

Acting on Climate Change: **Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians**

A collection of texts in response to
Acting on Climate Change:
Solutions from Canadian Scholars,
a consensus document released in March 2015





ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

UNIFOR

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Unifor is Canada's largest union in the private sector, representing 310,000 members working in over two dozen sectors of the economy. It was formed Labour Day Weekend 2013 when the Canadian Auto Workers and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers unions merged. Unifor works to protect its members and play a leadership role in building thriving, safe workplaces and a strong economy so all workers in Canada have a good job, a decent standard of living and greater equality.

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UNIFOR

Protect the Environment

by Doing More Work, Not Less

Citizens of all countries are increasingly concerned, and rightly so, with environmental protection and sustainability. Of course, climate change is the most important of the many environmental challenges that human civilization must grapple with in coming years, but there are many others as well (destruction of habitat, water pollution, extinction of species, and more). For climate change, the question is no longer whether global temperatures will rise (with destructive impacts on rainfall patterns, sea levels, biodiversity, severe weather, and more). The question is now whether we can limit the scale of that rise (capping it at around 2°C) and thus avoid the most cataclysmic and self-reinforcing effects of climate change. We also must prepare for a hotter climate, through enormous investments in adaptation and amelioration to moderate the impacts on civilization and nature.

Canada was once considered a global leader in environmental policy-making. Our pioneering policies in the areas of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) pollution, acid rain, and rigorous environmental assessment showed other countries that sensible, incremental environmental progress was indeed possible. And we played a generally constructive role in international environmental diplomacy,

which enhanced our global reputation and contributed to confidence that the world could rise to the challenge posed by pressing environmental problems.

Now, however, that good reputation is in tatters. More recently, Canada has played an unconscionable role. Not only have we failed to accept our own significant share of responsibility (as a major polluter, and as a rich country—one that benefited from years of carbon pollution) to address climate change, even more lamentable has been Canada's disruptive role in the international process to regulate climate change. Canada is the first and only country to renounce commitments it made under the Kyoto Protocol. And our representatives continue to block meaningful progress in globally reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution.

Indeed the Africa Progress Panel, a United Nations group co-chaired by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said that Canada "appears to have withdrawn entirely from constructive international engagement on climate"¹.

¹ http://www.africaprogresspanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/APP_REPORT_2015_FINAL_low1.pdf

Canadians expect more from our leaders. We want to be part of the global solution. We want to build a world that is hospitable and sustainable for our children and grandchildren, and their children and grandchildren. We thus welcome the invitation of the Sustainable Canada Dialogues to comment on their position paper, *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*.

Resource Industries and the Environment

Canada's traditional reliance on natural resource industries has certainly complicated both the politics and the economics of our response to climate change. Naturally, resource industries face a special challenge, and bear a special responsibility, in the effort to build a sustainable economy. By definition they relate to nature more closely and immediately than other parts of the economy, and they depend completely on a continuing ability to harvest natural wealth. Resource production and processing will always be essential activities in Canada's economy. But how we harvest and process those resources must change to become sustainable, fair, and more socially beneficial.

Unifor rejects the false conflict often established between "jobs" and the "environment". Many companies in the resource sector have traditionally tried to block environmental regulations, often claiming that resource jobs will disappear if environmental goals are taken seriously. This is not true; in fact, in many instances stronger environmental standards can lead to *more* work (and more *stable* work) in the long run. After all, a carefully managed, sustainable approach to resource production is much better than the short-run boom-and-bust employment cycles so typical of resource industries. (Canadians have been reminded of that boom-and-bust pattern once again, in the wake of the recent downturn in oil prices.)

Addressing climate change (and other environmental challenges) certainly does not and cannot entail shutting down production in resource sectors – whether that be petroleum, forestry, mining, or fisheries. That would impose enormous economic and social dislocation on resource communities, most of which are in relatively remote parts of Canada, with few economic alternatives. To the contrary, by investing in sustainability, by regulating the pace and quality of development (rather than fostering an all-or-nothing "gold rush" mentality), and by pushing resource industries to better internalize the environmental costs of their activities, we can attain a healthier and sustainable balance between the economy and the environment, and produce more lasting and stable employment opportunities in the process.

The best approach involves challenging resources industries to improve environmental performance (through direct regulations, and through economic incentives like carbon pricing); limiting new developments in line with environmental targets; and making major investments (both private and public) in pollution-reducing technologies and green infrastructure.

Another dimension to a more sustainable resource economy involves focusing on maximizing the Canadian value-added spin-offs from resource projects. If the amount of pure extraction must be constrained for environmental reasons, then it is a "no-brainer" that we should enhance the employment and production opportunities associated with whatever resources we do extract. This involves more attention to fostering "downstream" value-added opportunities (like refining and petrochemicals in the petroleum sector, wood products manufacturing in forestry, and value-added processing in fisheries). It also involves identifying opportunities to increase value-added "upstream" inputs for

resource production: including Canadian-made machinery and equipment, specialized services, and training. These value-added links do not happen spontaneously or automatically. They can only be optimized through pro-active policy and strategy – but the goal of enhancing those macroeconomic and supply-chain spin-offs has been overwhelmed in recent years by the single-minded rush to accelerate pure extraction.

A National Energy and Environmental Strategy

The unregulated, profit-driven expansion in Canada's petroleum industry (and new bitumen developments, in particular) has caused many economic, social, and environmental problems. To be sure, jobs are created by this "gold rush" development model – but not enough good, secure, Canadian jobs. The potential to use our petroleum wealth more carefully to maximize employment has been squandered in the rush to extract and export as much raw product as quickly and as cheaply as possible. Even in resource communities, the exploitation of workers (including temporary foreign workers), rampant inflation in living costs, and chronic job insecurity as the whole industry lurches from boom to bust and back again have all undermined the potential economic benefits that *could* be generated through the petroleum industry.

The bitumen industry, presently oriented so heavily around extracting the raw resource and exporting it to other countries, has been by far the largest single Canadian source of new GHG emissions – more than offsetting emission reductions from other measures (such as the phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation in Ontario). Bitumen production generates more GHG emissions per barrel of final output than conventional oil, so it is essential that the industry's overall scale be carefully controlled in line with the

implementation of national targets. Without a national strategy to regulate and reduce GHG emissions, the unbridled expansion of bitumen production will more than offset all other emission reduction efforts in other parts of Canada (such as the important phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation), and hence defeat our overall goal of slowing and controlling climate change.

Even the petroleum industry itself has begun to recognize that implementing a credible climate change plan for Canada is an essential precondition for its continued expansion. Canada's reputation as an environmental laggard has clearly undermined the industry's ability to market its products internationally and attract capital investment. Major producing companies are now pressing government to move ahead with a framework for regulating GHG emissions. The federal government, with its stubborn refusal to even contemplate such measures (the Prime Minister calling them "crazy"), is increasingly isolated; its approach is not doing the petroleum industry any favours.

As put forth in *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars'* policy orientation #4, Canada desperately needs a national energy strategy – not just to regulate the bitumen industry, but to sensibly integrate all our energy sources, meet the energy needs of Canadian consumers and industries, create good jobs, and protect the environment. Ensuring greater use of Canadian-made inputs, Canadian processing and refining, and benefits for Canadian consumers must be top priorities of a national energy strategy – instead of leaving all these decisions in the hands of profit-seeking (often foreign-owned) corporations. Total bitumen output should be regulated and limited within environmental targets. And whatever we do produce should be directed first to Canadian consumers – requi-

ring maximum Canadian value-added at all stages of the supply chain (including inputs, services, upgrading, and refining). The bulk export of raw petroleum must be limited: it is destructive and wasteful, both economically and environmentally. And the contributions of all energy forms (including conventional petroleum production in both Western and Atlantic Canada, hydro, coal, and renewable sources) must be planned and coordinated.

Unifor has called for a process involving all stakeholders to develop and implement a comprehensive national energy and environmental strategy. This process must involve the federal and provincial governments, the energy industry, consumer groups, organized labour, the environmental community, First Nations and aboriginal groups, and others. The goal is to develop and implement a strategy to utilize Canadian energy wealth, first and foremost to meet the energy needs of Canadians, in a manner that is environmentally responsible and socially beneficial.

Our current federal government is fully committed to the unregulated expansion of export-dominated extraction; for them, even the phrase “national energy strategy” is a dangerous notion. But most Canadians instinctively reject the vision that Canada should become solely a supplier of raw energy to other nations (whether that is the U.S. or Asia). We know our country can, and must, aim higher. We know that our resource wealth can and must be used to spur a broader, more diversified, and more lasting economic development.

Building Alliances

As a union fully committed to a progressive social and environmental agenda, Unifor works to build strong alliances with the environmental movement at all levels. This includes our efforts to advance environmen-

tal goals in our own workplaces, even using collective bargaining to make progress where possible. For example, our local bargaining committees have negotiated the establishment of joint environment committees in our workplaces; initiatives to reduce energy consumption and waste; and better controls on hazardous chemicals and other pollutants². Our network of workplace and local environment activists constitutes an environmental movement in its own right: mobilizing to advance a green agenda in our workplaces, inside our union, and in society at large.

From the founding of our union in 2013, Unifor also explicitly recognizes the collective debt we owe to First Nations, and pledges its full solidarity with their struggle for economic and social justice—including their efforts to wrest control over resource developments on their own lands. Unifor locals and activists support initiatives like Idle No More, the movement for justice for murdered and missing aboriginal women, employment equity and training opportunities for aboriginal workers, the reconciliation process, and more.

Doing More Work, Not Less

The simple fact is that working people need *both* good and secure jobs, *and* a healthy, sustainable environment. The two must go together. There would be enormous benefits generated by a green economic strategy, based on initiatives such as energy conservation and retrofits; expansion of public transit; development and production of energy-efficient vehicles; clean-up of environmental damage; and more. We imagine an expansive agenda of private and public investment – all

2 The origins and experience of these local committees is described more fully in a comprehensive policy document adopted by one of Unifor's predecessor unions, the Canadian Auto Workers: see Canadian Auto Workers Canada Council (2007). *Climate Change and our Jobs: Finding the Right Balance*, Toronto, <http://53.15.200-74.q9.net/en/3532.htm>

aimed at protecting the environment by doing more work, not less. Mobilizing economic resources to address pollution and protect the environment would be a powerful source of future growth, job creation, and prosperity.

It is simply a myth that it is impossible to protect the environment without sacrificing economic growth and destroying jobs. This false choice is wrong on many counts. Most directly, of course, the quality of the environment immediately affects our standard of living: we can't live well, no matter how "rich" we are, if the natural environment around us is being degraded and depleted.

But even in more narrowly economic terms, the counterposing of sustainability and growth is short-sighted and mistaken. Economic "growth" is nothing other than an increase in the value of goods and services we collectively produce with our labour. Growth's impact on the environment therefore depends entirely on what *kinds* of goods and services are being produced, and *how*.

Some forms of work and production can certainly harm the environment – through resource depletion or pollution. Some forms of work and production are largely benign in environmental terms: such as improvements in the quality of goods (rather than their quantity), and increased services production (especially human and caring services). But some forms of work and production are environmentally beneficial: building and operating public transit, developing sustainable energy sources, investing in energy conservation measures, and cleaning

up polluted areas. These are all forms of economic activity that create jobs, generate incomes, and – yes – add to our GDP. But they are also activities that leave the environment in better shape.

As pointed out in *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*, long overdue measures to enhance environmental protection in Canada, and to strengthen Canada's role in global environmental policy should be seen as an economic opportunity, rather than a burden. It will require pro-active policy measures to realize that positive potential: including substantial public investments in green energy and infrastructure, direct regulations limiting pollution and enhancing energy efficiency, and fiscal tools such as a price on carbon (in either the form of a tax, or a cap-and-trade regime). Private market decisions alone will not shift the economy onto a more sustainable track: it will require a conscious and collective strategy to get us there. But putting that strategy into effect would unleash powerful new sources of growth. Indeed, the spin-off jobs and incomes from an ambitious program of green public investment could be the engine that powers a whole new expansive chapter in Canada's economic history.

In essence, there is much work to be done, to build the framework for sustainable growth and green jobs. And work, after all, is the driving force behind production, GDP, and prosperity. We can and should protect the environment by doing *more* work – not less. And in so doing, we can generate the jobs and incomes that Canadians so urgently need.



ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

SUSTAINABLE CANADA DIALOGUES

This contribution is part of a collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, stemming from interactions between Sustainable Canada Dialogues, an initiative of the UNESCO-McGill Chair for Dialogues on Sustainability, and business associations, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, labour groups, institutions, organizations and private citizens.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues is a voluntary initiative that mobilizes over 60 researchers from every province in Canada, representing disciplines across engineering, sciences and social sciences. We are motivated by a shared view that putting options on the table will stimulate action and is long overdue in Canada.

Together, the contributions enrich the scope of possible solutions and show that Canada is brimming with ideas, possibilities and the will to act. The views expressed in *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* are those of the contributors, and are not necessarily endorsed by Sustainable Canada Dialogues.

We thank all contributors for engaging in this dialogue with us to help reach a collective vision of desired pathways to our futures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change