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True Crime Case Files:

Sabotage Against the Natural Gas Industry

When: 1990s to the Present

Wiebo Ludwig may have had a strange resume for being an eco-warrior.

Wiebo, a former Christian Reform minister, started a largely self-sufficient conservative Christian community called Trickle Creek northwest of Edmonton, Alberta in 1985. Their goal was to remove themselves from the secular world: to farm, to reduce their interactions with the outside, to live, as they believed, as god had intended.

Like the Luddites, the extent to which they rejected modernity lay within deeply religious roots and concepts of guilt, not in a rejection of civilized life. Their understanding of nature was passively incorporated in god's supposed creation, not in radical ecology.

But no religious belief changes the impacts of civilization.

New methods of resource extraction began to arise and their reality intruded upon this small community. 'Sour gas' wells, a type of natural gas containing high levels of hydrogen sulfite (a particularly noxious and toxic gas), started encroaching upon Trickle Creek.

And the impact was sudden.

By the mid-1990s, the Ludwig's began to take up a loud stance against sour gas. The wells surrounding their property leaked plumes of hydrogen sulfide, leading immediately to the death of livestock with exceptional increases in miscarriages, stillbirths, and birth defects among them. The Ludwig family suffered horrific rashes, chemical burns, and infections, the children suffering far worse than the adults. They went to the press, the corporations, and the government to no avail.

But it is when AEC West, one of the natural gas companies operating in the area, tried to seize Trickle Creek that wells started being damaged. One well was blown up with dynamite. Another was filled with concrete as a mock grave. The RCMP pinned these attacks on

Wiebo who wasn't mincing words about the wells, pipelines and their impacts. He was charged with the destruction of the wells and sentenced to 28 months, of which he would serve 19.

His release, however, was not grounds for silence.

Though later charges would be dropped, the RCMP claimed to have DNA evidence linking Wiebo to a series of letters threatening another natural gas corporation, EnCana, from 2008. The letters came alongside six explosions on a natural gas pipeline. And in true Wile E. Coyote, Wiebo never confirmed nor denied his role in the explosions, only having made public statements that he supported the bomber's campaign, but urged them to stop the explosions.¹



Wiebo Ludwig

Wiebo was arrested for the bombings in 2010, only to be released after a day for lack of evidence despite the heavy police presence after Trickle Creek was raided and searched for the fifth time in its short history.

After Wiebo died of esophageal cancer in 2012, his son, Joshua Ludwig, has continued alongside the expanding Trickle Creek family to continue their opposition to sour gas wells and hydraulic fracking extraction.²

Great though the pressure may have been, the threat that plumed forth from the wells was greater.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Energy Secretary, Ernest Moniz, pointed out in 2015 that the greatest threat to the natural gas industry comes in the

form of cyber attacks. In his words, hacking poses a “big and growing threat” to the industry. In particular, Moniz identifies conversion stations that distribute natural gas as a prime target for would be cyber-terrorists. Their compressors that steady the flow and circulation of the gas operate digitally, which makes them more susceptible to hacking.³

But while the natural gas industry decries that its threat lies with terrorists, Wiebo may be more the norm than the exception. True as the threat that hackers pose may be, the attacks on the natural gas industry seem to stem largely from those fed up with its consequences.

And that is a serious threat: the disorganized and disenfranchised who simply tire of having their homes and their water fucked with.

This is the threat that continues to plague the parasitic energy industry with its short-lived bubble economics. Not just the supposedly organized terrorists, not just hackers, but pissed off neighbors.

While Wiebo may be the estranged poster child of this rage and reaction, he has hardly been alone.

Between 1997 and 1999, oil, gas, hydro, and forestry resource industries faced more than 160 instances of sabotage in Alberta alone.⁴ For all the attention paid to Trickle Creek, the alleged attacks from Wiebo are a mere handful of that number.

It would be improbable to assume that these 160 attacks in one part of Canada are the anomaly. There is a vested interest among the oil industry and the government to downplay, under-report, or completely cover up what are seemingly regular attacks on the oil industry and the infrastructure that supports it.

Recently, a 2014 leaked Joint Terrorism Task Force presentation chronicled a number of pipe bombs and charred debris found near fracking well sites. It lists an incident of a drive-by shooting at a fracking oil well.⁵ In 2012, \$50,000 worth of damage occurred after a log was planted in a natural gas pipeline at some point two to four weeks prior.⁶

No evidence supports any notion that any of these attacks were organized or orchestrated.

Most likely, they are occurring entirely independently.

The point is this: these attacks are happening, seemingly regularly and without any organization.

The fear of these attacks is built around the threat of terrorism, but the reality is provocation is a part of the extraction process. It doesn't take an eco-warrior to recognize that fracking or any other

resource extraction impacts every living being.

No ideology, morality or predisposition is required.

It is because of our own removal and because of such heavily positioned propaganda that anyone could presume that some larger, insidious motivation is necessary to attack oil wells or pipelines. In reality, an animal will attack when cornered. It will respond when provoked. It will bite back when suffocated. It will react violently when its children and loved ones suffer.

It doesn't take an eco-warrior to understand the reality of resource extraction, but that reality will continue to create eco-warriors and saboteurs.

Strange though their journey may be, in the end, sabotage is sabotage.



Pipebomb found at Elk County, PA well site. From leaked JTTF presentation.

Endnotes

- 1 <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/sympathy-for-an-eco-warrior> Also see the documentary *Wiebo's War* for more on all of this.
- 2 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/ludwig-family-carries-on-father-wiebo-s-alberta-oilpatch-battle-1.2874163>
- 3 <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/moniz-says-cyber-attacks-threaten-natural-gas-industry/article/2570752>
- 4 <http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/2914>
- 5 <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2014/02/15/leaked-pennsylvania-jttf-presentation-profiles-earth-first/>
- 6 <http://www.wbng.com/home/Log-In-Pipeline-Causes-50000-in-Damages-148428125.html>