

Who Controls Canada's Energy Resources?*



Is Canada an 'energy superpower', or a U.S. energy colony?

Prime Minister Stephen Harper calls Canada an “energy superpower” celebrating investor interest in the tar sands. In fact, Canada is an energy colony, not a superpower, since we cannot safeguard our own citizens against freezing in the dark, nor control how much we export, nor set our own petroleum prices.

NAFTA limits our control over our own energy resources

The restrictions on our sovereignty imposed by the energy chapter of the North American Free Trade Agreement are unique in all the world’s treaties. NAFTA’s proportional sharing clause (Article 605) obliges Canada to go on exporting non-renewable hydrocarbons to the United States even if these sales cause domestic shortages. Mexico wisely won an exemption from this clause.

Currently, Canada has only 13 years worth of conventional oil reserves and just 9.3 years of proven natural gas reserves. Yet Canada exports two-thirds of our oil production and 63% of our natural gas to the U.S.

NAFTA prevents us from reducing the share we export in order to preserve supplies for future generations, cut down on greenhouse gas emissions from the tar sands or set aside natural gas for higher value-added, job-creating petrochemical industries.

We need a government that will protect our future energy supply

Candidates running in the October 14 Canadian election must declare what they will do to eliminate NAFTA’s:

- Article 605 requiring Canada to make available to the U.S. the same proportion of oil and gas supplies as were exported over the previous 3 years; and
- Article 604 prohibiting Canada from imposing export taxes on oil, gas or petrochemical products.

If Senator Barack Obama wins the U.S. election, he will “work with Canada and Mexico to amend the North American Free Trade Agreement so that it works for all three.”

Citizens concerned about our energy future, climate change and social justice should:

- Ask candidates what they will do to eliminate NAFTA’s energy provisions;
- Write letters to the editor raising this crucial issue;
- Request that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation cover this issue via their “Assign Us” web page at http://www.cbc.ca/national/blog/video/politicseconomy/assign_us.html
- Spread the word at local union, community or church gatherings.

*One of a series of ‘one-pagers’ prepared by Common Frontiers. To see them all go to www.commonfrontiers.ca