cabinet could vote to approve the project even if the NEB rejects it.⁴

A number of reasons exist to compel us to oppose Energy East simply as an individual infrastructural project; the fact that an old natural gas pipeline would be used to transport the much heavier and more corrosive tar sands bitumen has many describing the project as an oil spill (or multiple) just waiting to happen. However, Energy East's role as a tool of expansion of the Alberta tar sands means that it also carries the inherent problems associated with tar sands extraction, production and consumption.

Communities, particularly indigenous communities, located around tar sands extraction sites "face health risks from additional air and water pollution, and there are reports of an increasing incidence of cancer."^{5,6} Furthermore, they are literally watching their traditional food sources disappear as the Boreal Forest is stripped away and animal populations change their migration patterns or get sick and die.

At the other end of the process, despite the rhetoric that these projects will increase the "energy security" of consumers on this continent, Energy East is in fact a key component of increasing the export of tar sands oil to other markets such as those in Europe and Asia. Currently tar sands oil remains relatively land-locked, and projects like Energy East, as well as Enbridge's Line 9 and Northern Gateway pipelines, are needed to move bitumen overseas.

Finally, the consumption and burning of fossil fuels such as tar sands bitumen continue our path toward runaway climate change, not to mention increasingly polluted atmosphere, waters and lands. Pipelines are a necessary component of tar sands expansion. The current Canadian government plans to triple the tar sands production in the next two decades, compared to the 1.9 million barrels per day produced in 2012,⁷ and Energy East is a significant component to that production increase. As such, working to stop the flow of bitumen in this pipeline is just one of many parts of the global struggle against the forces leading to climate change.

Climate Justice for All: Strengthening our Analysis

In order to have a broader, more objective and more realistic approach, it is critical to discuss the Energy East project and all related projects from a climate justice perspective. A common climate justice framework consists of three parts: *root causes*, *unequal burdens*, and *false solutions*.^{8,9}

"Root causes" are the systemic reasons that allow these projects to continue being proposed and gain legitimacy in our society.

The term "unequal burdens" is used to identify which people, on a systemic level, profit from the project versus who are most vulnerable to its negative effects.

Finally, "false solutions" refer to proposed solutions to problems around things like pipeline safety or climate change that do nothing to address the root causes or unequal burdens. Instead, false solutions continue to benefit those who already benefit from the current state of affairs.

The entire framework allows us to consider more than just the short term impacts of individual projects, or the ones that would affect us personally. Instead it is based on an understanding of the power inequalities that lead certain people to benefit from the current way of doing things while other groups are subject to its negative impacts.

The root causes of Energy East are the same root causes that we find tied to many forms of oppression:

- **Capitalism**, which seeks to increase corporate profits from oil production even as alarms of the climate crisis continue to sound;
- **Colonialism**, in which certain people exploit or control pieces of land without the consent of those indigenous to those lands;
- **Patriarchy**, which sees men as inherently more legitimate decision-makers compared to women;
- **White supremacy**, which sees people of colour as less valuable than white people; and
- **Extractivism**, which promotes the idea that we must continue to pull more finite resources out of the ground, rather than reducing our consumption or extending the lifecycle of those which are already extracted.¹⁰

Energy East, and indeed the entire fossil-fuel intensive, extraction economy systematically perpetuates unequal burdens in the form of disproportionate levels of harm toward racialized and indigenous people, women, the poor and the majority of the Global South, where colonialism continues to keep many in a state of precarity.

As mentioned previously, indigenous communities near the Alberta tar sands are seeing members of their communities sicken and die from rare cancers because of the downstream effects of the extraction and tailings ponds, while their traditional food sources disappear. In addition, the Canadian government's colonial legacy of chronically underfunding indigenous nations for basic things like food, housing and clean drinking water leads to a terrible double-bind for some of these communities when extraction companies (with the support of that same colonial government) come knocking with the offer of short-term "economic development" opportunities if projects are allowed to go ahead.

Systemic racism and colonialism mean that racialized (i.e. not white) peoples from other parts of the world face the most harm from these projects. At the site of the tar sands itself, for example, racialized workers are often left with the most dangerous and low-paid jobs without union protection; this leads to tragedies such as an accident that led to the deaths of two temporary workers from China and injured four more.¹¹ On a more global scale, it is the people in the Global South who are disproportionately impacted by climate change and related floods, droughts, wildfires and extreme storms. By the same token, Energy East and the extraction it supports are the causes of displacement: whether it is indigenous people leaving their communities as conditions become unbearable, or migrant workers leaving their homes to work elsewhere because of lack of secure livelihood in the places they come from, or people who are forced to move due to the effects of the climate crisis.

Furthermore, a gender-based analysis shows that women are disproportionately burdened by the impacts of climate change such as water and food shortages and displacement worldwide. While men are also affected, women in their positions as caregivers, heads of households, farmers and water-fetchers must take on the extra work when necessities become more difficult to access. On a more local level, indigenous women are also unjustly burdened by a project like Energy East in Canada owing to the governance system that the federal government imposes on indigenous communities. Whereas traditional forms of governance often placed women of a community as central figures in decision making, the Government of Canada now only recognizes consent for projects from elected band councils it has set up and provides funding to. At the same time, extraction projects are often sites of high rates of gendered violence, due to the combined factors of large numbers of male workers who move in without ties to the community, high rates of substance and alcohol use in isolated environments and inflated housing prices that mean that women who are present in those communities have a harder time leaving abusive relationships.^{12,13} Furthermore, a historical perspective shows that not only are women disproportionately harmed by extraction projects, but in fact the oppression of women has always been part and parcel of the colonial and capitalist project to control and exploit natural resources. The imposition of patriarchal social structures as one force of

colonization, for example, has been a tool to weaken the social fabric of communities and in turn weaken their resistance efforts.

In terms of economic benefits, Energy East is legally for the benefit of TransCanada shareholders. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers has indicated that 94% of the economic benefits of the tar sands industry will be felt in Alberta.¹⁴ This means that of the materials being extracted from the planet, almost all the benefits are controlled and enjoyed by a very small group of powerful people. Contrary to the messaging of companies and governments that projects such as the tar sands and these pipelines are “good for Canada” as a whole, it is clear that even within this nation’s borders there are many who are being harmed for the sake of wealth accumulation by a powerful few. On a global scale, the inequalities are even greater.

Energy East is touted as a solution for oil transportation over transportation by truck or rail. This is a false solution. Energy East perpetuates the systems of extraction that place unequal burdens on people worldwide. It is not accompanied by any strategy to dismantle these oppressive systems. The installation of this pipeline would be unlikely to be accompanied by reduced tar sands transportation by rail and claims that it would be false and distracting. Similarly, calls for increased safety measures on the pipeline itself, or “greater efficiency” at the tar sands site are a false solution since those measures will not reduce the poisonous effects of the tar sands or the slow catastrophe that is climate change. While this analysis focuses on Energy East specifically, there are many other false solutions present in discussions around the climate crisis. These include things like carbon capture and storage, or carbon offset/trading schemes, and have been written about elsewhere.¹⁵

Resistance is Fertile: Stopping Pipelines and Creating a Better World

With all this in mind, we have a couple of clear timescales in which we must act. We have about a year to mobilize against the Energy East pipeline before it is approved and construction can begin. On a larger scale, the runaway climate change clock is ticking away, and while opinions vary on just how much time we have left before crisis is truly unavoidable (if we have time left at all), at this point it’s clear that the situation is urgent.

The tar sands need pipelines to expand their toxic and detrimental extraction. The next year or two provide us with plenty of opportunities to mobilize and stop Energy East, which could be the largest project in Canada in the last century. There is much inspiration to be found already from the indigenous communities and settlers who have worked together to oppose the Kinder Morgan and Northern Gateway pipeline projects on the West Coast, in the US against the Keystone XL pipeline, and other struggles against extraction.

While pipelines and climate change are disasters that we need to fight against, we at CJM invite all readers to also consider the possibility that exists within this rapidly diminishing time frame. Many of us have realized that to get off the path of runaway climate change, not only do we need to stop specific resource extraction projects in order to slow environmental destruction and state-sponsored genocide of indigenous communities, but we need to radically change our society’s priorities of ever-increasing production, consumption and profit margins.

This is a big, scary task, and it is extremely difficult to know how to start. After centuries of market capitalism with its drive toward limitless growth, very few blueprints exist, particularly for those of us living in settler Euro-North American society. However, there is also a great deal of potential, and in many ways some of the fundamentals are already very present in our social fabric.

For example, prioritizing sharing and collaboration, rather than individualism and competition works to strengthen our social fabric and build solidarity with one another. Re-using and up-cycling materials

allows us to develop skills currently hidden from most of us in industrial assembly lines, build resiliency by increasing our self-sufficiency and fostering creativity; all while disrupting capitalism's drive to constantly consume new products and make waste of the old. Building, maintaining and strongly valuing and nourishing relationships between people, and indeed with the non-human environment, and valuing those as strongly as we currently tend to value our material possessions, helps to refocus our priorities to be more humane. Growing our own food or being connected to the people who are doing that takes back from multinational corporations some of the necessary things in life that sustain us. Similarly, we can form, join or support things like food, housing or labour co-ops, which horizontally distribute the wealth and labour of a project to its users or members rather than distributing that wealth upward to bosses and/or owners and the labour downward to workers.

The above are all part of community and movement-building processes that have the power to build a safe and healthy future for all. Blockades, strikes, protests and other forms of direct action are an important form of resistance against the systems that cause so much harm. But even as we engage in direct action in order to topple the capitalist, colonial, extractive machine, the long process of rethinking and rebuilding our social and economic relations helps to erode the foundations on which that machine stands.

This moment is truly an exciting one. Austerity measures by our governments are aimed at creating a crisis situation of precarity and scarcity, which in turn can erode social relations and make it that much easier to control us by pitting us against one another. Let us resist that. Let us resist and take back this time of intersecting crises in order to build a world in which we all can flourish. There is so much great possibility on this beautiful, diverse, amazing planet of ours. We, as smart, creative, caring people can do so much better than what we have right now. The struggles for a more just world have been ongoing for centuries; let us see just what it can bring when we all work toward it together.

Notes

1. <http://www.pembina.org/oil-sands/os101>
2. <http://www.nwf.org/What-We-Do/Energy-and-Climate/Drilling-and-Mining/Tar-Sands.aspx>
3. http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2014/08/15/u_of_t_professor_launches_challenge_against_national_energy_board.html
4. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/cabinet-to-get-final-say-on-pipeline-projects-1.1217699>
5. <http://www.nrdc.org/energy/tar-sands-health-effects.asp>
6. <http://business.financialpost.com/2014/07/08/oil-sands-pollution-linked-to-higher-cancer-rates-in-fort-chipewyan-study-finds/>
7. <http://www.energy.alberta.ca/ourbusiness/oilsands.asp>
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9. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/ourselves/docs/Preview-Climate%20Change%20Who%20carries%20burden.pdf>
10. <http://iris-recherche.qc.ca/blogue/leconomie-extractive>
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13. <http://www.fortmcmurraytoday.com/2012/06/10/sod-turning-marks-beginning-for-new-crisis-society-facility>
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15. <http://no-redd.com/no-redd-papers/>