

## = Ethical Oil : The Case for Canada 's Oil Sands =

Ethical Oil : The Case for Canada 's Oil Sands is a book written by Canadian lawyer , talk @-@ show host and lobbyist Ezra Levant , which makes a case for exploiting the Athabasca oil sands and its sister projects in Alberta . Published in 2010 by McClelland & Stewart in Toronto , Canada , the book became a non @-@ fiction best seller and won the National Business Book Award for 2011 .

In the 261 page book , Ezra Levant makes the case that in terms of four criteria ( the environment , conflict , economic and social justice and freedom from oppression ) the Canadian petroleum industry is " heads above other crude producers like Saudi Arabia , Libya , Nigeria and Venezuela " . Highlighting perceived hypocrisy from Western progressive and environmental movements , the author confronts what he sees as unfair and excessive criticism of oil sands , stating that the " oil sands are not perfect , and criticizing them is fair game . But why has criticism of the oil sands been so disproportionately loud compared to criticism of other , larger , more disturbing sources of oil ? " .

Ethical Oil : The Case for Canada 's Oil Sands has popularized the concept of " ethical oil " as a neologism , giving ammunition to the Conservative government of Stephen Harper and providing the inspiration behind Alykhan Velshi 's " EthicalOil " campaign in the United States and Canada .

## = = Background = =

Oil sands in Alberta have a proven reserve of 170 billion barrels ( 2 @.@ 7 × 10<sup>10</sup> m<sup>3</sup> ) , the second largest proven reserves of crude oil in the world . They have become the largest source of oil imported into the United States . With significant economic development and investment into the oil sands , the industry has been enjoying strong support by both the province 's government and the federal government . However , the industry has also been subject to criticism due to the environmental impacts of bitumen exploitation . While the industry has attempted to resolve these issues by developing new techniques , such as in situ extraction , environmental organizations , such as Greenpeace , have launched campaigns to delegitimize the resource , based on its greenhouse gas emission records .

Canada 's primary export market , the United States , has been ambivalent to the environmental questions surrounding the exploitation of the oil sands , with Republicans being generally more supportive of the resource , while president Barack Obama , a Democrat , said that " there are some environmental questions about how destructive they are " .

In an attempt to refocus the debate , Ezra Levant , a conservative political activist , former publisher of the Western Standard and the host of The Source on Sun News Network , examines the ethical aspects of importing oil from countries where political oppression and human rights violations are prevalent , and argues that oil sands production from Canada should be considered the only true ethical alternative to OPEC oil exports . His inspiration for the concept of ' ethical oil ' came from the neologism ' conflict diamond ' , and its antonym ' conflict @-@ free diamond ' . Levant decided to write the book to change some minds , after realizing at the 2009 Ottawa International Writers Festival in Ottawa that he was the " token Alberta whipping boy " during a panel on the oil sands , and ineffective at convincing the audience of the merits of the oil sands . Ezra Levant stated that he wrote the book from a liberal point of view , in order to appeal to those who reject the traditional conservative point of view .

## = = Content = =

The book is divided into 12 chapters , with a prologue , an epilogue , acknowledgments and sources . Chapters deal with various topics , including an overview of the biggest oil producing countries , an account of the controversy over Talisman Energy 's involvement in Sudan , a critical analysis of some ethical funds , a case about inconsistencies in Greenpeace activism , a rebuke of the cancer controversy in Fort Chipewyan , the implication of Middle @-@ Eastern regimes in the anti @-@ Oil sands movement , and a critical analysis of the green jobs arguments .

A recurring theme throughout Ethical Oil : The Case for Canada 's Oil Sands is the perceived

hypocrisy of Western environmental movements . In a chapter entitled " Greenpeace 's Best Fundraiser Ever " , Levant notes the disparities between the harsh criticism of the Canadian energy industry coming from Greenpeace Canada to the seemingly absent criticism of Chinese industrial activity ( such as nuclear power ) from Greenpeace China , arguing that it is much easier to criticize free and liberal democracies than to criticize controlling regimes , but also raising the question of funding , noting that China , the most populated country on Earth , is a very attractive fundraising market for Greenpeace ( which Levant describes as a ' multinational corporation ' ) .

= = Reviews = =

Andrew Brannan reviewed the book in the The Objective Standard , and noted that it provides a " barrage of evidence in moral defense of the oil sands producers " , while Peter Foster , a Financial Post columnist , suggested that Levant " not only exposes the lies and hypocrisy of the media @-@ coddled opponents of the vast resource , but raises the uncomfortable question of what alternatives to the oilsands these moralists prefer " . On the other hand , David Suzuki , dismissing Levant as an " apologist " , argued that " the logic is faulty . Just because a country or society is considered ' ethical ' does not mean everything it produces or exports is ethical " . In the Winnipeg Free Press , John Collins , a retired union negotiator , criticized some of Levant 's sources , noting the presence of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers in the footnotes , while Patrick Brethour , an editor for The Globe and Mail writing in the Literary Review of Canada , contends that the title of Levant 's book " is a considerable misstatement " and that Levant " fails to make the case for ethical oil " .

= = Reactions = =

= = = Support = = =

Ezra Levant 's work gave ammunition to the Conservative government , which adopted the neologism in a similar rhetoric . Stephen Harper , Prime Minister of Canada from 2006 until 2015 , was quoted as saying that it is " critical to develop that resource in a way that 's responsible and environmental and the reality for the United States , which is the biggest consumer of our petroleum products , is that Canada is a very ethical society and a safe source for the United States in comparison to other sources of energy . " Danielle Smith , leader of Alberta 's Wildrose Alliance , echoed Levant 's arguments during a speech at the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce .

In 2011 , Alykhan Velshi , a former staffer for Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney left government service and founded a website to promote the ideas put forward by Ezra Levant in his book . He subsequently returned as the Director of Planning for the Prime Minister 's Office later in 2011 . The website , EthicalOil.org launched a campaign to compare Canada 's ' Ethical Oil ' against OPEC 's ' Conflict Oil ' and features controversial advertisements comparing conditions for women , gays and other minorities in OPEC countries to those in Canada . EthicalOil.org has staged counter @-@ protests in response to opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline project . Velshi left Ethical Oil in the fall of 2011 , and was replaced by law student and former junior Conservative staffer Kathryn Marshall .

= = = Criticism = = =

Among critics of the ' Ethical Oil ' point of view is Andrew Nikiforuk , author of Tar Sands : Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent ( Greystone Books , 2008 , ISBN 1 @-@ 55365 @-@ 407 @-@ 2 ) , who referred to Levant 's reasoning as " a classic Republican ruse " , and dismissed Minister of the Environment Peter Kent 's argument as an " infomercial on bitumen " . In The Guardian , Leo Hickman points out that China is a major investor in the Canadian oil sands , and asks " Shouldn 't this now mean that Canada 's tar sands are labelled as ' Conflict Oil ' , too ? " Another opponent ,

Megan Leslie , the environment critic for the Official Opposition 's New Democratic Party , said the debate surrounding the ethics of Canadian oil sands " misses the point " and maintained that " Canada should be working to move beyond fossil fuels toward renewable sources of energy " .

CBC 's The Current held a debate on the merits of the ethical oil argument in Dec 2011 . Nobel laureate and chair of the Nobel Women 's Initiative Jody Williams , argued that the ethical oil position was disingenuous and suspect of commercial interests rather than genuine concern for women 's rights . She argued that the oil industry with no history of advocating the case of women 's rights , is ill placed to begin the discussion . Ethical Oil spokesperson Kathryn Marshall responded that the ethical nature of oil production needs to be discussed , and she expected human rights activists to be more inclined to promote dialogue . Dr. Andrew Crane a business ethics professor at York University agreed the ethical argument for oil production should be discussed , but also added the narrow focus of the books argument was prioritising human rights over other ethical evaluating factors . Dr. Crane further stated that Canada was not taking a leadership position by trying to improve ethical extraction practices overseas and not just in Canada . He argued a primary ethical indicator is leadership , and companies operating in Canada , and Canadian companies operating abroad were not being held accountable within the ethical oil argument for their overseas practices . Kathryn Marshall responded the focus should be on the pushing these " unethical " countries for regulatory action , rather than the pushing the companies to improve in the absence of a regulatory impetus .