



Focus On Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

SPECIAL BULLETIN 4

CANADIANS FOR PEACE AND SOCIALISM

**STATEMENT ON THE HARDENING
STRUGGLE OF ALBERTA LABOUR
AGAINST THE HARPER-STELMACH
RESOURCE SELL-OUT TO US BIG OIL!**

ALSO INSIDE!

FOR A CLASS APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

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Focus On Socialism

FOS is the political journal of Canadians For Peace and Socialism (CPS). In it we address current national and international issues. We strive to bring a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint to the struggle of Canadians for peace, progress and socialism.

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HARDENING OF THE STRUGGLE OF ALBERTA LABOUR AGAINST THE HARPER-STELMACH SELL-OUT OF ALBERTA LABOUR TO US BIG OIL!

STATEMENT OF CPS, MARCH 05, 2007

A hardening of Alberta workers to the obstinate giveaway policies of the profit-driven-pro-war Harper-Stelmach agenda of Big-Oil in Alberta is emerging. Alberta workers are rejecting the policy of naked unbridled energy resource extraction and export of Canadian oil and gas to US corporate ownership and control. The Canadian administrative wing of US continental policy, the Harper Conservative regime, has given its newest lieutenant, Ed Stelmach, clear direction on energy policy for Alberta and Canada.

The transfer of power to Ed Stelmach, hailed as victory for ordinary people by the right wing media, continues the oil monopoly policies of his predecessor - Ralph Klein. The royal crown was passed, from the overtly crude power politics of the Klein regime, to the corporate coddling “transparent government of the people” line of the Stelmach clan.

Stelmach has served notice that he is a transparent man for the oil monopolies. Stelmach has assured the insider investor class that his government will not interfere in their maximising profit and is “one that



supports — not interferes with — the free market and seeks the benefits of freer trade relationships.”^[1]

The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) is the largest union organisation in the province. The AFL is confronted with winning better conditions for its 31 affiliate unions and nearly 125,000 members. Like the CAW, the AFL must protect the jobs basic working conditions and wages of its members and engages in political struggle against corporate interests that view labour as necessary but dispensable. In the battle to protect members’ wages, pensions and health and safety, the AFL is confronted with reactionary propaganda, an organized oiligarch and system of labour laws designed to keep Albertan’s working non-stop to maximize oil monopoly profits.

The AFL is up against US finance capital, Big-Oil and a war profiteer class supported and backed by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, local chamber of commerce and the Harper regime in Ottawa. The AFL has served notice that it is going to challenge the theft of Canadian resources by a profit bloated corporate oil class through a series of public forums in the month of March.

Gil McGowan, president of the AFL, is leading an effort to defend workers conditions and put forward a political economic agenda led by labour. The February 2007 edition of the AFL’s Labour Economic Monitor said, “The current boom is laying the basis for real gains in bargaining, and it’s up to us to win those gains.” The battle lines are being drawn.

THE AFL ASKS — WHOSE OIL?

The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) is conducting a series of province wide “Round Table” discussions and public “town hall” meetings with local activists and union leaders entitled, “Shipping Jobs Down the Pipeline – Our Oil, Our Choice.”.

The AFL has five central issues around which the series is to be conducted. They are:

1. Block construction of pipelines used to funnel unrefined bitumen to the U.S.
2. Guarantee a fair rate of return to Albertans through higher royalties on our oil resources



3. Introduce conditional leases on oil sands properties
4. Tighten up rules for temporary foreign workers
5. Regulate the pace of oil sands development

The Stelmach regime is attempting to deflect public attention from these issues, the crisis in Ft. McMurray and impending crisis in Edmonton. Stelmach announced, to much fanfare and hoopla, \$396 million over the next three years in aid of Fort McMurray's out of control growth. He is responding to Ralph Klein's admission that, "There wasn't a plan. The plan was being developed, but no one could anticipate the phenomenal growth that was taking place."^[2]

A cynical media steeped in years of Klein nepotism and pandering, has taken up the Stelmach smoke screen, and started a campaign to attack Alberta workers and undermine and divide AFL solidarity. The media barrage is the start of a campaign to break the unions in this province and lay the ground work for wage cutting. The campaign is part of a broader continental strategy of expanding free trade using such agreements as TILMA and trilateral agreements with the US and Mexico as promoted by the North American Competitiveness Council(NACC) to import labour and drive down wages and working conditions , safety and labour standards to the lowest common denominator.

Commenting on the \$50 million dollar Stelmach cash give away to Fort McMurray landlords and land developers for "rent supplements", a homeless shelter and 300 "affordable" housing units, Jason Markusoff, Provincial Affairs Writer for the Edmonton Journal wrote that the money is set aside "for those who would not normally need 'affordable housing' elsewhere – teachers, civil servants, firefighters and others who cannot compete for housing costs with ***wealthy industrial workers*** (our emphasis) employed at Syncrude, Suncor and other giant oil sands plants." Lumping industrial worker's wages in with landlords and land developers as a cause of the housing shortage is a new low in anti-labour journalism. Industrial worker's wages are not driving up the cost of housing, rent gouging, real estate speculators, mortgage lenders and the banks bear that responsibility.

THE KLEIN LEGACY OF NEGLECT AND THEFT

Alberta was dismantled and neglected during the Klein years. The Klein legacy of servitude to oil monopoly profit has resulted in a housing crisis,



deep cuts to education and health care services, an infrastructure which is in need of repair and expansion, increased poverty and hard ship to the working poor and the costs of these policies transferred on to backs of energy sector workers.

Increased and intensified work hours are stressing family relations and the mental and physical health of wage earners. Real wages have been eroded due to land and real estate speculators inflating housing costs out of reach for most workers. Privatization of social services, cuts to education and apprenticeship training are resulting in increased demands on workers wages to care for children, seniors and to protect retirement savings. Downloading provincial infrastructure costs to municipalities is resulting in delays and shelving of road, sewer and bridge repairs. Anarchic oil sands development is laying waste to the Alberta environment and destroying traditional lands of First Nations.

AFL President Gil McGowan in a September 27, 2006 submission to the Oil Sands Development hearings said of the Klein regime's capitulation policy towards royalty rates, "As a labour leader, I know something about bargaining. And I can tell you, if I'd gone back to my members with a deal like the Klein government got for Albertans on oil sands royalties I would have been run out of office in ten seconds flat."

The Klein legacy has resulted in record profits for the oil monopolies by protecting low royalty regimes, transfer of control of leased lands into the hands of US oil monopolies and deregulation of tar sands and mineral exploration. Oil monopolies benefited from the Klein Alberta Advantage – workers paid with their labour and lives.

ED STELMACH THE NEW KING OF OIL

Ed Stelmach has signified that he will continue the Klein agenda and ensure that Suncor, CNRL, Nexen, Shell, Syncrude, ENCANA, Imperial Oil and US finance capital will continue to rack up massive profit from the unpaid labour of Alberta workers. In a February 22, 2007 speech to the Economic Society of Calgary Stelmach said, "Looking beyond Alberta's borders, I am committed to supporting and expanding the free market system that underlies our prosperity." In other words –Washington have no fear "your" oil under our snow is safe with "Honest Ed."

The union busting policies of the CNRL-CLAC temporary foreign workers campaign are part of a broader strategy by the Canadian Council of Chief



Executives (CCCE) to “harmonize” labour and resource export policies in an effort to secure strategic labour and resources for US war profiteers. In a January 18, 2007 speech to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce Stelmach assured investors that he will work with Harper to secure cheap labour for the construction of oil sands extraction projects. Stelmach said, “We will also be working more closely with the federal government to streamline the immigration and temporary foreign worker processes.”

The ENCANA/Conoco-Philips raw bitumen export pipeline to refineries in Illinois to produce value-added refined product for US domestic and military markets is beginning to galvanize Alberta workers to the realities of capitalist economics. By continuing the sell off of Canadian resources and sovereignty Stelmach is signalling to Big Oil that he will maintain and protect the profits of US oil monopolies at the expense of Alberta workers.

In a January 14, 2007 news report newly minted Alberta Energy Minister Mel Knight stated, "We've exported oil from the province of Alberta for 65 years. Are we going to do the same thing (with bitumen)? Absolutely." In other words the Alberta Conservative regime will continue to ensure that US needs are satisfied first.

Clearly the need for Canadian control of such a vital commodity as energy needs to be placed up front as a central component in a People's Democratic Program of Peace, Economic Development and Defence of Canadian Sovereignty. The Harper-Stelmach policies of oil for war must be defeated and the control of the resource placed into public ownership for the peaceful development of Canada and its people's.

Focus on Socialism will be following the AFL's fight back closely and inform our readers of the progress of Alberta workers in their struggle to win public support for the 5 central themes of the AFL's Down the Pipeline forums.

Notes:

1. Ed Stelmach, February 22, 2007, Speech to the Economics Society of Calgary.
2. National Post, Saturday September 2, 2006, “A Boom, but at what cost?” Ralph Redux.



FOR A CLASS APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

STATEMENT CPS, MARCH 5, 2007

The Harper Conservatives are demagogically playing on the real fear of job loss among workers employed in the energy sector of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland-Labrador, to pitch provisions of the Clean Air Act (CAA). The CAA is designed to exempt Big Oil from their responsibility to reduce CO₂ emissions and meet Canada's Kyoto obligations. Feigned concern for energy sector jobs will be used by Harper candidates in Alberta to win labour votes in the upcoming federal election.

Well meaning environmentalists, most of who do not depend on jobs in the energy sector and ancillary industries to live, have little to say about the catch twenty-two situation confronting energy sector workers and their families who will be sacrificed by insider energy investors, rather than be compelled to allocate bloated profits to genuine CO₂ emission reductions. The real aim of the Harper Conservatives acting for Big Oil, is to allow the energy sector investors to make money out of the mess created by unbridled exploitation of the oil sands, through the implementation of a stock market for the sale of CO₂ credits and to dump the costs of any environmental cleanup on the taxpayers. In the zeal for progress on reducing CO₂ emissions calls for the entire industry to be shut down are unsupportable from a consistent working class viewpoint. In their zeal to



control green house gases the environmentalist movement would happily sacrifice the jobs of hundreds of thousands of energy sector workers.

To turn a blind eye to the stake of energy sector workers in the oil sands who come from all parts of the country is a serious weakness in the environmental strategy that play into the hands of the Harper Conservatives and their Big Oil backers. Uncritical promotion by the left of a multifarious environmental agenda rings hollow among workers whose jobs will be sacrificed to protect Big Oil profits.

The unity of the environmentalist and labour movement depends on rejecting without reservation the notion that it is OK to sacrifice worker's jobs for a "greater good". The labour movement is beginning to elaborate its own fight back strategy that protects jobs and protects the environment. Such proposals deserve close attention and respect and in the first place by the NDP, the Communists, and the environmentalist movement.

One of the key elements in this complex problem is to call for public ownership and control of the industry and to win science to the side of the cause of working people. The current mad uncontrolled, unsustainable profit driven pace of oil sands development is inimical to the interests of all working people. A program that protects the environment, develops the resource in a planned and scientifically based manner cannot be achieved so long as the extraction, processing, transportation and marketing of the resource remains in the hands of private investors.



TROOPS OUT of Iraq and Afghanistan

PAN-CANADIAN DAY OF ACTION

Saturday, March 17

Go to www.acp-cpa.ca or your local peace group for times and locations in your area.



An Invitation to

**Union Leaders, Executives, Business Agents,
Activists, Members and the General Public**

AFL President coming to Edmonton

**Learn how you can help stop oil companies from
“shipping Alberta jobs down the pipeline”**

Edmonton

**Crown Plaza Chateau Lacombe
Lacombe Room
10111 Bellamy Hill**

March 14, 2007

**7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
(open to public & media)**

Gil McGowan invites all local leaders, activists, representatives and the general public to attend a briefing session on the AFL’s current campaign to get a better deal for working people out of the oil sands.

The AFL’s “**Don’t Send Alberta Jobs down the Pipeline**” campaign calls on the government to address union concerns in three areas: **fair royalties; the piping of unrefined bitumen out of the province; and the increasing use of temporary foreign workers.**



Oilsands

“The strength of the labour movement has always been in our members and activists. I look forward to sharing ideas about how we can address the concerns of working people on this important issue.”

- Gil McGowan, AFL President

Please RSVP

Call Maureen Werlin at 780.483-3021 or 1.800.661-3995 or email mwerlin@afl.org to confirm your attendance.

March 1, 2007
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Go to www.afl.org for times and locations in your area!



www.FocusOnSocialism.ca

**For Canadians Who Want to Abolish the Profit System!
The Problem - Imperialist War & Capitalism!
The Solution - Peace & Socialism!**

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Halt the Militarization of Canada!
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Defeat P.M. Harper!

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