

Time for a New Direction for the Economy!
Alberta at a Crossroads --
Royalty Review Panel Issues Its Report



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Alberta at a Crossroads -- Royalty Review Panel Issues Its Report

The Alberta Royalty Review Panel Report, *Alberta at a Crossroads* was released on January 29. The title of the report, *Alberta at a Crossroads*, indicates that the panel considered important decisions had to be made about the future. The Panel described the crossroads for the Alberta economy in the following way:

"The global energy landscape has fundamentally changed during the past seven years. Alberta faces new competitors, especially the United States. Rising production in the U.S. threatens Alberta's market share, and has put downward pressure on prices.

"Global forces, competitive pressures from U.S. oil and gas resurgence, and limited market access have placed significant downward pressures on the prices Alberta can receive for crude oil and liquids, natural gas and oil sands resources. This, in turn, reduces the amount of value Albertans can collect through royalties. Many of these challenges are structural rather than cyclical, and we can expect price pressures to exist for quite some time."

The royalty review was initiated by the NDP government in keeping with its election promises. Premier Rachel Notley said in response to the report, "Our biggest problem is that our largest market has become our largest competitor." And in releasing the report she stated, "Now is the time to work together as partners, to still bring about change, to bring about innovation. But it is not the time to reach out and make a big money grab, because that is just not going to help Albertans."



The report concludes that current royalty rates are appropriate. This conclusion has been accepted by the NDP government, which in opposition had long stated that royalty rates were too low.

The report recommends the following changes to Alberta's new royalty framework:

- Modernize the royalty system to increase net returns to Albertans and industry over time by encouraging producers to reduce costs.
- Make changes for oil and gas wells effective 2017, preserving existing royalties for pre-2017 wells.
- Preserve existing royalty structures for oil sands projects and provide transparency by reporting royalties paid, costs, revenues, production, percentage of product upgraded and more for each project.
- Seize opportunities to enhance value-added processing in natural gas and partial upgrading in the oil sands.
- Measure the performance of the system on an annual basis against key criteria including returns to Albertans, levels of investment, development of value-added industry, and environmental performance.

Organize and Fight for a New Direction for the Economy

A picture emerges of a one-sided, crisis-prone resource dependent economy, which lacks diversity and internal self-reliant strength and is once again overwhelmed by external conditions. As the name of the report suggests, continuing with a boom and bust, rip and ship economy is simply not sustainable. But instead of tackling this problem with the courage to ask and find out what is an alternative, the conclusions drawn simply repeat the tired neo-liberal mantras.



It concludes that Alberta must become more "competitive" and to do so it must "pursue innovation" and "reduce costs." It abandons the path of full upgrading and refining of bitumen and instead opts for state subsidies to develop partial upgrading, which does nothing to stop jobs being shipped down the pipeline, as the saying goes.

Whatever the intention, in neo-liberal parlance "cutting costs" always means attacking the claims of workers who are considered a "cost of production" and demanding concessions from them. "Encouraging innovation" means paying the rich through state subsidies to pursue new

technologies. The report rejects the human-centred view that working class concessions are not solutions, and that paying the rich is part of the problem, not the solution.

Who decides is a key question in establishing a new direction based on affirming public right in opposition to monopoly right. An alternative to the royalty system is public ownership and control of natural resources both in theory and practice. An alternative to boom and bust cycles and to bring stability to the sector is for the government to set wholesale prices based on the price of production, and to use revenue to invest in the economy to make it more diverse.

An alternative to boom and bust and rip and ship is to develop upgrading, refining, and a robust manufacturing industry based on petrochemical projects. The oil and gas means of production must originate in Canada and be required to use Canadian steel so as to ensure a Canadian heavy machine industry and steel sector. All publicly supplied social and material infrastructure must be accounted for and its value properly exchanged and realized with natural resource produced value.

Other measures can be taken to ensure that strategic energy resources contribute to nation-building and not to monopoly empire-building and inter-monopoly and state competition and war. Development and exploitation of natural resources should not be pragmatic as is now the case with monopolies in control and their hysterical expansion when prices are high and gloom and doom and wrecking when prices fall. For this to happen, investment decisions must be taken out of the hands of the private global monopolies and put in the hands of the people through a public authority that reflects the public will and interest. The pro-social alternatives are vast when the mind is freed from the neo-liberal dogma of those who own and control social wealth and the monopolies.

The working class and its allies should respond harshly and loudly to this situation where the monopolies through this royalty report and elsewhere say the people and government have no

other choice than to submit to blackmail and the status quo. The people must not bow down to the vile threats of the energy monopolies to take their investments elsewhere and wreck what the working class has built with its sweat and blood.

The working class must rise to the occasion based on its own thinking and independent politics. The organized working class must lead the discussion about the necessity for a new direction for the economy and not allow the people to be overwhelmed with the crisis. A pro-social alternative and direction exists in what the working class has already built and achieved, and in the bounty of what Mother Earth offers her people. *Alberta Worker* will do its best to contribute to the discussion on organizing and building for the new. We invite everyone to join in!

Note

Oil sands royalties were substantially decreased under Ralph Klein, who was Premier from 1992 to 2006.

The last royalty review took place in 2007 under the PC Premier of the time Ed Stelmach. The review proposed very modest increases in some royalty rates, to come into effect in 2009, but they were never implemented. Stelmach was forced to reverse the increases and make further concessions to the oil and gas monopolies, and later to resign.



Discussion on Royalty Review

Workers Are Not a Cost to the Economy

- K.C. Adams -

The report of the Alberta Royalty Review, *Alberta at a Crossroads*, states, "Royalties are about Albertans, as owners, collecting value from our resources. We rely on energy companies to develop our resources on our behalf. Both the owners of the resource (Albertans) and the energy companies share in the value of developing our resources. There is only a certain amount of value available to share."

Albertans are told that "energy companies develop our resources on our behalf." Where do the actual producers, the working class fit into this picture? The workers are not acknowledged as the actual producers of wealth or value, as though the oil extracts itself magically without human work-time.



Oil sitting in the ground begins to have economic value only when workers begin the arduous task of extracting it. However, rather than recognizing the transformative nature of the work-time of the actual producers, workers are considered a "cost of production." Workers are a cost to whom, the workers query? To the owners of equity and debt? To the global energy monopolies and the big banks and other financial institutions with whom they are merged? And, just how does creating oil value through work-time become a cost to those fine people and institutions, oil

workers demand to know. Without our work, nothing is produced, no value is created.

You just don't understand dear workers, say the academics and experts. You cost the owners your wages and benefits.

But our work-time reproduces the value of our work-time and costs you nothing, workers reply.

Wow, now wait a minute, that is just workers' point of view, a human-centred one in opposition to our capital-centred view. We owners have to fork over your wages from our pockets.

But hold on yourself; your pockets are full of wealth from what we have already produced. We reproduce the value of our wages when we work, which you take for yourself to replace the wage that we receive. Without our work-time your pockets would be empty.

Besides, what is this logic of us workers costing the owners of natural resources money? The report says the owners of oil, at least in theory, are the people of Alberta. According to this "workers are a cost" logic, the more workers' wages and benefits are cut, the more the cost of producing is cut and the bigger the potential share may be for oil royalties. First of all, workers make up the vast majority of the people so according to this "cost" logic, we are a cost to ourselves because this "workers as a cost" line applies to all workers and not just oil workers. No sir, we are not a cost to ourselves or anyone, we are the producers of value and wealth and we have the right to first claim on the value we produce and you should get that into your head!

At the very least, the royalty review panel could have been respectful to the actual producers and acknowledge that workers who produce the oil are not a cost to anyone, but rather are the creators of oil value. Apparently this is never to be discussed or considered. Workers are supposed to just accept that, of course workers' wages and consumed material inputs are a cost; they are a cost to the owner of the company or government agency. What else could they be?

This distortion of reality shows that the working class needs its own thinking and outlook and cannot accept a capital-centred world outlook in which everything revolves around the owners of social wealth who fancy themselves the centre of the universe and who purchase workers' capacity to work so those workers can create value to be seized by those who own and control social wealth and declare it as their own to strengthen their class privilege and empires.

A human-centred outlook acknowledges the work-time of all those involved in actual production, which includes the engineers and other professionals, and that this work-time creates the only value that is available to be claimed. The claimants currently in this imperialist world dominated by private owners of social wealth are 1) the workers themselves, 2) those who own and control the social wealth and purchase the capacity to work of the working class (including owners of equity, debt and rental property), and 3) the state and its governments.

The workers reproduce their own claim for wages and benefits called reproduced-value. The workers produce added-value that becomes the claim of the owners and government. The reproduced-value plus added-value is new value of present work-time. The workers transfer and preserve in production the already-produced value or old value of the material and machinery consumed during the production process called transferred-value. When production is sold, the amount paid for already-produced value, its old value, is returned to those who bought it for use in producing new value.

The problems facing the energy industry cannot be solved by forcing concessions on workers in

the name of "reducing costs." Reducing wages and benefits does not reduce the new value workers produce; it merely moves new value from reproduced-value, which the workers claim, over to added-value, which those who own and control social wealth claim as their own. Workers are not a cost and concessions are not a solution. A big problem to be addressed is what to do about the fact that oil is being sold below its price of production, which is roughly the sum of new and old value of a commodity, where new value is a commodity's reproduced-value plus added-value, and old value is the already-produced value, its transferred-value.

Solutions such as public control of wholesale prices and distribution of oil need to be presented, discussed and considered. Concessions have never led anywhere except to impoverishment of the working class and crises in the economy. Attacking the value workers reproduce, their wages and benefits, does not solve anything.

Capital-centred logic turns the creation of value on its head, denying the actual producers their central role. The economic "truths" flowing from this logic or outmoded point of view served the royalty panel to justify what could only be a pre-determined conclusion, that Albertans are receiving "appropriate" royalties. Only so much wealth is received from the sale of oil and at present prices we are told the amount received is not enough to increase the royalty share.

Rather than question why the wholesale price is below the price of production, the royalty panel infers that the claim of workers on the value they produce should be lowered, and concludes that the claim of the state through royalties cannot be raised because the claim of monopolies would then drop below zero. Such a situation would mean that the monopolies would end their involvement in Alberta energy production and Albertans would be left high and dry passively twiddling their thumbs not knowing what to do. Therefore the demands of industry must be met. On this backward basis the panel declares current royalties as "appropriate."

This is all a sideshow from confronting the real problems of natural resource development and distribution that require real solutions not the status quo. Attacking the living and working conditions of the workers who create the wealth, accepting the present wholesale price of oil as the natural right of the global market to decide, not demanding a change to the royalty regime, and not questioning the current global monopoly ownership and control of Alberta's natural resources are not solutions. They are a dead-end and recipe for recurring economic crises. Real problems require real solutions! A new pro-social direction for the economy is needed!



What Is Partial Upgrading and the Dead-End It Represents?

The Royalty Review Report, *Alberta at a Crossroads* draws the conclusion that the province should "seize opportunities to add value-added processing." However, the Report seems already to have closed the door on full upgrading and refining of bitumen, and instead recommends that the government subsidize research into partial upgrading. The government has announced that it will immediately initiate further study of this.

The big global monopolies do not consider upgraders "economically viable" under present conditions. Big oil has decided not to build more upgraders, declaring them not "economically

viable." Full upgrading produces synthetic crude oil (SCO) which is essentially refinery-ready.

The last two major bitumen mines, Kearl Lake mine owned by Imperial Oil and ExxonMobil, and Fort Hills mine now under construction and owned by Suncor, Total and Teck Resources are being built without upgraders. The growing production from *in-situ* extraction is not upgraded either. The panel has accepted this as a *fait accompli* and instead promotes partial upgrading.



The goal of partial upgrading is not fully upgraded synthetic crude oil but to facilitate diluent-free transportation of bitumen. Bitumen without partial upgrading is too thick and gooey to flow through a pipeline. At the present time, diluent is used to thin the bitumen and make it flow. The most common diluent is a natural gas condensate.

Oil sands companies used approximately 350,000 barrels of diluent every day in 2014 while only 145,000 barrels of condensate were produced in western Canada in 2013. This shortage spiked the price of natural gas condensate and increased the price paid to ship bitumen and to produce Western Canadian Select oil.

Partial upgrading is a means to reduce the thickness of the bitumen so it can flow through pipelines without the addition of diluent. The aim is to use 100 per cent of pipeline capacity to ship partially upgraded bitumen and eliminate the necessity of using diluent. Since diluent makes up about 30 per cent of the total mix of "dilbit" (the combined bitumen/diluents solution), this can increase capacity of pipelines by 30 per cent as well as avoid the use of diluents, which would reduce the price of transporting bitumen through pipelines.

Partial upgrading does nothing to solve the problem of shipping new value and jobs down the pipeline, and continues the same rip and ship economy. What the review panel proposes is that the Alberta government subsidize industry research to develop partial upgrading. The report states, "Our Panel recommends that the Government of Alberta, as a significant owner of bitumen through in-kind royalties, provide financial support to accelerate the commercialization of partial upgrading technologies." The report also proposes expansion of industries using natural gas as a feedstock.

Canada sent almost 1.2 million barrels of unprocessed bitumen a day to the United States last year, or about 60 per cent of daily oil sands production. With no new upgraders, the per cent of exports that remain unprocessed or only partially upgraded will continue to grow.

Upgrading and refining bitumen has broad support of the people of Alberta. The rip and ship economy has proved to be unsustainable and in practice is a boom and bust economy. The time is now to say no to monopoly control and its rip and ship mindset and direction. Fresh thinking and a new direction are needed: Manufacturing Yes! Nation-Wrecking No!



The Alternative to the Royalties System: Affirming Our Right of Public Ownership in Practice

- Peggy Morton -

The report of the Royalty Review panel *Alberta at a Crossroads* says that royalties are the payment the people of Alberta receive as owners of the energy resources. The report states: "Royalties serve a unique and particular purpose. Put simply, royalties are payments made to Albertans for hydrocarbons that are produced and sold from the province's resources. Royalties are very different from taxes. Taxes are set by the government based on how much revenue it wants to raise to pay for expenditures such as health, education, and other public services. Taxes can be imposed on almost anyone or anything, and at almost any level, depending on how much money the government needs.



"Royalties, on the other hand, are rooted in ownership. They are about Albertans, as owners, collecting value from our resources. There is only a certain amount of value available to share between owners and developers. The value available to be shared can be calculated as: the price received for the resources, minus the costs to produce and sell them. That means, as Albertans, in addition to setting royalty rates correctly, we have a vested interest in things that affect both the prices received for our resources and the costs to produce them."

What does it mean to speak about the people as owners when private monopolies exercise their dictate over all decision-making as to what is produced, how it is produced, how it is priced and how it is distributed? Why do the private monopoly interests exercise ownership over the natural resources in practice if not in theory? Why this should be the case is never elaborated by governments, which simply assert the practice as unassailable. Working people are just supposed to accept this dictatorship of the monopolies as the way it is, and that the way it is cannot be challenged or changed.

Telling Albertans that royalty payments compensate for the loss of public control is supposed to deflect public opposition to the sell out of natural resources and the exercise of monopoly dictate. This idea is then spun into the concept that the monopolies are paying a form of economic rent, and that a fair exchange is carried out and after all, the monopolies are the ones investing billions of their own money and are the biggest stakeholders in any particular project.

Within this fairytale, Canadians are reduced to arguing about whether the people receive their "fair share" or "appropriate" level of royalties, while all the essential issues related to control are in the hands of the monopolies. The Royalty Review declares that within the reality of low oil prices when "there is only so much to go around," the royalty status quo represents a "fair share" for the people who own the natural resource in theory but not in practice.

What Should Be Done?

The owners in theory but not in practice, the First Nations and the people of Alberta and Canada, cannot permit the state to sanction the claims and rights of global private interests to ownership in practice of the country's natural resources. Legitimate claims to the natural resources in theory and practice belong to the First Nations, to the people of Alberta and Canada, to the workers who transform the natural resources into useable products, and to Mother Earth on whose behalf the people must ensure her well-being.



If royalties are rooted in ownership, as distinct from taxes, then it would naturally follow that the owners can exercise control over that which they own. But this is not the case. Statements about Albertans as owners of the resources are not linked to establishing new arrangements to empower the First Nations and Métis, Albertans and Canadians to exercise control over the natural resources and their production and distribution.

The exceptional nature of ownership in theory but not in practice results in the people as owners being deprived of their decision-making power. The monopoly owners in practice but not in theory, sanctioned by the state, exercise control and decision-making over the country's natural resources. What should be done about this exceptional situation, which runs counter to the public interest? How can the people harmonize their ownership in theory with ownership in practice?

Ownership of the oil sands and other energy and natural resources must first be identified and recognized. Most of the oil sands as well as much of the oil and gas lie within unceded Indigenous First Nations' territory.



When the working class and its allies speak of ownership, it does not mean that we should think and speak in a capital-centred way such as the CEOs and owners of the big monopolies do, which is repeated *ad nauseam* by their political representatives, academics and experts in the mass media and elsewhere. The capital-centred view is very narrowly based on protecting and enlarging private wealth, on empire-building and striving for hegemony through negating the rights and claims of the working class and the public good.

The capital-centred view is pragmatic in the service of narrow private interests. It lacks modern principles and definitions that begin with the necessity for a new direction for the economy to build a secure stable future for

the people based on recognizing and guaranteeing the rights of all. The pragmatic approach results mostly in the boom and bust, rip and ship practices that end up wrecking economies, ruining lives and the social and natural environment, and the use of the state for anti-social

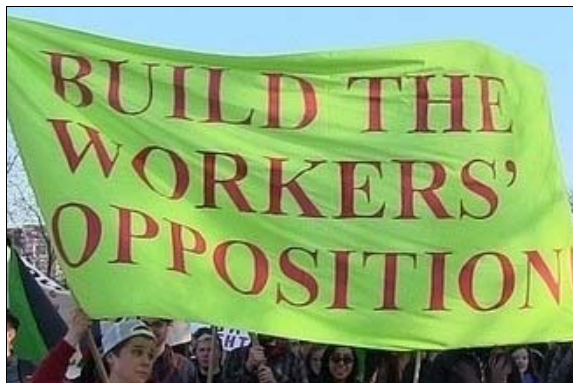
purposes to provide public funds and infrastructure to serve private monopoly interests and to unleash its military/police powers to assault all those who resist and do not submit but want a pro-social alternative and new direction.

For the working class and its allies, exercising the right of the people's ownership means putting the human factor/social consciousness in command to harmonize the claims and needs of the various sections of society, both individuals and their collectives, to serve the public or common good. To make this pro-social aim a reality, the working class and its allies need to have control and a say-so over the natural resources and what is produced and how it is distributed. This must include the political and legal authority and power to restrict the monopolies and their empire-building, the authority to deprive the owners of great social wealth and their monopolies of the power to harm the social and natural environment, and to deprive monopoly right of its power to deprive the people of their rights and well-being.

With the power to deprive the monopolies of their power to deprive the people of their rights, including the right in theory and practice to ownership and control of the natural resources, the many problems associated with the production of fossil fuels can be provided with solutions, and the issue of public ownership can be realized in practice and given a guarantee.

The power to deprive the monopolies of their power is very evident in the need to end the boom and bust, rip and ship economy. Public control is needed when it comes to decision-making about upgrading, refining, manufacturing, social programs and public services, the sum of contributing to nation-building and the all-sided development of the economy, which can provide the people with security and a prosperous future.

The monopolies recognize as legitimate only their claim to the natural resources and the wealth produced from those resources by the working class. The monopolies consider all public and working class claims as a cost and drain from their private coffers. The monopolists are medieval in their outlook as they view themselves as the centre of the universe around which the world, its peoples and natural resources revolve and owe tribute. They refuse to recognize the reality that they are anachronistic and must give way to the political power of the people and their public ownership in theory and practice.



For this to occur, the working class and its allies must step forward boldly based on their independent politics to restrict the monopolies and put them in their place and deprive them of their power to deprive the people of their rights. Private monopolies curtailed of their power to deprive could operate as temporary contractors without ownership of production, paid for their services from the value created by the working class according to strictly followed arrangements and payments scientifically determined from the price of production. But generally, the private monopolies must be gradually excluded from the socialized economy and replaced with public enterprise, as the monopolies are an obsolete drain on public wealth and source of grave danger to the public interest and the social and natural environment and to the rights of the people and their well-being.



Alberta Federation of Labour President Responds to Royalty Review



Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) President Gil McGowan has voiced strong criticism of the report of the Royalty Review panel and its acceptance by the NDP government. In an interview with *Calgary Sun* columnist Rick Bell, McGowan said, "Some people say the NDP have come face to face with reality. I say what happened can best be described as the government being captured by industry."

"I honestly think the government has made a profound political mistake. We don't believe progressive governments have to become conservative to deal effectively with economic issues or to succeed politically. That's a fallacy," McGowan said.

"Virtually none of our concerns or suggestions are reflected in the royalty report," McGowan told the *Sun*. "Those ideas were passed over in favour of a plan that could have been introduced by a PC or Wildrose government."

In the interview, McGowan pointed out that the AFL consulted well-known energy economists. He said, "We put forward a case for creative, progressive alternatives to the ones put forward by the oil industry and assorted conservative parties. We had high hopes at least some of those progressive alternatives would have found their way into the final report."

"This is not the end of the issue for us," McGowan said. The AFL will release its own royalty research on February 1, which can be found [here](#).

In a backgrounder, *Let's Talk Royalties*, published September 15, 2015, the AFL made a case that within the current system: "We give our oil away. [...] In 2012, Alberta collected barely 10 per cent of oil sands revenue in royalties. The year after that, Alberta collected just 11 per cent. By contrast, the Lougheed government collected 35-40 per cent of industry revenue in royalties. If Alberta had collected Lougheed-era royalties in 2012, we could have had \$12 billion extra in royalty revenue -- from an industry that collected more than \$42 billion in revenues that year. Albertans need to do more than pray for the next boom: we need to collect our fair share of royalties today so that we can once again contribute to the Heritage Trust Fund and our future prosperity."

The backgrounder also made the case that Albertans do not receive maximum value out of our resources: "For all of our oil wealth, we have very little to show for it. Primarily because we continue to subsidize one of the most profitable industries in the world. For years, the Alberta Federation of Labour has demonstrated that Alberta has one of the cheapest conventional oil and gas fiscal regimes in North America."

"The same goes for the oil sands. Past Progressive Conservative governments slashed non-conventional oil revenues, handing industry billions in subsidies at the expense of government revenues and Albertans' fair share. The AFL estimates that royalty giveaways since

2009 have cost Albertans at least \$4.7 billion. It's no wonder we are in a deficit budget position today."

The AFL called on the government to make the current royalty system transparent and remove hidden industry subsidies. It challenged the government to negotiate the best possible rate of return for the people, insisting on industry innovation and consistent royalty rates, not more government handouts. The AFL also called for "development of value-added projects in Alberta, including local upgrading and refining, which will create many good paying local jobs to support our economy and society."



AFL President Gil McGowan at the "Mirror" protest, Alberta Legislature, March 7, 2015.



**No to War Preparations! No to War Profiteers and Energy Companies
Collaborating Against the Interests of Humanity!**

Join the Picket to Oppose ConverX2016

Calgary

**Wednesday February 10 -- 3:30-6:30pm
Beside the Westin Hotel (3 Street & 4 Avenue SW)**

On February 9-11, 2016 representatives of the defence and energy industries will meet at the Westin Hotel in Calgary at ConverX 2016, an international industry-led conference. The conference will bring together "senior managers and research and technology leaders from the defence and energy sectors." ConverX is described as an inaugural conference with the aim of identifying "new market opportunities for existing and future technologies, products and services."



The conference is being supported by Industry Canada and Western Economic Diversification, as well as many global monopolies engaged in war production. Many of the world's biggest weapons dealers and military aircraft, missile and drone manufacturers will be present, including Raytheon, General Atomics, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Thales Canada, Babcock, and Meggitt. They are joined by energy corporations Enbridge, StatOil, MEG Energy, Weatherford and modular and tank manufacturer CofelyFabricom.

Topics for the conference include From the Battlefield to the Oilfield and Unmanned Systems (Drones). From the Battlefield to the Oilfield is being moderated by a representative of General Dynamics Canada. General Dynamics, a U.S.-owned weapons manufacturer is the supplier of multi-billion dollar contracts to the Canadian government. General Dynamics has a \$14.8 billion contract to provide light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia, a deal which accounted for more than 95 per cent of military exports in 2013-2014. The deal was brokered by the Crown

corporation Canadian Commercial Corporation and has been endorsed by the Liberal government.

Canada is the fifth-largest defence supplier in the world.

Bring banners and placards to express your opposition to war profiteers and their partners in the energy industry.

***Canada Needs an Anti-War Government!
Canada Get Out of NATO!
Hands Off Syria! Hands off Iraq!***

*For information contact Calgary Forum for People's Empowerment at
calgaryempowerment@gmail.com or call Peggy -- 403-923-7054; Reynold -- 403-701-3865.*



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