

PHD Defence

Gateway to Crisis: Discourse Coalitions, Extractivist Politics, and the Northern Gateway Conflict by Bob Neubauer

This is a news update from School of Communication, Simon Fraser University

Our dear colleague, Bob Neubauer, will defend his PHD dissertation on Wednesday, May 24, 2017 at Harbor Center Room 2245 (1:00–4:00 pm). Here is the abstract of his dissertation “Gateway to Crisis: Discourse Coalitions, Extractivist Politics, and the Northern Gateway Conflict.”

Abstract

This dissertation explores the political and social conflict over the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline and tanker project, a project designed to diversify bitumen exports by linking the Alberta tar sands to international markets via British Columbia’s North Coast. It examines this conflict in the context of long-term processes of Neoliberal Extractivist development, settler colonial expansion, and transnational economic integration. It also explains how both the project itself and the political response to it emerged from and helped constitute a series of interrelated national and global economic, political, and ecological crises. In doing so, it identifies extractivist development in Canada as an extension of the broader Neoliberal class project at the Canadian and global level.

The analysis combines Gramscian theory, political economy and ecology, field theory, ideology critique, and power structure research to examine how various state, civil society, and industry actors coalesced into pro- and anti-Gateway discourse coalitions loosely united in service of common political goals. It also explores how these coalitions themselves were integrated into and/or emerged from broader coalitions oriented around Neoliberal extractivism and transnational Neoliberal epistemic communities on the one hand and environmental, decolonial and left-wing politics on the other.

The project explores the capacity of discourse coalitions to coordinate inter-field political projects by examining 17 prominent civil society, First Nations, state and industry organizations supporting or opposing Gateway’s approval in the Canadian press between 2011 and 2014. To do so, it engages in an in depth discourse and frame analysis of hundreds of communications materials produced by these actors as well as stories from four Canadian daily newspapers. It examines the way actors from both coalitions generated and circulated opposing narratives combining elements of populism, nationalism, regionalism, and decolonialism to develop alternative concepts of interest

and subjectivity which themselves facilitated differing interpretations of the distribution of ecological and economic risk and benefit. This discourse analysis was supplemented with a social network analysis of the 17 organizations' directorate boards, executives, and key staff to explore how the interpersonal and institutional networks of discourse coalitions allowed for the coordination of political projects and movements across social fields.