

The Peoples' Right to Decide Is Paramount **Alberta Government Announces** **"Climate Leadership Plan"**



Calgarians rally in support of action on climate change, November 28, 2015.
(Climate Action Network)

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Alberta Government Announces "Climate Leadership Plan"



Peoples' Climate Change Rally, Edmonton, November 28, 2015.

Alberta Premier Rachel Notley and Environment Minister Shannon Phillips brought together representatives of First Nations, environmental organizations, and the biggest global oil and gas monopolies operating in the oil sands to announce on November 22, the government's Climate Leadership Plan.

"This is the day we start to mobilize capital and resources to create green jobs, green energy, green infrastructure, and a strong, environmentally-responsible, sustainable and visionary Alberta energy industry with a great future. This is the day we step up, at long last, to one of the world's biggest problems — the pollution that is causing climate change," Notley said.

Under the plan, coal-fired electricity generation will be phased out by 2030. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the oil sands will be allowed to grow from the current level of roughly 70 megatonnes a year to 100 megatonnes. Economy wide carbon taxes will be introduced. The price on carbon will increase from the current \$15 a tonne to \$20 in 2017 and \$30 in 2018. A carbon sales tax on gasoline starting at 5 cents a litre and increasing to 7 cents a litre will be introduced, and people will also have to pay a sales tax on natural gas for home heating. Some revenue will be used to provide relief for low and middle income Albertans, Notley said. Combined carbon taxes are expected to raise about \$3 billion a year initially, rising to \$5 billion. Tax revenue will subsidize companies' development of technology to reduce emissions and expand renewable energy sources such as solar power and wind.

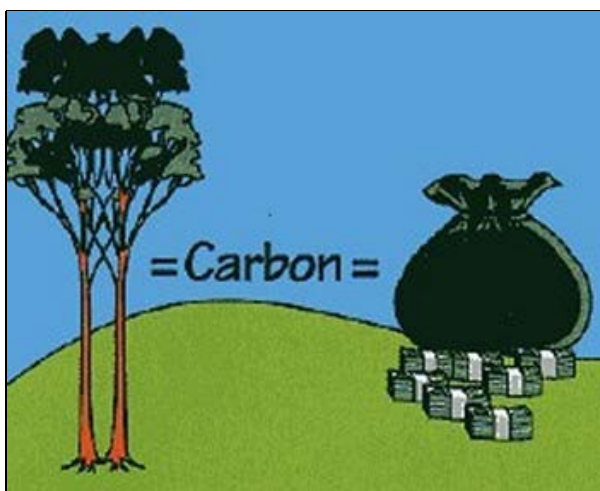


At the announcement, Tony Alexis, Grand Chief of Treaty Six, highlighted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the obligation of governments to respect indigenous and

treaty rights, including the right to decide. Representatives of environmental organizations Pembina Institute, Forest Ethics, and Environmental Defence were also present. Speaking on their behalf, Ed Whittingham from the Pembina Institute expressed his strong endorsement of the Climate Leadership Plan.

The leaders of four of the biggest players in the oil sands were also on the podium lending support. Steve Williams, president and CEO of Suncor Energy Inc.; Lorraine Mitchelmore, president of Shell Canada; Brian Ferguson, president and CEO of Cenovus Energy Inc.; and Murray Edwards, chairman of Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. were not just present, but hailed as champions of climate change action, with Edwards singled out as a leader.

No doubt the people want the government to take action on environmental issues including pollution and its effects on the people and climate. But why is big oil so enthusiastic and when did this remarkable transformation take place, where the biggest monopolies operating in the oilsands are suddenly hailed as champions of climate change action? Why is the major shareholder in the corporation responsible for the BC Mount Polley mine pollution disaster, Murray Edwards, being praised in this way? When were these oil barons absolved of all responsibility for the environmental devastation resulting from their reckless pursuit of their narrow private interests and a big score? What redress has been achieved? Apparently something has been holding them back from doing what they have always wanted to do, and now the conditions have been created for these global monopolies to unleash their passion not only for their pocketbooks but also their newfound care for Mother Earth and the people.



Since coming into being, private monopoly interests have usurped the decision making power, which belongs to the First Nations, Albertans and Canadians. The people have the right to decide what is produced and how it should be produced and used. The global monopolies have deprived the peoples of their right to decide resulting in the well-documented environmental, social and other problems the world faces.

No one has been holding a gun to the heads of the monopolies telling them to deprive the peoples of their right to decide. It is they who have long held guns to the heads of the working people and small business depriving them of their rights. In spite of their enormous power to deprive, including the power of the state, the monopolies face numerous roadblocks in their pursuit to satisfy their narrow private interests. One roadblock is the fierce opposition they encounter from the people who refuse to accept the denial of their right to decide. The monopolies bemoan this opposition, which they often describe as a "lack of social license" to pursue their reckless path of destruction. Their tactics here in Alberta and indeed at COP21 in Paris are efforts to undermine the opposition and achieve the sought-after social license to serve their private interests.

The energy monopolies are also dealing with the reality of a bottom dropping out of the price of oil amidst a glut of oil, fierce inter-monopoly competition for markets and the consequences of the aims of the most powerful imperialists to destroy the economies of those who do not submit.

The development of tactics of big oil calls for careful scrutiny and an active stand from the working class and its allies in small business not to permit these monopolies to use the people's

demand for action on climate and the environment to justify yet more schemes to pay the rich and deprive the people of their right to decide.

As soon as the government's Climate Leadership Plan was released, everyone was called on to declare themselves for or against it. Such an approach is not helpful in assessing precisely what is being put in place, what impact it will have, and whether it constitutes a pro-social response and new direction to resolve the problems faced by the social and natural environment and the destruction wrought by the monopolies.

What are the people being asked to take a stand on: whether or not to reduce emissions and remediate negative environmental impacts? Everyone knows that Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have been skyrocketing mainly because of the oil sands. Besides GHG emissions, other serious issues involving pollution include the existence of vast tailings ponds, the negative health effects on people, and the one-sided nature of oilsands development that has left the economy and working class vulnerable during this downturn.



The working class as well as First Nations and Métis are fighting for a pro-social response to the crises of pollution and an economy in turmoil. A pro-social response is based first and foremost on upholding the rights of First Nations, Métis, Albertans and Canadians, of which the most important is the right to decide.



What Is Big Oil Up to on Climate Change?

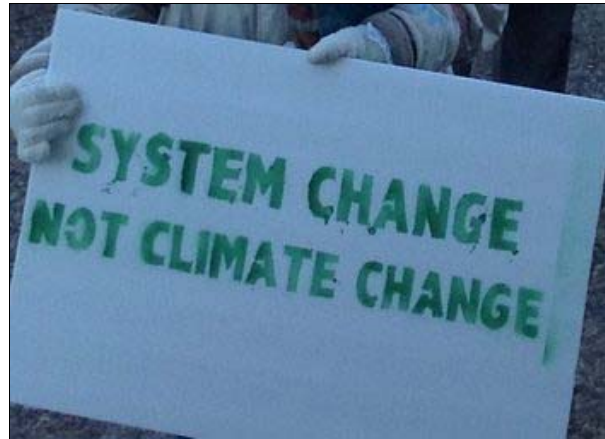
- Peggy Morton -

In a joint press release, four major players in the oilsands, Canadian Natural Resources Ltd (CNRL), Suncor, Shell, and Cenovus, express strong approval for the Alberta NDP government's Climate Leadership Plan. They declare it a "historic development for Alberta" that will "change the conversation about climate change, oil sands and infrastructure." The press release states that they are proud to be working with leading environmental organizations to "better understand each other's views and recommend solutions for the oil and natural gas industry that helped inform the policy."

"By directing revenue generated from the new carbon pricing regime towards the development of potentially game-changing greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction technologies, this made-in-Alberta plan lays the foundation for the province to become a global leader in addressing the climate change challenge," the press release states. "It also creates the conditions for Alberta's oil to

become carbon competitive on the global stage and for Canadians to begin receiving full value for their oil exports. By demonstrating that Alberta is willing to lead the way with an ambitious climate plan, the province can become a preferred source for oil and create sustained wealth and jobs for future generations of Albertans and Canadians."

These sentiments were echoed by Pembina Institute Director Ed Whittingham who said, "Today we are making history, with Alberta taking its rightful place as a leader on the world stage. Premier Notley promised Albertans leadership on the issue of climate change and she and her government have delivered. This is the right thing to do both for our environment and our economy. The world needs more of this kind of leadership from major energy producing jurisdictions if we are to avoid dangerous climate change."



The stand of the oil monopolies reflects the conclusion that Harper's approach was a colossal failure. Harper's position held that no scientific or popular opposition would stand in the way of the rapid growth of the oil sands and export of raw bitumen. Harper and the Alberta PCs failed in their mission and could not force through a single pipeline. Harper told Obama that he would not take no for an answer yet the answer he received was still no. Simply put, the big four in the oil sands have decided that their best option to transport oil to markets is to present themselves as champions of climate action. The focus and aim remains the opening of export markets and this is the way to do it, they have concluded.

Premier Rachel Notley called the final decision by U.S. President Obama to reject the Keystone XL pipeline a "wake-up call" for Alberta. Obama said that oil from the tar sands is some of the dirtiest oil in the world. Alberta is a land-locked energy producer with a single market that just took a very hard hit, Notley said, and "we are going to do better."

While Obama's remarks have been the focus of much discussion, the monopolies operating in Alberta know very well that the U.S. is currently swimming in oil and that market prospects in the U.S. are dismal. The real target is to ensure the approval of Energy East and the TransMountain lines to export to markets in Europe and Asia.

So, is there nothing or something to worry about with this sudden change of heart of the oil monopolies, the people ask. The monopolies may be self-serving and somewhat cynical in their awakening to the pollution they have caused but no matter what their motives are, does the change not serve the common good? Will the oil monopolies clean up their act after which everyone benefits? Billionaire Murray Edwards, promoted as the poster boy for climate action amongst owners and CEOs of big oil, makes the argument of one happy family with a common aim and politics.

"This announcement removes barriers for collaboration with a broader group of stakeholders. We are all now working together to realize the full value provided by the oil and natural gas industry, including jobs, economic benefits and government revenues in a way that addresses the challenges associated with climate change," said Murray Edwards, CNRL Chair.[1]

What barriers does the government announcement remove? Would it include the people's opposition to monopoly dictate, which Edwards suggests will now melt away under

good-natured one nation politics? Why are the oil companies giddy about the announcement and what are their expectations and demands of the provincial government?

It seems the monopolies will pay a carbon tax up front, with the people paying at the gas pump and for home heating, and then have a certain amount of the tax revenue returned to the monopolies to pay for technologies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. If this is how the plan is to work, then big oil may consider the exercise nothing but a grand cynical PR stunt to pose as good guys in the eyes of the people, especially those concerned with the self-serving pollution of the monopolies, and in the process slip through a couple of green pipelines.

Much of the sales taxes collected at the gas pump and from natural gas used for home heating according to the carbon tax plan will be handed over to the energy monopolies. At first blush, the carbon tax and sales taxes appear to be a cash-back plan for the energy monopolies, a massive pay-the-rich scheme in the making, one which big oil, including the drilling contractors association, will no doubt work overtime to game in every way possible.[2]

The assumption in all this is that the public interest is somehow served by opening export markets for bitumen. The people are not convinced and continue to be deprived of the right to set the direction for the economy and decide what will be produced and how it will be produced, distributed and used. The monopolies remain firmly in control of decision making with the aim of serving their own narrow private interests, but with the new twist of trying to equate their private interests with the public interest and the people's desire for action to combat pollution.



Rather than a repeat of the old methods to pay the rich, which now are to include cynical twists that posture as new and even green, the workers' opposition demands a new direction for the economy, which includes empowerment of the people to decide, new ways of collecting revenue from the economy through public enterprise and other methods, a transition to a diversified economy based on manufacturing, public services and social programs, and an end to monopoly control over crucial sectors of the economy, such as raw material extraction in Alberta. A new direction with a new aim to serve the people would ensure development of upgrading, processing and manufacturing to replace the "rip and ship" economy presently imposed by the monopolies, which inevitably leads to boom greatly profiting a few, and bust affecting the many.

Importantly, the government must stop paying the rich. The funneling of public funds to private interests, in this case the oil monopolies should be banned and recognized as criminal pilfering of the public purse. Giving the private monopolies public money strengthens their empires and their monopoly right to dictate policies to serve their narrow private interests. Public money to pay the rich protects and grows their private fortunes and class privilege, and weakens the public right to control the economy and decide its direction and how best to humanize the social and natural environment. The public funds proposed to pay the energy monopolies, disguised under the guise of green initiatives, should go instead to build public enterprises that together with the universities would generate expertise on the energy front and continually pour value back into productive development and the science necessary to make a real difference on the climate front and the economy.

Notes

1. CNRL Chair Murray Edwards had an estimated personal net worth of US \$2.2 billion in 2011. CNRL was the first to sign contracts with the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) for construction of the Horizon oil sands project with the aim to degrade wages and working conditions. Horizon was also the first project to use temporary foreign workers in an arrangement where CLAC turned a blind eye to the fact that the workers were being paid far below the industry standard. Edwards is a major donor and fundraiser for the BC ruling Liberal Party. He is the controlling shareholder of the Mount Polley gold mine in BC where the tailings pond collapsed in 2014, sending years of accumulated toxic wastes into the surrounding lakes and rivers, including contamination of the once pristine Quesnel Lake.
2. In following issues, *Alberta Worker* will take up the questions of whether carbon exchanges and taxes on carbon commodities are effective and suitable weapons to combat climate change.



Public Right Not Monopoly Right!
No to Public-Private-Parasites!

No P3! No Bechtel!
The People Have the Right to Decide!
- George Allen -

The City of Edmonton announced on November 25, it has given a 30-year \$1.8 billion private-public partnership (P3) contract to TransEd partnership led by Bechtel. The P3 contract is for the private portion of the Millwoods extension of Edmonton's LRT. Bechtel is a giant U.S. construction monopoly closely aligned with the U.S. military. The other TransEd partners include Ellis-Don, Bombardier, Fengate Capital Management, IBI Group, American Bridge Canada (U.S.), Arup Canada (England), and Veolia (France).

Alberta Worker in its November 25 issue points out why the people of Edmonton should oppose building the extension as a P3. In a nutshell, "P3s are just one more scheme to remove decision-making from the people, transfer public wealth to private interests and enforce monopoly right over public right. They are privatization by stealth, another strategy to pay the rich, to divert public funds into the hands of the monopolies, with minimal risk for the private interests." (See *Alberta Worker*, November 25, 2015 - Vol. 1 No. 9)



The people of Edmonton have been excluded from the Millwoods LRT decision-making on at least two levels. First, they had no say in the decision to build the Millwoods line as a P3 instead of a completely public project. Second, they had no say in selecting Bechtel and the TransEd partnership as the private contractors.

Looming over this process is the question of what say, if any, the people of Edmonton will have regarding the actual carrying out of the 30-year private contract, now that it has been signed, sealed and delivered behind their backs. How will the people of Edmonton hold Bechtel and TransEd accountable for the LRT work, when they have had no say to this point in the decision, and when most of the monopolies involved are foreign-owned and closely integrated with their imperialist states?

Recent experiences with the City, the LRT and the French monopoly, Thales, are instructive here. In 2011, the City hired Thales, owned jointly by the Government of France and France's leading war contractor, Dassault, to complete extension of the signal system for the LRT's branch line to NAIT by April 2014. Problem after problem ended up delaying opening of the new section for 15 months. What was the City's response? In *The Edmonton Journal* dated August 19, 2015, the Mayor admits, "The city did not hold the contractor accountable to deliver the product that they contracted to deliver."



The City's decision to award the signalling contract to Thales was very questionable in the first place because Thales has been involved in some major business scandals:

- In 2004, the World Bank blacklisted Thales from any of its projects for one year because of fraudulent practices in a US\$6.9 million contract for supply and maintenance of motorcycles in Cambodia.
- In 2005, Schabir Shaik, financial advisor to African National Congress President Jacob Zuma, was found guilty of organising a bribe on behalf of Thales relating to an arms deal.
- On June 10, 2011 Thales was ordered to pay 630 million Euros (almost U.S.\$1 billion) in fines after courts heard that bribes had been paid to the Taiwanese government to win a large naval contract, the largest corruption case in French history.

Not only the P3 decision but also the City's selection of Bechtel and its partners for the Millwoods extension are an affront to the people. Bechtel's dark history, a matter of public record, is closely aligned with U.S. predatory wars, including in Vietnam and Iraq. Since the Second World War, wherever the U.S. military has been active Bechtel has been involved. This includes the recent wars in Iraq and elsewhere in West Asia and North Africa where the U.S. military has destroyed and rebuilt infrastructure in its interests over and over again.

Further, a revolving door exists between Bechtel executives and the U.S. government, especially the CIA. Here are a few of the many examples:

- Riley Bechtel is a member of the Trilateral Commission and was appointed to the U.S. President's Export Council under George W. Bush

- former Bechtel President George Schultz was Ronald Reagan's Secretary of State
- former Bechtel executive Casper Weinberger served as Reagan's Secretary of Defense
- former Bechtel consultant William Casey served as director of the CIA
- Stephen Bechtel's wartime business partner John McCone served as director of the CIA
- former CIA director Richard Helms later became Bechtel's General Counsel

Bechtel is a very powerful monopoly closely connected with the U.S. state and its military/police power. A May 22, 1988, *New York Times* article entitled "Government by Bechtel" asserts, "No other private corporation in modern history has had closer ties to the (U.S.) Federal Government than Bechtel." Couple this with the fact that NAFTA (1994) and other free trade agreements include clauses giving foreign monopolies the right to trump decisions made by sovereign governments, including municipal governments and cause for alarm is increased.

The Global Affairs Canada website on International Trade Agreements notes that under NAFTA, municipal officials need to assess, "whether certain types of policies, programs or projects could be subject to trade agreement obligations.... Key questions that should be asked as part of such an assessment focus on four areas of municipal activity: financial assistance, government procurement, P3s and regulation."

The people in Bolivia have given us a good example of soundly defeating Bechtel to serve the public interest. A Bolivian people's movement said a resounding "No!" to the company's interference in the public sector. A Bechtel-led consortium privatized the municipal water supply in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 1999-2000. The privatization included making the use of rainwater illegal. The people of Cochabamba launched a continuous wave of demonstrations against the monopolization of supply and the huge rate hikes that followed, including a massive general strike. This staunch resistance led to reversal of the decision to privatize in April 2000. Bechtel sued for compensation of \$40 million but dropped all financial claims in January 2006.



The awarding of an LRT P3 contract behind the backs of the people of Edmonton once again brings to the fore the main issue: "Who decides?" The people of the City of Edmonton have a right to a genuine say in all the decisions that affect their lives, including matters of public transportation. This right is greatly threatened when major transportation projects such as the extension of the LRT are handed over to the private sector through the use of P3s, especially when the narrow private interests are extremely powerful dangerous monopolies with a history of acting against the public interest in concert with the U.S. state and its military/police power.

The people of Edmonton need to stand as one on this issue and not allow this P3 to proceed. They have the right to decide! It is not in the public interest to have U.S. warmongers and parasites sucking value out of our city for thirty years and dictating how our public transportation should be built, organized and managed.

The Edmonton Mayor and Council have made it clear they do not stand with the people but are

in bed with the foreign monopolies and parasites and their monopoly right in opposition to the people and public right. This must not pass! This is our city and our project. The people have the right to decide!

***Public Right Yes! Monopoly Right No!
No P3s! No Bechtel! No Parasites!
Keep the LRT Public!***



Education Is a Right!

Keep Athabasca University in Athabasca!

- Dougal MacDonald -

On November 25, representatives from Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) Local 69, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3911, and the Athabasca University Faculty Association (AUFA) met at the Legislature Building in Edmonton to deliver a petition to Honourable Lori Sigurdson, provincial Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. The petition called on the government to keep the headquarters of Athabasca University (AU), Alberta's online distance university, in the town of Athabasca where it has been located since 1970. Minister Sigurdson stated that the government was in favour of this.

The petition included almost 900 signatures and was organized in response to comments by interim AU President Peter MacKinnon in his June 1, 2015, Presidential Task Force Report. The three unions had already issued a joint press release disagreeing with the contents of the report. The report suggested that for "sustainability reasons" AU's headquarters might be better relocated to a larger centre. Page seven of the report claims that the size of the town of Athabasca "is an obstacle to the recruitment and retention of professional personnel" and that Athabasca does not meet MacKinnon's criteria for "viable small town universities and colleges elsewhere in Canada and the United States."



The report also specifically targeted the members of CUPE Local 3911, who were excluded from representation on the task force, decrying the fact that few of the 290 CUPE members live in Athabasca. First, AU also has offices in Edmonton and Calgary. Second, AU courses are offered online, not in classrooms in a building in Athabasca. The locations of the students and hence of the teaching staff is flexible. Third, all CUPE members are forced to be part-time and so require other work to make a living, e.g., contract teaching for other post-secondary institutions. Such additional work is usually more easily found in larger centres like Edmonton and Calgary.

While presenting the petition, the union representatives pointed out to Minister Sigurdson that at present about 400 Athabasca university workers live in or around the town of Athabasca and that closing the university would seriously disrupt their lives and livelihood. Athabasca is a small

town with a population of about 3,500, located 230 kilometres north of Edmonton. The university is the largest employer in the town, annually contributing an estimated \$30 million to the local economy, so closing the headquarters is not just an issue for AU workers. The closure would alter the demographic fabric of the entire community and would be a serious body blow to many other workers, farmers and small businesses in the area. Young workers in particular would be hard hit and would be the most likely group to leave the Athabasca area to find other work, thereby undermining the whole community.



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