

# Sink the ship strategy

**Billions would be better spent on environmental, social needs**

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Canadians should be challenging, not cheerleading, the federal shipbuilding strategy. Instead of putting up signs "Ships Start Here," the public should be raising critical questions.

Last year, with little parliamentary debate and a lack of public consultations, the federal government announced the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy (NSPS) as part of the Canada First Defence Strategy.

Under the NSPS, the federal government plans to spend \$35 billion of our tax dollars over the next 30 years to manufacture over 100 vessels. The shipbuilding procurement is comprised of \$25 billion to build combat vessels, \$8 billion to build non-combat vessels, and \$2 billion for small craft and repair work.

Three shipyards are competing for the contracts: Nova Scotia's Irving Shipbuilding; British Columbia's Seaway Marine and Industrial; and Quebec's Davie Yards. Halifax-based Irving Shipbuilding is vying for the combat vessel contract.

Why do we need combat vessels? What is the security threat assessment that justifies them? Who are our naval enemies? The NSPS does not adequately answer these fundamental questions. Protecting our sovereignty and settling maritime disputes can be more responsibly done through international law and diplomacy than combat. Patrolling our coastline can be done more economically by the Coast Guard and with new unmanned surveillance technology.

Why are warships even a national priority? The federal government is running an annual deficit and increasing the national debt. With these financial constraints and a limited budget, the government should be first investing in national social and environmental programs that meet the most pressing human security needs of Canadians, such as affordable housing, mental health, post-secondary education, childcare, and renewable energy. The federal government could also spend money on caring for sick and homeless veterans and cleaning up the thousands of neglected Department of National Defence contaminated sites across the country.

Politicians and industry supporters often cite the job creation potential of the shipbuilding program. However, a 2007 economic study entitled "The U.S. Employment Effects on Military and Domestic Spending Priorities" by the University of Massachusetts found that more jobs could be created with \$1 billion in government expenditures in health care, education, and construction than in the military.

Moreover, do we really want our next generation workforce building warships and naval combat systems? Imagine instead our young people proudly employed retrofitting homes, installing clean energy technologies, expanding public transportation, upgrading wastewater treatment systems, running organic farms, and restoring polluted rivers.

In March, the Pembina Institute released a report "Reducing Pollution, Creating Jobs" explaining how the federal government could create a national green collar job strategy and grow the economy while protecting the environment and tackling climate change. Canadians could be put to work helping our country transition to a low-carbon future and prepare for the sustainability challenges of the 21st century.

Former U.S. President General Dwight Eisenhower's 1953 critique of military procurement is still relevant today, "Every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are

not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense."

The federal government should sink the ship strategy.

The Halifax Peace Coalition will host a discussion of the NSPS and a free, public screening of the film "Myths for Profit: Canada's Role in Industries of War and Peace" on Sept. 15 at 7:00 p.m. at Just Us Café, 5896 Spring Garden Road, Halifax.

Tamara Lorincz is a member of the Halifax Peace Coalition and the Nova Scotia Voice of Women.