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Pink Crude

Tar sands supporters criticized for using gay rights to mask environmental disaster

by [JESSE GRASS](#)

The Dominion -
<http://www.dominionpaper.ca>

MONTREAL—As the negative environmental and health impacts of the Alberta tar sands grow, defenders of the huge oil extraction project continue to try to green-wash the endeavour by leaning on arguments that make it appear more environmentally friendly than it truly is. Recently, industry backers have added "pink-washing"—brandishing queer rights to promote Alberta's oil as an ethical choice.

This past September, former Conservative government aide Alykhan Velshi launched a media blitz to build on right-wing pundit Ezra Levant's push to re-brand the tar sands as "Ethical Oil." The centrepiece of Velshi's campaign is a series of seven ads, presenting two images each: on the left, a frightening scene from a state in which conflict oil is produced; on the right, a polished image of a happy white Canadian worker or pristine landscape.

"[Canadians] have a choice to make: Ethical Oil from Canada...and other liberal democracies, or Conflict Oil from politically oppressive...regimes," explains Velshi in a blog entry on The Huffington Post.

One of the ads focuses on the treatment of gays in Canada and abroad. This ad also features two images side-by-side. On the left, a scene in which two presumably gay men, faces covered, are in the process of being hanged. The caption reads, "Conflict Oil: Persecution." On the right, an image of two people holding hands, both donning rainbow bracelets accompanied by the caption, "Ethical Oil: Pride."

That Velshi would cite gay pride in his campaign against foreign oil may seem peculiar to some: as a former spokesperson for Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney, Velshi has defended Kenney and his colleagues' actions against LGBTQ communities. Examples from the past five years include [attempting to repeal same-sex marriage](#), [removing LGBT presence from a citizenship guide for new Canadians](#) and [appointing an opponent to same-sex marriage to the Immigration and Refugee Board](#). Over the past year, queer people in Toronto successfully rallied against the Harper government's attempted deportation of Alvaro Orozco, an undocumented filmmaker who received significant media attention in 2007 when [his refugee claim was denied because "he didn't look gay enough"](#). Conservatives also overwhelmingly voted against a federal bill which proponents argue would have helped to protect transgendered citizens against discrimination.

With this in mind, many are suspicious of Velshi's sudden defense of LGBTQ rights.

"The green- and pink-washing PR campaign is another manifestation of the



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racist, neoconservative ideology of people such as Kenney and Velshi, which involves the demonization of Arab and Muslim people and states," says Claire Hurtig, member of Tadamon!, a Montreal-based solidarity collective. "It co-opts queer, female, and Indigenous identities to justify the ruthless exploitation of the world's most unclean and unsustainable source of energy."

"The choice that exists is between ethical oil from Canada and conflict oil from politically oppressive countries," according to EthicalOil.org. But the reality of many queer people in Canada under the Tory regime has been anything but glamorous. While mainstream gay rights lobbyists won the right to marry, those who do not fit into state-sanctioned regulations of assimilationist gay respectability remain out in the cold.

"The reality is that most queer people continue to be subjected to homophobia on a regular basis on both the institutional and interpersonal levels," says Natalie Kouri-Towe of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid, an organization that works in solidarity with Palestinian people, and has been active in resisting pink-washing.

"It hides the way being gay can be just as dangerous in Canada or in any other place around the world, and that Canada is not free from homophobic violence." Increasing government cuts to major social services that support queer people have negatively impacts, says Kouri-Towe, pointing at sex education programs in high schools, HIV/AIDS and health programming, as well as support services for non-status and refugee people.

For Kouri-Towe, Canada's use of pink-washing is hypocritical. "When Canada [is discussed] as a haven for gay refugees," she explains, "what gets erased is the way Canadian immigration policies actually make it difficult for queer people to claim refugee status, and the types of racism and homophobia they face through the refugee claimant process."

New statistics from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs and the National Transgender Discrimination Survey make clear that queer and trans-people of colour continue to disproportionately suffer violent hate crimes and murder. The Ontario-based Trans PULSE Project (transpulseproject.ca) recently revealed that trans- Ontarians attempt suicide at shockingly high rates.

Blood Services Canada still has restrictions regarding which queer bodies can donate blood. People with HIV/AIDS continue to be stigmatized and criminalized. Sterilization is required for trans- people to legally change their gender. High populations of trans- youth are homeless.

While several queer organizations are actively resisting Israel's use of pink-washing in Canada, few responses have moved beyond poignant online commentary to Velshi's campaign as of yet. But for all the media attention the Ethical Oil campaign has garnered, it's not clear how effective it will be.

As Hurtig explains, "Israel's pink-washing campaign has backfired completely. [Since] it has launched, queers have been organizing [across] Canada [to] denounce Israel's pink-washing and have in fact used the 'gay branding' campaign to highlight both Israel's hypocrisy and its apartheid system."

"I am not aware of any extensive successes [of pink-washing] campaigns," she says.

jesse grass is a genderqueer, working class fuck-up.

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If this article interests

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Fri, 2011-10-21 16:55.

If this article interests you, check out the trailer for an upcoming documentary on the subject: Pink Ribbons, Inc: <http://bit.ly/oPsE38>

Greenwashing by tar baby Levant.

Submitted by case biersteeker (not verified) on Fri, 2011-10-21 17:18.

I like your "pink wash" insight into "Ethical Oil" what I love is how Ezra and his man/boy servant former Conservative government aide Alykhan Velshi have made supporting BIG OIL Canada's newest charity.

Anyone with a heart (or is it heartburn?) needs to throw their money now at Ethical Oil Inc. The darkest endeavour ever in burning canadian money and our country's natural wealth held in trust for future generations of Canadians.

Alberta is alight with Ezra's violin for SUNCOR and those siphoning off Canada's buried black gold. The boreal forest of true north can't be stripped off fast enough for the likes of Levant.

Texas burns for our crude.

And Ezra wants us to "gift it to them" lock, stock and by the barrel. His generosity knows no bounds.

This article is so flawed it

Submitted by Trent Steal (not verified) on Thu, 2011-11-17 20:50.

This article is so flawed it might be beyond redemption. Where to even begin? The author wants to critique the ethical oil campaign, specifically the portion of the campaign that juxtaposes Canada's treatment of homosexuals with the treatment of homosexuals in major oil producing countries in the Middle East. Her argument is basically "Since Canada is not perfect in regards to the treatment of its LGBT community Velshi should not suggest that Canada's treatments of homosexuals makes Canada's oil more ethical than oil from Middle East countries"

But the author then completely fails to consider what the state of LGBT people are in those Middle Eastern Countries. Lets consider that for a moment. In Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan and Muslim regions of Nigeria, homosexuality is a crime punishable by death. In Bahrain and Qatar, two other major oil exporters, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by imprisonment and corporal punishment, otherwise known as torture. They will arrest you and either kill you, throw you in jail or whip you for being gay.

In contrast, Canada removed some references to homosexuality from an immigration pamphlet and doesn't let gay men donate blood... If you were gay, where would you rather live?

The author commits a fatal fallacy here. She rejects the legitimacy of comparison because the things to be compared are both flawed. So, you have two people, Harry and Fred. Harry has raped and murdered 150 people, he enjoys this type of activity and is quite unapologetic for it. Fred has generally been law abiding his whole life but he once had a bad day and without much provocation punched someone in the nose once, causing it to bleed.

You need to choose to live beside one of these people. Inevitably, you will compare them when making the decision. Does the fact that neither of them are perfect negate the legitimacy of the conclusion you will draw? Does it negate the legitimacy of comparison as an exercise?

Hardly. If comparisons didn't matter, there would be no problem at all with the oil sands because no energy source available to us is completely environmentally friendly. The whole reason to not like the tar sands in the first place is because, the argument goes, it's worse! Ditto for the human rights records in Canada and the other countries currently exporting oil.