

Pale Greens Honor BC Climate Vandals

For some, a tiny tax outweighs massive environmental destruction

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by Roger Annis (Oil Sands Truth)

At first glance, it seemed that the “Yes Men” had scored another comedic coup for Mother Earth. CBC Radio news reported on December 16 that on the previous day, British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell was feted and presented an environmental award by many of Canada’s well-heeled “environmental groups” during the United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen.

Hah! Great gag, guys! And very timely. An embarrassingly large number of people and agencies in Canada and abroad have been hoodwinked by the BC government’s claims to environmental stewardship and its greenwashing propaganda.

But wait, the story proves to be true and not a gag at all! Campbell actually did receive an ‘Economy Wide Carbon Pricing’ award from Tzeporah Berman of PowerUp Canada, one of ten of Canada’s best funded “environmental groups” that endorsed the award, presented at a gala recognizing “acts of climate leadership” by municipal and provincial governments across Canada.

Other award endorsers are the David Suzuki Foundation, the Ecology Action Centre, Environmental Defence, Équiterre, ForestEthics, the Green Energy Act Alliance, the Pembina Institute, TckTckTck, and WWF Canada.

The principal justification for the award is British Columbia’s so-called “carbon tax,” introduced in early 2008. The tax is 2.3 cents per liter of gasoline, to rise to 7 cents by 2012. Revenue from the tax is purportedly returned to taxpayers in the form of reductions to other taxes.

Matt Horne of the Pembina Institute said his group recognizes the “inconsistencies” in B.C.’s climate policies, but the carbon tax is strong enough to stand on its own. When asked whether the carbon tax has demonstrably reduced greenhouse gas emissions in the province, he said “in terms of solid evidence that it’s working, I think it’s too early to tell.”

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson also accepted an award for the city’s “green initiatives.” These include, according to the mayor, “the most ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets in North America” and mandated electric car plug-ins in new developments.

In 2008, British Columbia was the only province in the country to report a net increase in greenhouse gas emissions from major industries, according to recent figures released by Environment Canada. The figures report “facility greenhouse gas emissions” from power plants and heavy industries such as mining, pulp and paper, and petroleum.

Oil, gas, coal and roads

The emissions increases were largely due to the rapid and vast expansion in recent years of oil and gas extraction in the province. A new Gold Rush prevails today in the northern and southeast corners of the province, nearly on the scale of the Tar Sands disaster in neighboring Alberta.

Billions of dollars land leasing rights and construction of gas and oil extraction facilities has been made in recent years, along with related construction of pipelines and electricity transmission lines. The sale of oil and gas land lease rights hit a record in the calendar year 2008 at \$2.7 billion. This year closed at \$893 million. The BC government, which describes the province as “The Best Place on Earth” on its websites, provides generous subsidies to the oil and gas industries, calling them a “stimulus package.”

Most of the gas drilling is into shale rock, using the hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” method. This involves blasting through rock with a mixture of water, sand and chemicals to split the rock and release gas. Like the extraction and processing of tar sands, shale gas extraction is a heavily energy-intensive and CO₂-spewing process.

Additionally, the composition of the chemicals used is considered a trade secret and largely unregulated. Concern over the pollution of groundwaters caused by hydraulic fracturing has led the city of New York to urge the New York legislature to ban gas drilling in the city’s watershed. There is also concern that the provincial government could move to lift the decades-old ban on oil and gas drilling along the British Columbia coast. Already, it plans to allow fuel tankers into the northern port of Kitimat to export Alberta Tar Sands products and provide needed fuel imports (Tar Sands extraction requires large imports of light crude oil). A proposed \$3 billion liquefied gas import/export facility is currently on the hunt for financing.

British Columbia’s mining and export of coal has received little attention from environmental activists and climate researchers. The province has coal reserves of 20 billion tons. It exported 28 million tons in 2007. Exports in 2008 were worth a whopping \$5.4 billion. Vancouver is the largest coal-exporting port in North America.

The province is also embarked on a vast, multi-billion dollar expansion of the road network in the Vancouver region. Meanwhile, the transit authority continues to hike fares and has scrapped plans to build a long-promised and much-needed rapid transit line to the region’s northeast. Fares have gone up approximately 40 per cent over the past eight years.

Voices of dissent

The Sierra Club did not participate in the Copenhagen award gala. Executive Director George Heyman, a former long-time president of the BC Government Employees Union, said the BC Liberals have taken a lot of actions that are “deeply contradictory” to its greenwashing propaganda. Heyman pointed out that fuel is exempt from the soon-to-be-imposed Harmonized Sales Tax, but the labour for energy efficient home retrofits is not.

“They’re also providing massive subsidies to the oil and gas industry. . . and supporting a massive pipeline to move dirty tar sands oil across B.C.,” he said.

Voices of concern are on the rise from the Indigenous peoples living in the coal and gas rich regions. Writing in the Vancouver Sun on December 22, Kathie Dickie, Chief of the 800-member Fort Nelson First Nation, expressed grave concern over two giant gas processing facilities being built near Fort Nelson, in northeast B.C.

Chief Dickie wrote there has been no meaningful consultation with her people concerning the environmental impacts of En Cana Corporation's Cabin Gas Plant nor a Spectra Gas plant to be located 15 kilometers away.

Cabin Gas, once constructed, will be the largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the province. One BC government official told the Fort Nelson First Nation that its 100-year old treaty with Canada does not guarantee clean air.

"Imagine being told by a government official in 2009 that you have no say on the quality of air you or your children breathe! What parent would stand for it?" Dickie asked.

The pale green groups that honored Gordon Campbell should be ashamed. His government should be condemned, not praised.

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