

# Tar Sands Showdown: Building a Blue-Green Alliance in our Communities

The following is an action proposal for consideration by workshop participants arising out of our discussions.

## **Context:**

At first glance, some may feel that the Alberta tar sands are far away from the concerns people have here in Southwestern Ontario. But, a closer look reveals that there are important links to be made between the production of tar sands crude and our local jobs and the economy in this region, let alone the environment and our energy future.

To be sure, some workers from our communities may have jobs in the tar sands industry itself, being part of the work force that's flown in and out of Ft. McMurray on a regular basis. While these jobs no doubt provide much needed income, they also have their downsides, namely, the stress and strains that come from separation from their families and related forms of social dislocation.

At the same time, many more workers in Southwestern Ontario have lost their jobs in manufacturing industries, which is due, in part, to the tar sands boom. When the world price of oil rose steadily during the tar sands boom, so did the value of the Canadian dollar [which is viewed as a petro dollar on currency markets]. As a result, our manufacturing exports became less and less competitive in the US market which, in turn, translated into increasing layoffs and job losses in manufacturing industries here at home [note: some 400,000 manufacturing jobs lost in Canada between 2004 and 2008].

On top of this, tar sands crude is a dirty fuel which is also being refined and sold here in Southwestern Ontario. The greenhouse gas emissions generated by the full fuel cycle of synthetic crude oil production from the tar sands are between three and five times that of conventional oil production. In effect, the tar sands industry has become Canada's number one global warming machine. Unless concerted efforts are made to curb and reduce consumption of tar sands crude in Southwestern Ontario, this region will be making an additional contribution to global warming and climate change.

While these issues are certainly challenging and complex, there is an urgent need to develop a constructive dialogue and working relationship between labour and environmental groups in our communities. For, what is at stake here is not only the tar sands but our economic, environmental and energy future. Our economy needs to be transformed in relation to environmental priorities which, in turn, means shifting to renewable energy alternatives. To move in this direction, we need to develop a blue-green alliance in our communities.

## **Take Action Now!**

The objective here is to form a community or citizen-based task force to explore the possibilities of organizing a blue-green alliance in your city to undertake the following tasks:

- Initiate discussions with your local labour council and/or unions and local environmental groups about the prospects of forming a blue-green alliance for collective actions around tar sands issues and the development of a local green industry strategy;
- Analyze the loss of manufacturing jobs in your communities over the last few years with a view to showing how they may be linked, in part, to the tar sands boom through the rise and fall of the Canadian dollar [i.e. our petro dollar];
- Develop some concrete proposals for what could be done in your community by labour and environment groups to promote green jobs and green industry proposals for the building of a clean energy economy for the future in your region;\*
- Organize a community-based campaign to promote public discussion and action on these issues, including a public forum and/or cultural event to spread the word and cultivate community awareness and action;
- Engage in other proposed actions such as consumer-based campaigns against the use of dirty fuels from tar sands production and the call for municipal government resolutions concerning the purchase and use of tar sands crude.

\*some ideas for building a clean energy economy or a green industrial strategy include:

- industry and programs for retrofitting buildings in city and region for energy conservation
- build, expand and/or renew public transit systems in our cities and communities
- retool auto industry for production of energy efficient, low carbon fueled vehicles
- promote low carbon fuel standards for all municipal and public facilities
- develop local renewable energy industries --- solar, wind and geo-thermal
- establish local or regional green jobs and training programs to develop new skills