

3 mars 2008

## Leçons écologiques de la Colombie britannique

La critique ci-contre de la politique environnementale du gouvernement Libéral de la Colombie britannique comporte des leçons intéressantes d'un point de vue de gauche de sorte à éviter certains pièges :

1. Les taxes sur le carbone sont régressives et contre-productives
2. Les nouvelles dépenses du gouvernement Libéral de CB pour le transport en commun seront deux fois plus importantes que celles prévues par Québec solidaire et cela pour une province moins peuplée que le Québec
3. Les systèmes de transport en commun luxueux, genre TGV, ne sont pas écologiques
4. Les objectifs de réduction des GES sont certes indispensables -- Québec solidaire n'est même pas rendu là -- mais sont une leurre sans plan de réalisation
5. L'expansion du réseau de transport, même maritime et du rail, pour des fins de développement du commerce international est anti-écologique
6. Certains groupes écologiques nord-américains et pan-canadiens parmi les plus connus sont anti-écologiques
7. D'un point de vue pan-canadien, la fin de l'exploitation des sables bitumineux et la reconversion des dépenses militaires sont cruciales
8. Le contrôle démocratique des sociétés de transport en commun est nécessaire

Marc Bonhomme, 3 mars 2008

---

# Socialist Voice

Marxist Perspectives for the 21st Century

MARCH 3, 2008

Web Edition: [www.socialistvoice.ca](http://www.socialistvoice.ca)

# Masters of Greenwash: B.C.'s Carbon Tax Is No Answer to Climate Change

**By Roger Annis**

Vancouver, British Columbia — When it comes to the greenwashing of politics, no government in Canada can equal the Liberal Party government here, headed by Premier Gordon Campbell.

Last year, Campbell made a much ballyhooed announcement that his government intended to legislate a 33% reduction in carbon emissions by the year 2020 and aim for an 80% reduction by 2050. No plan for how to achieve these lofty goals accompanied the announcement, and the province's residents are still waiting for one.

In a budget released on February 19, the government announced a new "carbon tax" that now occupies centre-stage of its carbon reduction goals. The province becomes the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce such a tax. It will penalize users of fossil fuels with a levy of \$10 per ton of carbon emissions, eventually rising to \$30 per ton. For gasoline, that means an initial tax of 2½ cents per litre.

## **Billions for roads, ports, fossil fuel**

The government's emissions reduction goals are laughable because everything it is doing ensures that they will never be reached.

Shortly after the Liberals were first elected in 2001, they abolished the province's environment ministry, cutting 1,000 jobs. One of its functions was to monitor violations of pollution laws and prosecute offenders.

The same budget that introduced the carbon tax gives tax breaks to oil and gas companies to boost exploration and production. And several of the most polluting industries in the province are exempt, including production of natural gas, cement, and aluminium.

The B.C. and Canadian governments are charging ahead with huge expansions of two shipping ports in the province —Vancouver and Prince Rupert. These will facilitate the export of fossil fuels and the import of manufactured goods to markets across North America. The movement of ships is one of the largest emitters of carbon dioxide and other pollutants. The port expansions necessarily require more associated

roads and railways.

The Vancouver part of this plan, the "Gateway Program," will spend more than \$5 billion on port and rail expansion and a huge extension of bridges and highways in the metropolitan region. A significant movement of opposition has sprung up, but so far both governments are sticking to their guns.

### **No answer on public transit**

Another target of the provincial government's greenwashing is public transit. In January, it announced it would add \$14 billion to transit spending across the province by 2011.

Public transit in the Vancouver region is woefully inadequate. Service cannot keep up with demand, and fares are rising sharply. Rail lines that could be used for transit sit idle. Bus travel is crowded and inadequate. Successive governments in B.C. have invested in an overhead rapid transit system called "skytrain" that provides inferior service and starves the transit system of funding for less costly and more functional technologies such as light rail and buses.

Most of the announced \$14 billion will go towards more skytrains. Construction of a third skytrain line began several years ago in order to reach the Vancouver airport in time for the 2010 Winter Olympics. It will cost at least \$2 billion, more than \$100 million per kilometre. Without a broad, effective rebuilding of the entire transit system, this massive spending on skytrain will not reduce automobile travel by any appreciable amount.

The carbon tax fits the policy pattern of provincial governments in Canada that have engineered a massive shift in the taxation system, away from progressive income tax and in favour of regressive consumption taxes. This has been accompanied by massive reductions in taxation of corporate profits.

Nowadays in British Columbia, everything is up for greenwash. One of the measures in the latest budget is elimination of a tax on the income of financial institutions operating in the province. This tax was originally introduced some years ago in response to the obscene profits they were earning. The *Vancouver Sun* editorialized on February 23 that the removal of the tax, "should unburden the financial services sector, which employs about 27,000 British Columbians in clean, green jobs." This would be the "sector" whose financing work will facilitate expansion of

fossil fuel exploration and extraction, road expansion, etc.

### **Liberal environmentalists endorse the greenwash**

More road building, continued subsidies to corporate polluters, inadequate plans for transit expansion, rising consumption taxes that hit the poor the hardest — this doesn't sound like much of a "green" plan for the future of British Columbia, or the world. Despite that, some liberal environmentalists in B.C. have welcomed the government's plans.

Kevin Washbrook, director of Voters Taking Action on Climate Change, says the carbon tax is "good news." He told the weekly *Georgia Straight* that the tax should be \$30 per ton from the get-go, instead of the miserly \$10 per ton.

"They're building a good track record," commented Lisa Matthaus of the Sierra Club of Canada.

Ian Bruce of the Suzuki Foundation called the transit plan "a good step forward," and said the carbon tax will promote development of green technologies and make B.C. an environmental leader.

### **Labour needs to revisit positions**

The farce unfolding in British Columbia demonstrates the need for an independent and forceful campaign on the climate change crisis, one that places the onus on those who caused the problem in the first place — greedy corporations and compliant governments. Trade unions and associated political movements should be taking a lead.

But the labour movement's record to date is pretty abysmal. The New Democratic Party and most unions supported the bid for the 2010 Olympics, a greenhouse gas-generating monster if every there was one. They also supported the airport skytrain line boondoggle. For years they have watched in silence as paper and wood products companies have destroyed the province's forests with clearcutting and other environmentally destructive practices.

But fresh winds are blowing within labour on climate issues, creating new openings to revisit past positions and deepen a debate over the future.

Eliminating the pollution threat to humanity and the rest of the earth's biosystem requires a fundamental shift in how the world's economy is

organized. The profit drive and the belief that the earth's resources are unlimited must be replaced with a planned economy that both meets human social and cultural needs *and* strictly respects humanity's dependence on a healthy biosphere.

An important step in this direction is establishing free and effective public transit. The unelected board of directors that runs Vancouver's transit system represents the interests of companies that profit from the movement of goods, real estate interests that make a killing along the routes of rapid transit lines, and construction companies that have an interest in having cumbersome and expensive technologies adopted.

Summing up in fine style a capitalist's approach to public transit, federal government finance minister James Flaherty recently explained why his government is providing funding to Vancouver for skytrain expansion: "It's about reducing traffic congestion so goods can get to market on time."

Public transit should be about creating a better society and eliminating the killer pollution caused by cars and trucks. It should be organized by elected bodies that represent ordinary citizens. Their job is to meet people's need for cheap, comfortable and effective transportation.

Consumption taxes like the B.C. government's carbon tax cannot solve the earth's looming environmental calamity. They punish the poorest people in society for the follies and excesses of the wealthiest.

Climate change writer and activist Ian Angus explained in a recent article why carbon taxes won't stop greenhouse gas emissions: "So long as corporations are free to invest as they see fit, any carbon tax that is high enough to be effective will lead to capital flight, not to investment in new technology." If carbon taxes are to be part of an effective anti-emissions policy, he says, "they must be coupled with broadscale economic planning and a determined effort to shut down the Alberta tar sands and other major emitters."

In a recent article in the online journal, [Climate and Capitalism](#), Angus proposed six steps to reduce carbon emissions:

- Unilaterally adopt and implement the emission reduction targets proposed by the experts in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: 25%-40% below 1990 levels by 2020, and 50%-85% by 2050.
- Instead of carbon taxes and carbon exchange schemes, impose hard limits on the emissions produced by the largest resource and energy companies.
- Stop all expansion of the tar sands — and then shut them down quickly.

- Redirect military spending and the federal budget surplus into public energy-saving projects such as expanding mass transit and retrofitting homes and office buildings. Tar sands workers and redeployed soldiers can play key roles in this effort.
- Recognize Canada's ecological debt to the Third World and to indigenous peoples. Clean up the damage that Canada's capitalists have caused, provide assistance in adapting to climate change, and transfer the resources and technology needed for clean economic development.