

OPINION

Wab Kinew's development dreams threaten our people's way of life

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Premier of Manitoba Wab Kinew recently promoted the idea of an energy and trade corridor to a new port in Hudson Bay.

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Clayton Thomas-Müller is a member of the Mathais Colomb Cree Nation and the author of Life in the City of Dirty Water – A Memoir Of Healing.

I respect Wabanakwut Kinew and the Manitoba NDP government that he has formed; they are light-years ahead of any other provincial or territorial governments in these lands they call Canada. I understand the political game. It is, however, still jarring and triggering to hear a Neechi (fellow Indigenous person), one I grew up with, promoting an energy and trade corridor to a [new port in Hudson Bay](#) during the climate crisis, as the [Premier did](#) recently.

This came at a moment when so many Indigenous peoples and Northern community members had been evacuated due to climate-change exacerbated fires. It's staggering to see Mr. Kinew's openness to entertain the critical mineral and energy resource export dreams of Alberta Premier Danielle Smith and Ontario Premier Doug Ford, and those showcased in Prime Minister Mark Carney's Bill C-5 – initiatives that violate our climate as well as our inherent and treaty rights as Indigenous peoples.

Northern peoples and our way of life are on the chopping block in the current economic conversation between the provinces, territories and the federal government. I've heard talk of a northern train line proposal and an LNG export facility, which would require massive infrastructure on the Hudson Bay coast. LNG super tankers are huge – the scale of what we're talking about in terms of exporting gas, critical minerals and potentially tar sands and conventional oil out of Hudson Bay is truly science fiction.

[Premier Wab Kinew promotes Manitoba trade corridor that could include a pipeline](#)

If new transportation corridors are opened up – one being explored is the First Nations-led NeeStaNaN project to Nelson Bay – they could potentially accommodate timber, critical minerals and oil, leading to a massive increase in pressure on First Nations and northern municipalities to engage in extraction on an enormous scale. After, we could expect a proposal for an LNG facility, oil sands and conventional oil pipelines, as well as a line to bring condensate, a petroleum byproduct, to Hudson Bay. Let us not forget that oil from the tar sands can sink once exposed to water in a river or lake, in this case, right in the middle of the Beluga sanctuary in Hudson Bay. Unlike conventional oil that floats on the top of water, bitumen is heavy, and depending on other factors, it can sink. There is no way to remove or clean it; if it settles on the bottom of the body of water, it can harden and contaminate the ecosystem forever.

We need to mobilize to protest these carbon-intensive proposals and false climate solutions that Mr. Kinew is proposing, along with increased military spending that he has said could be used to boost [military bases in Manitoba](#). It is dangerous for our Premier to be echoing the rhetoric coming out of Alberta and Ontario during the era of the climate crisis. It is also extremely insensitive to be talking about pipelines being built across the permafrost of the North and trade corridors to Churchill at the same time as 21,000 climate refugees from Manitoba have registered as evacuees with the Red Cross.

We should be increasing funding for our northern firefighters program, purchasing more water bombers and other life-saving equipment, and boosting training. We need to make northern communities climate-safe by rebuilding highways and other infrastructure and upgrading and constructing airports. We should be responding to the climate crisis at scale, making economic decisions centred on the 94 calls to action

of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and climate science, and not locking Manitoba and Canada into another 100 years of fossil fuel dependency and violent, unpredictable climate weather events.

[The making of Premier Wab Kinew](#)

While Mr. Kinew has ended the state of emergency here in Manitoba, I have heard from fellow members of my First Nation, Pukatawagan, who say they may not be able to return home until as late as November. This is the second time my nation has been evacuated in three years due to climate-fueled fires. The situation demonstrates how violent and unpredictable climate-related weather events are – how they are increasing and affecting Indigenous peoples more – and this government is talking about pipelines.

This critical minerals renaissance sellout by our Premier is not unique to our sacred lands here in Manitoba – it is happening across the country. This is high carbon intensity, water destroying, and food security-disrupting extractivism. Indigenous peoples are on the front line of it all, disproportionately affected. We are also on the front line of the policing apparatus and criminalization aimed at our people and peaceful communities when we stand up as land defenders and water protectors, as we have seen in land disputes across the country, such as in Elsipogtog, N.B., and more recently in B.C., with the Wet'suwet'en. We must expose any special interests trying to profit from this current ecological and economic crisis.

[Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak: If Canada is seeking an ideal nation-building project, it should invest in First Nations infrastructure](#)

Manitoba must stand up. Labour and all social movement sectors need to talk across silos, taking a hard look at this current reality that we're facing, and making plans about what to do. We cannot let the shock economics of our biggest trading partner, the U.S., set the stage to allow the neoliberal hawks of Canada to fast-track all kinds of excessive military spending and outdated dirty energy and critical minerals infrastructure at the request of the fossil fuel sector, the banks that finance them, and U.S. President Donald Trump.

We need social movements to stand up like never before to protect the public, defend the commons, and to fight against the commodification of life, the privatization of our ecosystem, and the turning of the atmosphere into a dump for large corporations. We need to start making the connections between climate justice and colonization; between reparations and truth and reconciliation, because these things are all inextricably linked.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-wab-kinew-manitoba-lng-development-indigenous-peoples/>

We keep looking for, and insisting we have found, impregnable ethical fortresses, mobile ones we can swivel to attack the next citadel of sin. If romantic, even better.

How can you argue against environmentalism, the fact that the way we live has done immeasurable unnecessary harm to the natural world? The worst amongst us have run amok, and the best amongst us, consumed by our own needs, have been unable to stop it. How can anyone argue that the capitalist economy imported from Europe has not done grave injustices to Indigenous peoples? It does such to its own people.

But, be this as it may, this is the world we have inherited, and this is the way it will keep operating. Green initiatives to address global warming and climate change are something we should have put in place long ago. But as it becomes clear the rest of the world will not do much, if anything, to join in the cause, our own activism needs to be scaled back; we are a very small player in the matter, and the (in)actions of the major players in the rest of the world will affect us little mediated by our own actions. There are plenty of “green” things we should still do; they even make sense economically. Our only hope is to rein the worst of the corporate monster in. And when I accuse capitalism of crimes, it is not that I am therefore a “socialist.” Go too far down that road and you end up in another corrupted place, just differently constituted. We still need government, rightly aimed, to tame the monsters within.

Mr. Thomas-Müller rightly challenges the oil and gas industry. Alberta is the biggest hypocrite in Canada, and long has been. Recently the arch right-wing government there had to disclose a \$3 billion surplus. Not long ago the province was crying the blues about its sorry and “unjust” treatment in Canada; it still threatens secession. This is the province that refused to seriously maintain the Heritage Fund Peter Lougheed implored them to set up to counter the cyclical nature of the oil and gas industry. Instead, the unkept promise has remained “Lord, give us another boom and we promise we won’t piss it all away this time.” They always do, and then blame their problems on the federal government, refusing to confront the local leadership toying with them. All of this, though, mean nevertheless that, if the world is going to keep guzzling oil and natural gas, it might as well be bought from Canada. If another pipeline or rail line or port is economically viable, then the economy that could sustain the people of Canada—urban by far whether we like it or not—and begin to lift us out of the fiscal mess-wreck we are on course for, can be built to provide the tax and revenue base needed to prevent further erosion of our way of life.

Mr. Thomas-Müller would have those hydroelectric dams removed. Really? I know they inundated some graves and forced people off traditional lands and traplines. (See Richard Wagamese’s family story.) But without those dams, otherwise “clean,” people would not be able to live in Winnipeg, “dirty” as its “water” may be. I doubt even Mr. Thomas-Müller would or could go back full-time to that now-flooded trapline. It is not even dams that are being proposed, nor anything as hideous as the Oilsands project. But this time, Indigenous rights and needs, and ecological parameters must be included and served to the utmost. If Mr. Carney proceeds in good faith, then we next need to be convinced First Nation elites and environmentalist power players—become the next vested interests—are not just being obstructive to protect the privileged places they have carved out for themselves, feathering their own nests. We need a better Canada with better leaders. Can we do what America cannot?

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