

## Revolt News 304 7-9-2010

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1. The Irish News is again making outrageous assurances (21-8-10) of safety of powerlines and getting its facts wrong. My reply (22-8-10, not yet published as far as I know) is at APPENDIX A. A second article by the offending journalist appeared in the same vein on 4-9-10. The continued inaccuracies do not merit a further reply, seeing as my first correcting reply appears to have been ignored.

2. Edwin Poots is a DUP MLA and Minister of the Environment in Northern Ireland. Wikipedia says "*Poots is a young earth creationist and an opponent of the theory of evolution*". On 18-8-10 Poots announced the Irish 400 kV interconnector project had been referred to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) for a public inquiry. He said "*This proposal raises a number of issues which need further exploration. This includes the impact on public health and the consideration of alternative technologies such as underground cabling.*" Fair enough! Given the level of objections, a public inquiry would be expected.

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-doe/news-doe-180810-poots-announces-public.htm>

3. There could be an issue with the Irish interconnector project across two countries and legislative systems, in that the EU Directive 97/11/EC requires the Environmental Impact Assessment to assess the project as a whole. The two Environmental Statements split the project into two parts and may only make piecemeal assessments. Northern Ireland fell foul of the predecessor Directive over the undersea connector to Scotland in the 1990s.

4. Objectors' group SEAT has welcomed the news of the public inquiry in Northern Ireland.

<http://www.seatactiongroup.com/>

5. The InterAcademy Council is made up from about 20 leading national and international scientific bodies, including the UK Royal Society and the USA National Academy of Sciences. Its review of the IPCC on climate change, commissioned by the UN and released 30-8-10, is therefore important. While couched diplomatically and forward-looking, it makes several recommendations and implied criticisms. Examples include calling for adopting "*a rigorous conflict of interest policy*" and

## Revolt News 304 7-9-2010

ensuring “*that genuine controversies are adequately reflected*”. The review distinguishes between the IPCC qualitative level-of-understanding scale and the quantitative likelihood scale: “*The confidence scale should not be used to assign subjective probabilities to ill-defined outcomes*”. Generally this is a much better balanced perspective than some of the earlier zealous excesses of the Royal Society (and others) which demonised critics and attempted to restrict media reporting.  
<http://reviewipcc.interacademycouncil.net/>

6. For a sensible discussion and history of public issues on climate change, and media reporting of them, try Roger Harrabin’s Monday morning series “Uncertain Climate” on BBC Radio 4. In his notes, Harrabin dubs the conflicting groups “*insiders*” and “*outsiders*” – perhaps better labels than mainstream / sceptic or established / alternative, since there is a measure of *insider* networking and self-protection as revealed in the Wegman Report.

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-11131399](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-11131399)

7. A paper by Kheifets, Swanson et al (in Risk Analysis, 2010, DOI: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.2010.01467.x) on risk governance uses EMF for illustration. Scientists are divided into two categories similar to those in climate change: here called “*establishment*” and “*other*”. The first are identified with words like “*eminent*” and “*generally respected*” and tending to populate official bodies. The lead authors Kheifets and Swanson are themselves arch *insiders*, so this may be how insiders see themselves. The paper portrays the insider position as between two “*other*” extremes (on both sides), as if extreme sceptics of health effects were outsiders. In my experience, as in climate change, that extreme side has been populated by insiders at the heart of official bodies.

8. On the other hand, the Kheifets et al paper is a useful overview of risk governance issues in EMF, identifying deficits on both sides, as seen by insiders. Among deficits on the establishment side, the paper recognises

- “*they tended to privilege their assessment of the science, and to exhibit limited regard for alternative scientific views*”;
- “*This desire by the establishment to counter alarmism coming from elsewhere by slanting its own presentation of the facts is seen in other issues as well (e.g., the BSE issue in the United Kingdom(67)).*”; and
- “*that exaggerated reassurance, even when well meant, is counterproductive*”.

9. A July 2010 “Addendum to Report” commissioned by Wraxall and Failand Parish Council, for the Hinkley Point connection consultation, highlights Gas Insulated Lines (GIL) as an alternative form of underground cables. The Addendum argues that it is more economic than more usual forms (e.g. the now standard XLPE). A table of cost comparisons is given with GIL lowest per mile at £9 million and lowest whole-project life cost at £519 million.

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## Revolt News 304 7-9-2010

### APPENDIX A Letter 22-8-10 to Irish News

In the Irish News (Saturday 21st August), Newton Emerson, who has written in similar vein before, wrote:

"Environment minister Edwin Poots has given in to NIMBY nonsense and ordered an inquiry into "public health" issues over the new cross - border interconnector. This is parish pump politics of the very dumbest kind as science is as certain as science can be that overhead power lines are completely safe".

Here is my reply:

Sir,

Does Newton Emerson enjoy his little joke? His claim that "*science is as certain as science can be that overhead power lines are completely safe*" is plainly at odds with the declared assessment of WHO and virtually all scientific bodies on both sides of the argument.

If I may quote John McEnroe, "*you can not be serious!*", would you please envisage it with all the emphasis and body language that he would give.

The WHO body IARC classified magnetic fields from power lines as a Class 2B possible human carcinogen (*IARC Monographs vol.80, 2002*). There are Classes 3 and 4 where science is less certain of harm and more certain of safety. Scientific evidence shows a persistent association with a doubled risk of childhood leukaemia, among other things. The latest comprehensive WHO assessment (*Environmental Health Criteria 238, 2007, page 12*) states that "*the use of precautionary approaches is warranted*".

Perhaps Newton Emerson has fallen for the misleading line taken by Eirgrid's Environmental Statement. That would be a pity, for it would have been in Eirgrid's best interests to show a fairer and more balanced approach. Eirgrid should have nothing to fear from an even-handed, accurate and proportionate assessment.

Yours,  
(MJOC)

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