



POWER TO THE PEOPLE

*Creating a
sustainable Canada.*



POWER to the PEOPLE

creating a sustainable Canada

Canadians—we're a modest, peace-loving people. We're known everywhere for being 'nice'. We have a reputation for doing the right thing be it peacekeeping or helping other nations in times of need.

So why is our reputation so tarnished when it comes to climate change action? At the last United Nations climate change talks in Warsaw, Poland, Canada again received an award from Climate Action Network, a group of non-profit organizations committed to the environment. The 'Lifetime Unachievement' Fossil Award created anew for Canada recognizes not only our failure to meaningfully contribute but our role in blocking and stalling climate change progress. Canada was also the undeniable choice for the first ever 'Fossil of Disbelief' Award, given to Canadian government officials who cheered Australia's move to roll back their climate change laws.

Not surprising, Canada won't meet its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions-reduction targets under the Copenhagen Accord's 2020 deadline. Are we a nation of climate change deniers, content to sit on the sidelines? Or are we a nation of doers who envision a leadership role for Canada on climate change action?

A recent poll found 84 per cent of Canadians believe the federal government should take the lead on climate change, while 71 per cent thought climate change should be a top priority. So why is there a deep gulf between Canadians' desire to protect the environment and government failure to act?

Highly carbonated

The research is clear—human activity contributes to global warming. Our lives and what powers them rely upon burning carbon-based fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal. High levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases contribute to global warming by raising sea-surface and air temperatures.

The latest United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports tell us that risks from climate change are greater and hitting sooner than expected. They warn unless we reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 to 70 per cent, global temperature will increase beyond 2°C, the maximum limit agreed to under the Copenhagen Accord. To achieve this the International Energy Agency has said two-thirds of oil and gas reserves should remain underground.

You only have to watch the news to see how our changing climate impacts people around the world. Severe weather exacts a punishing toll especially on vulnerable coastal nations. Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines last year, killing 20,000 and displacing another million. Across Europe, England had its worst flooding in 250 years. Germany was pelted with hail storms and parts of Siberia set new record high temperatures.

More extreme and varied weather events are hitting closer to home too. California declared a state of emergency this January after its worst draught in a century. Last June Calgary experienced massive flooding, the costliest insured natural disaster in Canadian history.

Resource reliance— from fur trade to free trade

Canada is rich in natural resources—minerals, oil, gas, coveted amounts of fresh water and many wildlife species. Canadians and tourists alike value our natural heritage.

But how far have we come from textbook portrayals of Canadians as fur traders and 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'? Not as far as you'd think. Canada is still a heavy exporter of raw materials. Natural resources, and energy products in particular, are Canada's top export.

Our resources sector gets a big boost from government too. Federal government subsidies to oil, gas and coal

industries total more than \$1.4 billion a year—almost \$800/Canadian every year in energy subsidies or about four per cent of federal government revenues.

The International Monetary Fund supports removing subsidies for fossil fuel industries because they: artificially lower energy prices making them appear cheaper which leads to greater consumption; encourage capital intensive resource industries; and speed up the depletion of natural resources. The IMF believes removing subsidies could lead to a 13 per cent decline in global GHG emissions.

Canada's resource dependent economy also means our dollar is heavily tied to the price of oil and gas and subject to its boom and bust cycles. The rising price of a barrel of oil can artificially inflate the Canadian dollar. A strong Canadian dollar isn't all bad but it also makes the cost of exported Canadian-made goods more expensive which hurts Canadian manufacturers and the workers they employ.

Some economists fear that disproportionate investment in the capital intensive resources sector shifts monies away from possible innovations in other sectors like manufacturing.

In recent decades, Canada's economy and environment have also been reshaped by international trade agreements. Keen to remove trade barriers and gain access to more markets, Canada has free trade agreements in force with 10 countries and is in talks with another 60.

It's been twenty years since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into force. Those who have studied NAFTA's environmental impacts report a more integrated North American energy market, greater reliance on fossil fuels and higher levels of pollution.

Free trade has spurred economic growth, especially in the carbon and resource intensive oil and gas industry. Seeking more bang per barrel, new extraction methods like fracking use more chemicals and water which can also expose workers to new hazards. Unifor represents thousands of workers in Alberta's oil sands and is among those calling for an end to new fracking development in Canada.

NAFTA eliminates trade barriers but erects others which erode our ability to pass laws and policies to protect workers and the environment.

Canada is eager to sign international trade deals so why can't we commit to internationally binding environmental agreements which have the potential to benefit everyone?

Good green jobs

“Young workers are the labour market's canary in the coal mine.”

—Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
The Young and the Jobless, September 2013

Canaries were the early warning sentinels in coal mines. When the birds fell silent, miners were warned of dangerous gas buildups underground. With Canada's youth unemployment rate now double the national average for adults, young people are most affected by structural changes in the job market. Young workers may be more likely to accept jobs that are neither safe nor sustainable. All workers have the legal right to safe and healthy work. What's more, we don't have to choose between jobs and the environment, we can and need to have both.

Ideally, good jobs are also green jobs because they protect worker and community health and safety, respect human dignity, add value to our communities and use local resources, including human resources, wisely.

Environmental necessity is driving the transition to a low carbon economy, but it must not rest solely on the backs of workers or their communities who earn a living in polluting industries. That's why Unifor and others support just transition measures to protect workers who face major industrial change and restructuring in the name of sustainability and environmental protection. Measures may include retraining, income security and re-employment in alternative industries and ventures.

Workers employed in extracting and refining fossil fuels will suffer the greatest displacement, but through a fair and just transition they too support tough measures to reduce GHG emissions. They understand there are no jobs on a dead planet.

Going low carbon isn't just about green energy. It means thinking about what things are made of and how they are made because these can impact our health and the health

of the planet. Many chemicals are petroleum-based but so are many other products. Many plastics are produced using fossil fuel but petroleum is also currently used to produce a lot of everyday items like balloons, bandages, eyeglass frames, fertilizers, ink, house paint, lipstick, perfumes, rain boots, shampoo, toothpaste and vitamin capsules. Choosing and using materials that are less toxic and more sustainable is good for workers and the environment.

For example, in some auto manufacturing, natural fibres like flax, hemp and jute are used as interior supports, as reinforcing agents for plastics often replacing fibreglass, and as carpet backing which makes vehicles lighter and more energy efficient.

Policy for the people

Good laws and public policies have the potential to do the greatest good for the greatest number. In 1987 Canada was among 191 nations who signed the Montreal Protocol and committed to taking action to protect the ozone layer. Phasing out ozone depleting substances not only prevented further ozone layer damage, but it unintentionally helped slow the rate of global warming.

Canadians need more than a patchwork of policies to address our pressing environmental issues. In the absence of a national strategy several provinces have shown environmental leadership. British Columbia's carbon tax has helped reduce GHG. The province has also joined other Pacific Coast governments to develop climate change strategies. Quebec's new cap and trade system promises to put a realistic price on carbon. Ontario's *Green Energy Act* has encouraged renewable energy supplies but more impressively Ontario is the first North American jurisdiction to phase-out coal-fired power plants.

Canada needs a national climate change action plan that will:

- Set a national energy policy with targets for GHG reductions, renewable energy production and energy conservation
- Establish a green jobs strategy supported by tax incentives and rebates to greening businesses including research
- Redirect fossil fuel subsidies to create jobs in clean technology and support just transition measures

- Regulate rapid development of the oil sands
- Enact Extended Producer Responsibility laws to reduce waste and toxins
- Provide rebates for homeownership energy efficiency programs
- Develop a national transportation strategy with funds to assist provinces and urban centres.

Beyond the blue box

If we hope to seriously tackle climate change we need solutions much bigger than a blue box. With our voices and our votes we can demand change.

Meantime, each of us can do our part by living more sustainability. Simply put it means meeting our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. We need to choose, use and dispose of products and services in a way that conserves energy and materials and:

- Minimizes the depletion of natural resources
- Avoids toxic substances
- Enhances the quality of life for both consumers and workers throughout the life cycle of the product or service.

Canadians have the power to move our country towards a sustainable future. Together we can ensure Canada does the right thing.



Program Co-Sponsors

Unifor was formed on August 31, 2013 with the coming together of the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) – two of Canada’s largest and most influential labour unions. Unifor is now Canada’s largest private sector union, with more than 300,000 members across the country, working in every major sector of the Canadian economy. Unifor has become a source of optimism and inspiration that a fairer, more secure future can be won for working people. We are citizens and parents concerned with the education of our children. We understand the power that young people possess to change our world if given the opportunity. On the environmental front, we will continue to demand a national energy and environmental strategy, so that future energy production can be regulated in line with credible, progressive environmental commitments.



To learn more about Unifor
visit www.unifor.org.

Workers Health & Safety Centre (WHSC)

is designated by the government as Ontario’s health and safety “training centre”. We offer training and information services to workers and workplace representatives in every sector of the economy and every region of the province. All focus on controlling, or better yet eliminating, occupational hazards at their source. WHSC delivers training programs using a participantcentred and “workers training workers” approach. For more than a decade the WHSC has also proudly offered health, safety and environmental awareness programs aimed at young workers.



To learn more about WHSC
visit www.whsc.on.ca.

cope:343