

Presentation to CEP BC Provincial Council – Vancouver – April 27, 2013

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Good morning, sisters and brothers. It's been just over six years since I found myself in a CEP crowd like this. Last time, in this very room, I was a delegate for Local 1129 at the Pulp and Paper Wage Caucus.

So, how did I get here today? Well the answer is kind of a story, a story that started last January 14 on a cold, sleeting Monday night in Vancouver. I was walking in the middle of a downtown street with 1100 other people. We were on our way to the Wall Centre, just up the block here, to protest the phony Joint Review Panel hearings on Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline from the Alberta oil patch to Kitimat.

As we walked – marched – I noticed there was no visible union presence in this crowd of committed, progressive Canadians trying to democratically shape our future. And then I thought of the other times in recent years that I'd missed seeing unions at progressive protests and rallies.

I remembered the 5,000 protesters outside the opening ceremonies for the 2010 Olympics, a event that transferred \$6-10 billion from public coffers into corporate hands. While the governments donating our tax dollars continued making vicious cuts to programs for the sick, the elderly, children at risk, the poor, etc. Another necessary cost-saving measure involved tearing up collective agreements, firing thousands of health care workers, and turning their work over to non-union contractors.

I also recalled the Occupy movement, when hundreds of thousands around the world almost spontaneously erupted , opposing the economic and political stranglehold on our world by the super-rich. Opposing the very corporations that unions oppose across bargaining tables, on picket lines, and at the ballot box. To the several thousand "occupiers" across BC and Canada, some verbal and monetary support did come from unions. But union members were not a significant, visible part of the occupations.

Then there have been the numerous actions of Idle No More, another near-spontaneous continent-wide series of protest actions against proposed oil and gas pipelines, against Stephen Harper's anti-democratic omnibus bills. Against, specifically, the parts of those now-enacted laws that endanger all our futures by scrapping page after page of environmental protections (some of them a century old).

And, yes, Idle No More actions have also protested and continue to protest unjust treatment of First Nations by government. As well they should, since we can see a pattern of conflict not unlike the one we're more familiar with when corporations and governments attack unions. The bosses and their political puppets aim to crush unions because we block their unchecked profiteering in our workplaces. They aim to crush First Nations because they block environmentally destructive profiteering by controlling or laying claim to large tracts of resource-rich land.

Again, some good verbal support for Idle No More from CEP, CAW, CUPW, and CUPE. A nice media shot of CEP President Dave Coles with hunger-striking Chief Teresa Spencer on the frozen Ottawa River behind the Parliament Buildings. But again, at least in the actions I've attended, no appreciable visible presence of union members.

So, why are union members not part of these struggles? Not long ago we were leading such fights. (Now, these observations are based on Vancouver. Maybe they don't apply to the rest of the province. If that's true, it would make my heart glad to hear about it.)

As mentioned, some of these struggles have received strong support from some of our union leaders, Brother Coles prominent among them. But that's not the same as seeing dozens or hundreds or thousands of union members in their union hats and coats and shirts, banners and flags flying,

At this point, people I meet in various struggles, especially young people, think unions are pretty much irrelevant. They don't even question why unions are absent. They don't think unions matter.

So, I was worried about this separation between unions and progressive struggles for two main reasons. First, because I think the strength of unions can be extremely important, decisive even, in gaining ground in some of these struggles.

But second, I was concerned, because all kinds of corporate and government attacks coming down on unions are based on bosses' and their pet government politicians' telling the general public that unions and union members are better off than most people, unfairly better off. They say that we're too rich, that we don't deserve the wages and benefits and pensions we've won by "ganging up on" employers, and ignoring people who aren't in our gang. Really, they portray us as acting like gangs and rising above regular folks by unfair means.

So, if you're *NOT* a union member, don't worry when they tear up contracts as the BC Lie-berals did to healthcare workers in 2002 and Ontario Lie-berals did to teachers just recently. Don't cry if pro-business governments legislate strike-breaking and impose contracts – as Harper Tories have done to postal, airline, and rail workers. And don't even blink when union-busting, right-to-work laws come north from the U.S. – begun with the passage of Bill C-377 in the House of Commons last December.

I think you get the point. When we're attacked, we expect our friends and allies to come to our support, people we've stood shoulder-to-shoulder with, people we've supported in their struggles and in the battles we share an interest in winning. But if we've isolated ourselves, then what?

Of course, even if you agree with that point, it doesn't mean you agree that CEP members should be more involved in the rallies and marches I'm talking about.

Which brings me back to the story.

You see, after I got all worried about unions being separated from progressive struggles I started raising it with every trade unionist I ran into. One of whom was Sister Andrea McBride – near the meat section of our local Safeway. She suggested I e-mail her a proposal for a 20-minute presentation to this Provincial Council Meeting?

This was a totally unexpected, but very welcome, chance to bring my concerns to you and through you to our sisters and brothers province-wide.

But it was also much more than that. Completely unknown to me at the time, it was a suggestion that has changed my life. Because I now had to go and read up on the anti-pipelines/anti-tankers movement and the Idle No More movement, so I could sound more like I actually know what I'm talking about today.

I first found out how consistently Brother Coles has been writing all over the internet and speaking all over North America against the proposed Northern Gateway and Keystone XL pipelines. He and other CEPers have also forcefully voiced the need to halt climate change. I discovered CEP is one of two unions allied with environmentalists in Blue Green Canada. And I read the many informative documents on the CEP website opposing pipelines and climate change, and calling for a national energy strategy. A lot of what's in those website documents harmonizes with what I'm going to tell you, especially CEP's slightly outdated but still highly impressive 2008 Energy Policy.

But... that wasn't the life-changing part.

Elsewhere on the internet, as I read up on pipeline spills, I remembered the reports in recent years about the Enbridge spill into a Michigan river, and then the two spills in Alberta, and then the spill in Wisconsin, and then the spill a few kilometres from my own residence in North Burnaby, the Arkansas spill earlier this month ... damn, there's been a lot of them. Leaving aside the other pipeline corporations, Enbridge alone, from 2000 to 2010, had 720 spills onto land and into water, totaling 132,715 barrels of oil.

And how about the tanker spills? How about hundreds of them each year, some stretching from here to the back door of St. Paul's Hospital's, squeezing in and out of the Port of Vancouver, in and out of the Port of Kitimat, winding through the stormy, narrow, twisty channels along the BC coast?

When – not if – there is a major spill, there will be irreparable damage to the ecology of the turbulent seas and jagged shorelines. But the dollar cost will also be humongous. According to Robyn Allan, former president and CEO of the Insurance Corporation of BC and former senior economist at BC Central Credit Union, there isn't an existing insurance package that pays enough to cover the clean-up costs. So who pays? Guesses?

Finding out about the particularly dirty and hard-to-clean-up properties of tar sands oil – diluted bitumen or dilbit—made the spill stories and stats even more worrisome. Thirty miles of the Kalamazoo River in Michigan is still fouled with dilbit, 33 months and nearly one billion dollars worth of clean-up costs later.

But none of that was life-changing.

In my research I checked the supposedly "rigorous" environmental assessments of Northern Gateway by the Joint Review Panel. Its membership stacked with pro-industry appointees, the rule change giving federal cabinet the final say, the outcome revealed two months before the panel's first hearing with the Tories' unveiling their proposed legislation.

Far from life-changing, however, all that just confirmed what I already expected from transnational corporations and their government lapdogs.

Nor did my life turn over when I discovered more and more about the huge international opposition that is growing to the proposed pipelines, to tankers and to the increased use of tar sands oil they would guarantee. Protests, often leading to arrests,

across Canada and the US, grandmas locking themselves to excavators in Texas, First Nations warrior camps set up in the paths of proposed pipelines in northern B.C. and southern Oklahoma. Motions adopted by municipalities. Hundreds testifying at hearings against pipelines. Educational materials being put together and brought into schools by the students themselves. Court cases filed by private citizens. Campaigns on University and college campuses to get schools to disinvest from fossil fuel companies. Even a California billionaire pledging millions to block construction of Keystone XL.

And finally, I was not knocked sideways by the numerous lies and scams I learned of. Not just the disappearing islands on the Enbridge map of Douglas Channel out of Kitimat. Or the company's ridiculous claim that dilbit spills are no more difficult to clean up than any other kind of crude oil.

But also about the economics of bringing the world's dirtiest oil to tidewater and then to foreign markets.

As it turns out, oceans of tar sands oil, flowing to China would not lower our fuel prices or enrich us through jobs and tax revenues. Rather, because all our domestically produced oil would trade at world prices, it would create a "price shock" bumping up our vehicle and home heating costs, raising energy expenses for manufacturing and shipping, and making only some obscenely wealthy corporate honchos even richer.

As federal NDP leader Tom Mulcair has pointed out (to cries of "traitor" from right-wing hacks) the production and sale of tar sands oil is already driving up the international exchange value of the Canadian dollar and making other manufacturing exports (possibly including those from the now-shutdown mill I used to work in) too expensive for our foreign customers. If dilbit sales triple in 10-15 years, as planned, so much the worse. Robyn Allan, claiming agreement with the Bank of Canada, the World Bank, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and others, says it will boost inflation and interest rates and be a net killer of jobs – including well-paying ones.

I could probably keep you here until next week if I kept going, fleshing out what I've said with evidence and quotes, adding a huge pile of stuff I haven't said. But time is short, and I have to get to the part that changed my life.

That happened when I became more acquainted with the most important logic, or should I say the "eco-logic," behind the anti-pipelines, anti-tankers protests. I started reading about the science of climate change.

I was boggled that no one had told me this stuff before. I mean I read a lot, so I knew we were in for more big storms, some hotter weather creeping further north, maybe some more drought in different places. *Eventually*. But I didn't know about the drastic forecasts and the urgent need for immediate action revealed by this science. And no, it isn't fringe, lunatic stuff. Though right-wing corporate billionaires like the Koch brothers pay people to dispute climate change, the science is actually agreed on by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, numerous professional societies of scientists, almost all national academies of science, the International Energy Agency, and an unusual, overwhelming majority of individual scientists (meteorologists, geophysicists, oceanographers, etc.).

Moreover, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have recently come out with statements on the need to "mitigate" climate change because it poses major "fiscal, financial, and economic" problems. The main US government auditor, the General Accounting Office, has put climate change on its list of the highest financial risks to the government and country.

And even stockbrokers and bankers are starting to talk about a looming "carbon bubble." You'll want to check this out because it potentially threatens our negotiated pensions. In short, stock values in fossil fuel companies are based on their assets, most of which are still in the ground. If governments become convinced of climate change dangers and start to make laws that keep those assets in the ground, trillions of dollars of stock value could disappear in a flash with dire impacts on the world economy—and on our pensions.

So what's the deal? What does the science say?

It says basically that we have to stop putting carbon dioxide into the air. We have to do this because CO₂ is the most dangerous greenhouse gas causing the earth's atmosphere to heat up. And the CO₂ is not like pollution that we've learned we can fix by simply stopping putting it into the air. You do that with many pollutants for weeks or months or years, the amount in the air is reduced. With CO₂ though, it takes decades, maybe up to a century for the stuff already in the air to slowly diminish. So, we have to stop putting it in the air to begin with.

The numbers? The scientists say the maximum amount of CO₂ in the air, which will allow us to (probably) avoid catastrophic climate warming is 350 parts per million. Unfortunately, we are now, worldwide, at 395 parts per million and rising at an

accelerating rate. If we keep going the way we're going for another 20-30 years, we will be on track to have 650 parts per million before the end of the century.

How does that translate into temperature and other effects? 350 ppm means probably the average world temperature will rise 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels. That causes what, indeed, we are already seeing with a rise of only .8 degrees so far: extreme storms like Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy; serious droughts like those in two-thirds of the US last year, in Russia the year before, and in Australia right now; disastrous flooding in other places; multiplying crop failures; the melting of arctic sea ice, and ice sheets on Greenland and Antarctica, resulting in rising sea levels and the drowning of a few low-lying islands and coastal areas around the world; growing ocean warming and acidification (another effect of CO₂) which have already, since 1950, killed off 40 per cent of the world's phytoplankton, the bottom of the marine food chain and producers of half the world's oxygen, etc.

Beyond 350 ppm, we approach what scientists call dangerous "tipping points," which will set in motion self-reinforcing domino effects. Melting northern tundra will release a hell of a lot of CO₂ *and* methane, a greenhouse gas that is 36 times as bad as CO₂. Solar heat, once reflected back into space by polar ice, will be absorbed by the darker, ice-free ocean. Forests that historically soaked up tons of CO₂ will be killed by drought and fire. Etc., etc.

650 ppm means an average worldwide temperature hike of at least four degrees celsius, more likely six, a change not seen since the end of the last ice age 11,000 years ago. It also means the extinction of 40 to 70 per cent of all earth species, plant and animal.

Rising sea levels, possibly up to the front steps of this building, will inundate major cities around the planet, submerge low-lying valley farmlands, and contaminate dwindling fresh water sources.

As temperate climate zones retreat toward the North Pole and South Pole, much of Asia and North America, the bottom half of Europe, and nearly all of Africa and South America will become virtually uninhabitable for humans. The billions displaced by these changes will move toward places like Canada and northern Europe. Fierce conflicts over disappearing survival necessities will likely be the final experiences of most people. Obviously, civilization would collapse.

I have left out many descriptions of the results of climate change in the last few paragraphs. I want to scare you into action, not paralysis. But I hope this information,

and what you can find yourselves, starting with the hand-outs I've prepared for you, will impact your lives as it did mine.

If I'm successful in this, I know I've created a dilemma for you, as members of CEP, a union with many members who want to keep making good wages and benefits off the tar sands. As a CEP member, I feel that dilemma too. And it comes even closer, because I know if the tar sands shut down and the pipelines aren't built, there are going to be a hell of a lot of tradespeople in the coming years who are scrambling for a terrible few jobs, and my son is a 25-year-old millwright.

But, the science won't change because of any of that. The science says we have to start NOW to change the way we do pretty much everything, and that includes gearing up for launching whole new green industries with tens of thousands of well-paid jobs. We can't wait 20 years. What we do or don't do now will have effects in 20 years. If we don't start until then, it will be – a scary expression being used more and more these days – "game over for the environment."

And the most crucial thing the science says we must do ASAP, ASAP, ASAP is to start leaving as much carbon as possible right where it is, in the ground. Another set of climate science numbers says that we have a global "carbon budget" that will let us put another roughly 530 gigatons of CO₂ in the atmosphere before we hit the dreaded 2 degrees C global temperature increase. If current trends continue, we will blow through that budget fifteen years from now. Conventional crude, tar sands bitumen, natural gas, shale gas, coal – every bit possible must stay buried. Either that or tell our grandchildren that they are going to have to pay a very severe price.

It's going to take all of us to figure out how to shift quickly to a non-carbon-based economy and overcome the greed-motivated corporations standing in the way. Many detailed ideas on what is needed are contained in the CEP's own Energy Policy. There's also some stuff in the handout – green alternatives that are already being implemented in various places, others that are still just ideas or proposals.

I want to end by emphasizing that reining in climate change is not a just a choice we might find preferable. It is something that must be done. It's something that we have to do. We absolutely have to do it!

Thanks for hearing me out. I'm looking forward to some lively discussion – and, I hope, to some fellow CEP members keeping me company at coming protests.