

MAKING BC A GREEN JOBS MACHINE¹

Tom Sandborn[©]

In B.C., taxpayers spend millions to subsidize mining, oil and gas industries, which create a third of all our climate-wrecking green house gases but only 1.2 per cent of provincial employment. Add in the manufacturing sector and the freight and transportation sector, and the imbalance is equally striking. Creating 81 per cent of B.C. emissions, these sectors only employ 15.5 per cent of B.C. workers. These are signs, argues a new paper from a Vancouver think tank, of a malfunctioning economy in dire need of greening in a way that creates opportunities for those struggling to make it in this province.

"Air pollution is the smell of money," flamboyant B.C. politician "Flying" Phil Gaglardi once responded to complaints about the lung-searing stink from a pulp mill in the interior. But telling people they must decide between having an intact environment or a thriving economy is a false choice, say authors of *"Climate Justice, Green Jobs and Sustainable Production in BC,"* published by the progressive *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives* as part of a larger effort, the Climate Justice Project, led by the CCPA and UBC.

CCPA economist Marc Lee and UBC associate professor of economics Ken Carlaw offer a bracing set of steps they say we'll need to take on our way down the green jobs path. By road's end, B.C. would be a very different place in three or four decades -- a province where each citizen uses virtually no fossil fuels or generates any greenhouse emissions. And they say there is no reason to hold back, given that the current approach -- massively subsidizing polluting industries -- is producing relatively few jobs. Here's their road map to creating a B.C. economy rich in green pay cheques:

- (1) **Commit to zero fossil fuels by 2040** at the latest, with all energy requirements met by clean electric sources, plus some biofuels and hydrogen fuel cells where alternatives are required. All remaining non-fossil-fuel GHG emissions should be eliminated by 2050.
- (2) **Enact a moratorium on new fossil fuel extraction** unless 100 per cent of emissions can be captured and stored underground permanently.
- (3) **Establish a 10-year rapid action plan on climate change**, funded by a mix of carbon tax, increased natural gas royalties, and eliminated subsidies for fossil fuel industries, as well as from reallocating existing expenditures on unsustainable activities (e.g. highway expansion).
- (4) **Develop a comprehensive provincial industrial strategy**, including green jobs and capital plans, with priority focus on the following areas: green building construction and retrofitting; transportation; green manufacturing and waste management; and adaptation planning. The strategy must be coordinated across business, trade unions, secondary and post-secondary institutions and all levels of government, and should actively engage traditionally disadvantaged populations.

¹ The Tyee, October 22, 2010

- (5) **Push the construction industry to "net zero" new buildings** as quickly as possible. A major expansion of the LiveSmart program for building retrofits is also in order, with special attention paid to low- to middle-income households, older housing stock and coverage of multi-unit buildings.
- (6) **Implement a new transportation planning framework** that focuses on building complete communities and shifting to more sustainable modes of transportation (such walking, biking and transit, rather than just on electric vehicles).
- (7) **Take action on waste** by expanding Extended Producer Responsibility programs and developing processing capacity to recycle materials in the province.
- (8) **Support research and development of new technologies** with green economy applications through direct government funding, direct or indirect support for commercialization and production, and support for learning and diffusion of knowledge and technology.
- (9) **Place limits on offset projects** in order to focus on real emission reductions. Offsets should not be granted for projects outside of B.C., and should be limited in time and scope.
- (10) **Develop adaptation plans** focused on the security of basic needs in areas such as food, water, electricity and housing.
- (11) **Launch a broad-based participatory exercise** aimed at defining the parameters of a new "green social contract" that ensures no one is left behind in the transition to a sustainable economy.
- (12) **Develop a framework for a new climate transfer grant to households** that would, minimally, be equivalent to existing energy expenditures (and ideally more) to insulate low- to middle-income households from increases in energy and carbon prices, funded from revenues from those sources.

Part of the challenge, Lee and Carlaw say, will be to make these changes in ways that don't put too much of the burden of the transformation on the poor and the working middle class. They argue that a truly green job is environmentally sustainable and socially just, making more room at the economic table for previously excluded or exploited workers like women and members of visible minorities. "Past industrial revolutions have caused great upheaval and hardship, with some sectors of society bearing a terrible burden. If this green industrial revolution is to occur in a just manner, we need to help workers make the transition to new employment, and provide economically marginalized people with new opportunities to secure decent work and economic security. Creating green jobs allows us not only to confront climate change, but also to achieve climate justice," they argue.

Current Policies Don't Add Up

Lee and Carlaw highlight contradictions in the BC Liberal government's economic policies, on the one hand bringing in one of North America's first carbon taxes, and on the other building new port and highway infrastructure, subsidizing fossil fuel production and actively encouraging massive exports of coal and crude oil, all destined to heat the global atmosphere we share with our customers overseas.

For example, the study's authors point to \$404 million in shale gas exploration permits sold to fossil fuel companies this year, and to reductions in royalties paid by the oil and gas industry to the province. The BC Liberals' Climate Action Plan, they say, represents some useful first steps, but lacks any concrete plans for reaching its goal of reducing B.C. emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.

They see more contradictions in the B.C. Liberal government's support for going ahead with the Site C dam, sold as a generator of "clean energy." In fact, the authors note, the hydro-generated energy will likely be used to facilitate shale gas extraction near the dam. The gas would then be pipelined to Alberta to process bitumen extracted from tar sands, a method that produces far higher emission per barrel of oil than most others. Lee and Carlaw says that plan represents "perhaps the ultimate conflict between industrial and climate policies."