

Canadian gov't takes strong stand on Pittston

Some people seem to be missing the point of the debate underway over the Pittston proposal to build a 250,000 a day oil refinery in Eastport, Maine.

People from inland regions may find the fishing business hard to comprehend, and maybe find it hard to understand how fragile the marine environment is.

They might also be pardoned if, never seeing the ocean, what a big oil spill would do to the tourism industry in the Bay of Fundy region.

However, anyone can understand that the Canadian government has made clear to the United States government that they do not want an oil refinery there, and would be willing to bar ships from passing through Head Harbor Passage between Deer Island and Campobello Island, a stretch which the Canadian government considers Canadian territorial waters.

Anyone can also understand that, even though the American authorities know the view of the Canadian authorities on the matter — the American federal government has approved the proposal and Maine State officials are still mulling it over.

We can add to that that Canadian government officials to date have launched very little protest about this apparent disregard of the publicly stated wishes of the Canadian government.

Maybe now you can understand why some Americans are surprised when Canadians give a sour look when our neighbors to the South talk about the model of international understanding and co-operation Canada and the United States are supposed to represent.

Prime Minister Trudeau's remarks about the mouse sleeping with the elephant was not all that far off.

Eminent Canadian scientists and government officials, including our own Dr. John Anderson, have said it would be a disaster.

There are a number of other outstanding issues between the Canadian and American governments, and it is doubtful whether our government would make a public statement on the issue and complicate our relations with the Americans further unless there was something to it.

We have to hope that "quiet diplomacy" is quietly going to work to convince the American friends of the error of their ways.

Of course, it is easy to understand why some people in Eastport might welcome the jobs provided by the refinery but we contend there are other possibilities for economic development in the Eastport area which would be more compatible to the local environment.

We should point out that we have our own oil refinery at Saint John and the National Energy Board has already given its nod to the large Liquefied Natural Gas terminal for the Port City which some say could have disastrous consequences if there were an explosion.

We should also remember the Lorneville area, where the province's largest thermal electric (oil burning) plant is located, on the Bay of Fundy shores, and the nearby Point Lepreau nuclear development.

These all have several environmental consequences for the Bay

of Fundy region, and the way of life of the people who live there.

However, none of these have met the near universal condemnation that the Pittston proposal has, at least in this country.

Also, we do not have to enter anybody else's territorial waters to reach these developments, and we are not flying in the face of the objections of another government.

Canadian nationalists can say this is another example of the American tendency to disregard Canadian views, and to an extent they are right.

Our officials have already said the proposal is unacceptable, 'that' oil will have to go through water we control.

Could it be that they are hoping, as has happened before, the Canadian officials will give in? Are they hoping pressure in other areas can be used as bargaining points, perhaps the auto pact,

trade in beef across the border, or maybe some other preferential trade policies?

To those in Eastport who might welcome the economic expansion provided by the refinery, let us say that we are not against you.

We also have made mistakes, and are fast reaching the point where hard decisions will have to be made on environmental protection.

People often do not realize the value of something until it is gone, and in this case the beauty of the lands and ocean and some of the often under-rated resources. The economic recovery of this region on both sides of the border ultimately depends on those resources, which may be gone for generations if projects like the Pittston Oil Refinery go through.

The sooner people on both sides of the border realize this the better.

