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Time for BC to start preparing for climate migration: A question of justice

By Stephanie Dickson, Sophie Webber and Tim Takaro

The world is already witnessing severe impacts of climate change on lives and livelihoods. Global damage from climate change and fossil fuel development was estimated at \$1.2 trillion in 2010, or 1.6 per cent of world GDP, and is projected to rise to 3.2 per cent by 2030. Over the past several years alone, the severity of extreme weather events impacted millions of lives. In some cases, changes in climate will induce permanent or temporary displacements, and the forced movement of people will only increase over the coming decades.

In 2010, Canada ranked ninth among all nations in greenhouse gas emissions. As a wealthy nation, Canada has resources that will assist in adapting to future climate-related stressors domestically, and it is well positioned to help other countries respond to climate change. Given Canada's contribution to climate change, and our status as a wealthy nation in part due to fossil fuel extraction, we are morally obligated to assist climate migrants.

Climate change is one factor that interacts with many others to drive population movements. Estimates of the number of climate-influenced migrants range widely, but most projections agree that in the coming years climate change will compel hundreds of millions of people to relocate.

Industrialized countries like Canada have benefitted enormously from the extraction and sale of fossil fuels, whereas others who have contributed least to climate change will disproportionately feel its impacts. Despite our obligation to correct this injustice, at present, the federal and provincial governments show



little interest in reducing Canada's carbon emissions. Furthermore, both levels of government have yet to define our responsibilities to those displaced by climate change.

We surveyed existing immigration service-providers, revealing that there are serious gaps in current policies and understanding when it comes to climate migration. Despite Canada's historical emissions, neither our senior governments nor the leaders within our core service systems are comprehensively planning for what climate migration will require of our social and cultural services or infrastructure. We must begin a conversation about how to develop and direct this leadership.

Despite Canada's reputation for being open to immigrants and enjoying a diverse and multicultural society, our immigration policies are not welcoming of the most vulnerable people, exposing a core justice gap at the root of our immigration system. We admit about 250,000 immigrants per year, an amount that has changed little since the early 1990s. The

WHY BC NEEDS A HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Check out this great series of PolicyNote.ca posts explaining a wide range of issues a BC human rights commission could address: policynote.ca/tag/human-rights-commission-series.

You can also read the report these posts are based on, *Strengthening Human Rights: Why British Columbia Needs a Human Rights Commission* by Gwen Brodsky and Shelagh Day, at policyalternatives.ca/bchumanrights.

BC's workers need a human rights commission

By Devyn Cousineau

Let me explain BC's strategy for addressing discrimination. First, we ask someone to experience it. Then we ask that person to understand a complex area of law, investigate the facts and engage in a legal proceeding against their employer / landlord / service provider to enforce their rights. We ask many people to do this without any legal help.

What would it look like if we actually acted proactively to try to avoid discrimination in the first place? Just ask the other nine provinces, which have invested in a proactive system for exposing, understanding and preventing discrimination. All of Canada's provinces, except for BC, have a human rights commission.

BC's lack of a human rights commission matters.

I'm a non-profit lawyer who represents and advises low-wage workers about their human rights in the workplace. Over the last year I've had a growing number of calls from a group of uniquely vulnerable workers in our province: temporary foreign workers. I have received enough calls, and read enough media stories, to say confidently that these workers experience discrimination as a predictable by-product of their legislated working conditions. They are vulnerable to discrimination on a systemic level.

Most people think it's daunting to sue their employer. But few of us can understand how truly formidable that proposition becomes when a person is reliant on their employer not only for their job, but also their immigration status, housing and long-term prospects of being reunited with their family. The obstacles faced by temporary foreign workers to enforce their basic human right to be treated with dignity in the workplace cannot be understated.

In my experience, it is the rare worker indeed who can bear this burden.

Also in my experience, the odds are that when discrimination is happening to one temporary foreign worker in the workplace, it is happening to a group of workers. This could include racial or sexual harassment, or breaching minimum standards of employment like failing to pay minimum wage. Again, this is a systemic form of discrimination.

Asking these workers to shoulder the responsibility of understanding, investigating and exposing the ways in which they are being abused, and providing the complex evidence necessary to tie their exploitation to factors like their race or gender, is too much. It ensures that systemic discrimination against temporary foreign workers remains hidden and poorly understood. It ensures that systemic discrimination against temporary foreign workers will continue.

A human rights commission has the mandate to investigate and understand this type of systemic discrimination. It can create guidelines for employers to understand their obligations and workers to understand their rights. It can educate the parties, the government and the public about what makes temporary foreign workers vulnerable and what kind of treatment will be unlawful. It can help us to prevent this predictable but unacceptable discrimination.

It's time for BC to catch up...again. BC's low-wage workers need a human rights commission. The responsibility for fighting discrimination in the workplace cannot be theirs alone.

Devyn Cousineau is a member of the Employment Standards Coalition and a CCPA-BC research associate.

Asking these workers to shoulder the responsibility of understanding, investigating and exposing the ways in which they are being abused, and providing the complex evidence necessary to tie their exploitation to factors like their race or gender, is too much.

From discrimination against temporary foreign workers to sexual harassment, there's no shortage of issues a human rights commission could tackle

By Gwen Brodsky and Shelagh Day

British Columbia is the only province in Canada that does not have a human rights commission. That makes us the weakest province when it comes to fostering human rights awareness and preventing discrimination.

Currently BC only has a human rights tribunal, which mediates and adjudicates complaints about discrimination after it has occurred. The Tribunal does its job well. But the onus to identify and report human rights violations rests on individual British Columbians, who must know their rights, navigate the complaints process, and handle the risk of failure. We know that the complaints that get to the Tribunal are only the “tip of the iceberg,” and that many of the tougher, more systemic issues are not resolved through individual complaints.

For example, troubling evidence has come to light of abusive treatment of temporary foreign workers and recent immigrants in the food service and tree planting industries. Workers have been subjected to intimidation and sexual and racial harassment, and coerced into using over-crowded and inadequate accommodation provided by the employer. These workers are too vulnerable and face too many obstacles—including fear, financial need, lack of English fluency and isolation—to deal with this discrimination on their own. A human rights commission—if we had one—could investigate, issue public guidelines that would provide information, education and protection to both workers and employers, and monitor the situation.

Recent events have also heightened our awareness of the prevalence of sexual harassment and violence against women. Our institutions—even sophisticated ones like the University of British Columbia (e.g. rape chants and campus sexual assaults) and the CBC (Jian Ghomeshi)—have yet to institute adequate practices and protocols that can prevent discrimination against



women, and respond effectively when it occurs. Because women often do not trust the police to help them, most do not report sexual assaults. Again, a human rights commission—if we had one—could develop standards, protocols and supports for employers and key service providers like the police.

The accommodation of people with mental health issues, and of workers who are also caring for children, parents or a disabled family member, is an emerging part of human rights law. A human rights commission—if we had one—could provide education, information and advice, so that complaints could be avoided. Most employers, service providers and landlords want to comply with human rights law. But right now, we provide little help or encouragement.

These are just a few examples of how a commission could help advance human rights in British Columbia. And there is no shortage of other pressing issues a commission could help us deal with: not enough supports for youth with mental health problems; race and sex bias in policing; the concentration of Aboriginal, immigrant and racialized women and youth in low-wage employment; homelessness and lack of affordable housing...just to name a few.

Without a commission, BC has no public institution that can take steps to prevent discrimination, educate the public, initiate inquiries on broad systemic issues, develop guidelines and promote human rights compliance. We do not have the institutional machinery necessary to make good on the stated purpose of

Governments need to be committed guarantors of human rights and supporters of strong, stable human rights systems.

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It's time to seriously tackle child poverty

By Igluka Ivanova

One in five BC children lives in poverty. This is the sobering finding of the 2014 BC Child Poverty Report Card released on November 24, the 25th anniversary of a unanimous all-party resolution in Canada's House of Commons to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.



Poverty stops too many children from reaching their full potential and we are all poorer for it.

Child poverty is not just a big city problem. In fact, the highest child poverty rates in BC are on the north and central coast:

- Central Coast Regional District (54.8 per cent child poverty rate)
- Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District (33.5 per cent child poverty rate)
- Mount Waddington Regional District (33.2 per cent child poverty rate)

In Metro Vancouver, there are pockets of extremely high child poverty (30 per cent or more) in the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown and Strathcona, but also in Surrey, Coquitlam, North Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, New Westminster and Langley.

Yes, there has been some decline in child poverty since 2000 but progress has been too slow. With 169,420 children still living in poverty in our province, now is hardly the time for patting ourselves on the back. We must do better!

Behind these statistics are real children and families who suffer tremendous hardship and indignity. The Report Card features some of these heart-wrenching stories. More were shared at the press conference for the report's release. Elementary school teacher Anna Chudnovsky brought the audience to tears with stories from the lives of some of her students. Single mother (and cofounder of the new Single Mothers' Alliance of BC) Viveca Ellis talked about her own experience with poverty and being forced to go on welfare because she was unable to keep working at a \$13/hour job when child care cost her \$11/hour.

We must do better because poverty is more than just a personal crisis for the families living with low incomes; it's a tremendous burden for society as a whole. We all pay for poverty.

Early childhood is when our brains are most

sensitive to our environment, to our nutrition, to the kind of housing we live in and the stressors we are exposed to. Poverty in early childhood has detrimental consequences that persist when children grow up. It's linked to health problems, behavioural problems and worse school performance.

Poverty stops too many children from reaching their full potential and we are all poorer for it. Not fully tapping into the creativity, talents and passions of one out of every five BC kids is a big loss to our communities and our economy.

It doesn't have to be this way. The 2014 BC Child Poverty Report Card outlines areas for both immediate and medium-term action in its recommendations. The BC government must take the lead and develop a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines to tackle the root causes of poverty.

There is broad support for such a plan, not just from concerned community groups, educators and health professionals who've joined the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition but also from the Legislature's Committee on Finance and Government Services. Their 2015 Budget Consultation report recommends that the BC government:

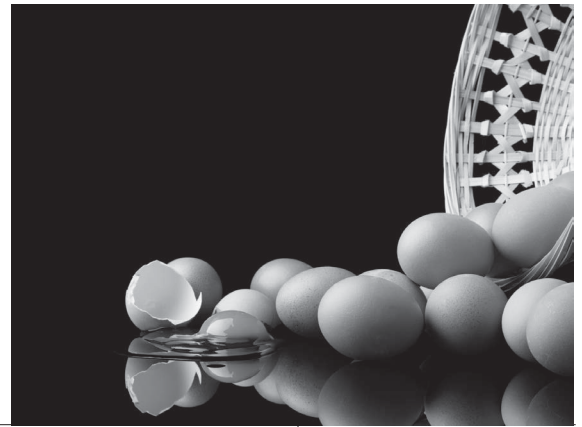
- Introduce a comprehensive poverty reduction plan, and review income assistance rates, the minimum wage, and clawback of child support payments. (Recommendation 37)
- Provide funding and support for the development and implementation of a child care plan. (Recommendation 40)

Child poverty is not a problem that can be solved by soup kitchens, food banks and Christmas toy drives any more than a leaky roof can be fixed by mopping the drips off the floor. We need an overarching, systematic

A BC framework for LNG: The LNG income tax

By Marc Lee

We saw this coming but it's still sobering to see it in black and white. The BC government's decision to cut its proposed LNG income tax in half (from 7 per cent to 3.5 per cent) is simply a cave-in to industry. It's a massive giveaway of a public resource to global corporations by a desperate government that put all its eggs in one basket.



Not that we should be surprised. The recent trend in BC has been to give away our gas resources for next to nothing. The idea behind the LNG income tax was to capture some of the windfall profits from exporting to Asia, to be used for the public benefit. On this basis, we were promised a \$100 billion Prosperity Fund, a debt-free BC, lower taxes and better public services.

These claims were unrealistic at the proposed 7 per cent rate from February's budget. At the lower rate they will be a pittance. First off, companies are able to deduct the full capital costs of their LNG plant investment before they pay the full (now 3.5 per cent) tax. This could take 6–12 years depending on what price they are able to get in Asia. If there are capital cost overruns, as in the case of Australian LNG or Canadian tar sands, it could be as much 16 years before the full tax kicks in. Yes, there is an early 1.5 per cent tax to get some funds into the treasury but those funds are deductible from the full 3.5 per cent tax.

I crunched the numbers on the LNG tax back in April, and if we adjust to the lower 3.5 per cent rate, a mature industry (that has paid off its capital costs) of five LNG plants would contribute only about \$100–300 million per year in LNG income tax (depending on the price received in Asia). Another \$200–600 million in natural gas royalties could also be expected. But compare that combined \$300–900 million to BC's 2014 budget of \$44 billion. Drop, meet bucket.

And that's not counting another sneaky measure: a corporate income tax (CIT) credit for LNG producers for its cost of natural gas. That works out to be equivalent to a CIT cut from 11 per cent to 8 per cent. Once we factor in the delayed application of the LNG tax and cost overruns, this CIT reduction essentially wipes out any revenue gain from the LNG tax.

The finance minister blames changing market conditions, higher construction costs and lower prices for the tax regime shift. Those factors have been well known for some time, and would indeed lead to much lower revenues. But at budget time, the government issued a "study" by Ernst and Young that found BC's LNG tax regime and all other taxes were, in fact, competitive with other jurisdictions. I suspect the industry just had a stronger negotiating position, as it knew how keen the BC government was to land a deal (and there may be more caving before we see any final investment decision on LNG).

In the end it's a trade-off between competitiveness for the industry (low taxes, weak regulations) and public benefits for BC. To get the investment, the BC government has chosen competitiveness. This will drive some new job creation, mostly in construction, as well as several hundred jobs per LNG plant and more upstream. Perhaps 5,000 new permanent jobs in all, and those workers will pay other BC taxes.

So the impact of an LNG industry is more than what we get in LNG tax, CIT and royalties. However, we must also consider increased public costs for roads, schools, hospitals, policing and so forth, plus environmental and climate impacts. At the end of the day, it's not clear that LNG will pay its way at all.

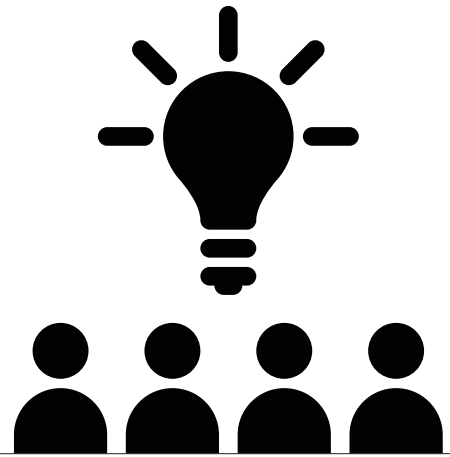
Marc Lee is a senior economist with the BC Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and is the co-director of the Climate Justice Project. This article draws on research from Path to Prosperity?, a study looking at potential public revenues from planned LNG development in BC, with a focus on BC's natural gas royalty regime and the proposed LNG income tax. Download it at policyalternatives.ca/path-to-prosperity.

At the end of the day, it's not clear that LNG will pay its way at all.

How to create good jobs in BC

By Iglika Ivanova

It's pretty clear that the BC Jobs Plan has failed to deliver. As of September 2014—three years after the plan was launched—only 71 per cent of working-age (15–64) British Columbians are employed, a number that has only barely improved since the low point of the recession. BC still needs 94,000 more jobs to return to pre-recession employment levels, but employment growth has been slow so far this year (13,600 net new jobs over the first nine months of 2014) and in 2013 the number of jobs actually decreased.



What else can be done to create meaningful, sustainable, family-supporting jobs in BC?

Many British Columbians recognize that the provincial government's economic strategy—narrowly focused on boosting resource-extraction industries like mining and LNG—puts all our eggs in one basket. The strategy is both economically and environmentally risky.

But what else, some ask, can be done to create meaningful, sustainable, family-supporting jobs in BC?

I turned to leading thinkers in our broader network with this question and asked each of them to submit a single idea they have for fostering good jobs in our province.

They offer a wide range of solutions to create good jobs—including new government-led

initiatives, policy changes that remove existing barriers or enable British Columbians to tap into new opportunities and action items for businesses and individuals. The list is long, showcasing the great potential of our province and its people.

While there is no silver bullet, there is widespread agreement that governments can and should play an important role in steering economic activity towards a more innovative and diverse economy that serves the public interest. Indeed, this is the only way to move forward.

Two great ideas are on the opposite page, with more to come in subsequent issues of *BC Commentary*.

31 GOOD JOBS IDEAS FOR BC

1. Promote co-ops as a business model
2. Expand BC Hydro's Powersmart program
3. Buy local
4. Set up new crown corporations
5. Invest in training
6. Develop an industrial strategy for the creative sector
7. Pay a living wage
8. Implement the \$10/day Child Care Plan
9. Use the Carbon Tax for green public infrastructure investments
10. Create a public bank with a local development mandate
11. Transform the "poor jobs"
12. Facilitate knowledge exchange between universities, business, communities and government
13. Focus on green jobs for youth
14. Harness the promise of social enterprise with enabling legislation
15. Use public school infrastructure to provide quality child care
16. Institute precarity pay
17. Redesign the economy to respect the ecosystem
18. Develop a youth jobs initiative
19. Turn all farm jobs into good jobs
20. Guarantee a basic income
21. Create a new urban-rural economic development initiative
22. Green the resource industries
23. Start co-ops
24. Adopt green procurement policies in hospitals and long-term care homes
25. Establish province-wide elderly care standards
26. Support co-operatively run businesses
27. Fund and build affordable housing
28. Invest in public education
29. Move towards greener, carbon-focused forest management
30. Implement a youth guarantee
31. Avoid groupthink by looking at the data

Read about each of these at:
policyalternatives.ca/goodjobsbc

Adopt green procurement policies in hospitals and long-term care homes

By Lou Black, Research Analyst,
Hospital Employees' Union

Increasingly, in hospitals and long-term care homes, food is pre-packaged, shipped long distances and served with disposable plates and cutlery. Establishing green procurement policies alongside local, healthy food policies (including in-house meal preparation using fresh ingredients) would have several important advantages over the current system.

First, patients and care home residents would experience improved nutrition and health outcomes. Second, there would be immediate environmental benefits of such a program, including reduced packaging, reduced reliance on disposables (thus reduced waste) and a lower ecological footprint from not having to transport pre-processed food over long distances. In the process, agricultural development and food security would be increased. Finally, such an initiative will create more well-paid, skilled jobs for food service staff in health care facilities, thus doubling as a good jobs program.

*Continued from page 4
Child poverty*

approach to addressing the root causes of poverty. A government-led, comprehensive poverty reduction plan with an accountability mechanism to ensure that anti-poverty initiatives are sustained, evaluated and modified as needed to be effective is the best tool for the job.

There's no better time than now.

BC's current fiscal position is solid, with surpluses projected annually in the near term, and a manageable debt load. Our debt-to-GDP ratio of 18.1 per cent this year is one of the lowest in the country. Interest rates are record low. Now is a perfect time for our government to consider borrowing to make the strategic public investments necessary to tackle child poverty. The only thing standing in the way is political will.

Iglika Ivanova is a senior economist and Public Interest Researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-BC Office.

Develop an industrial strategy for the creative sector

By Matt Toner,
President, Zeros 2 Heroes

In many ways, British Columbia has historically been a land of accidental wealth: blessed with an abundance of natural resources, we haven't had to think long and hard about a sustainable industrial strategy.

Buoyed by a relatively cheap dollar, the BC creative economy has been another example of accidental wealth. Unlike other global tech centres, we have done little to foster and even less to cultivate the creative sector.

As a result, our innovation industry has devolved into a new form of branch-plant economy, one where global players chase small differentials in tax incentives or immigration policies. While this can create good local jobs, these are not going to be deeply rooted and can quickly leave the province at the click of a mouse.

We can counter this by reimagining the role of government in the digital economy.

Government can foster co-investments in local companies that are capable of generating unique and compelling intellectual property. A new crown corporation—operating along the lines of Creative BC—would be a great vehicle to seed and support start-up companies in clean tech, games or digital media.

In terms of jobs-for-the-buck, these sectors provide a much greater potential return than the resource industries. And these are jobs that are cleaner, greener, better paid and more sustainable—exactly the sorts of jobs we want for our children and grandchildren.

Read the other 29 ideas at:
policyalternatives.ca/goodjobsbc

In terms of jobs-for-the-buck, creative sectors provide a much greater potential return than resource industries.

percentage of immigrants who are admitted under “refugee status” has fallen from a high of 23 per cent in 1991 to just 9 per cent in 2012. Current policies stack the odds against the most vulnerable people and draw a false distinction between “deserving” and “undeserving” migrants.

There are three existing areas of Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that could be used to accommodate climate migrants. First, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration may temporarily suspend removal orders for people who become displaced while in Canada. This occurred for Haitian visitors following the 2010 earthquake. Second, climate migrants could be granted permanent residency on “humanitarian and compassionate grounds.” Third, refugees situated outside of Canada may apply to immigrate if sponsored by certain private groups.

Greater support and certainty and a specific answer to our moral obligations would be provided if Canada created a new immigration class of “climate migrants” along with targets and programs to ensure Canada absorbs its fair share of those migrants. Those admitted under this new category should be additional to our existing immigration numbers.

Key services should be made accessible to climate migrants. Settlement counseling and health services are both currently available, but already stretched thin. All immigrants and

refugees could benefit from better coordination of those services and access to others including legal, housing and education services. We do not suggest reducing current programs, rather an increase in funding specifically for this new designation.

Additionally, given that most climate migrants will remain in the Global South, Canada should substantially increase its support to developing countries shouldering the burden of climate displacement. Canada owes a “climate debt” to the nations bearing the greatest impacts, including countries that will assist and settle climate migrants. This is not a matter of charity or generosity but one of justice and reparation, which was codified in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties agreement in 2013.

The Canadian government must take seriously its responsibility to help accommodate climate migrants, reassure the public that all levels of government are taking steps to address the impacts on social services involved, and invite society as a whole to the conversation on how Canada can undertake this ethical responsibility.

Stephanie Dickson, Sophie Webber and Tim Takaro are co-authors of Preparing BC for Climate Migration. The report is available at policyalternatives.ca/climatemigration and is part of the Climate Justice Project, a five-year research project led by the CCPA-BC and the University of BC.

BC’s Human Rights Code—which includes to “identify and eliminate persistent patterns of inequality” and to “prevent discrimination.”

Despite its importance, BC’s human rights system has had a volatile history. A commission was first formed in 1973, disbanded in 1984, later reinstated, but disbanded again in 2002. Now even the truncated human rights system we have left appears to be under review by the provincial government, and may be hollowed out even further by funding cuts for advice and assistance to people who take complaints to the Tribunal.

We should not be playing “political football” with the human rights system. Governments need to be committed guarantors of human rights and supporters of strong, stable human rights systems. That’s what BC needs now—adequate resources for advice and legal representation, and a new independent commission appointed by the Legislature that provides British Columbians with real tools to prevent discrimination.

Gwen Brodsky and Shelagh Day are co-authors of Strengthening Human Rights: Why British Columbia Needs a Human Rights Commission, published by the Poverty and Human Rights Centre and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and available at: policyalternatives.ca/bchumanrights.

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