



Capitalism Nature Socialism >

Volume 31, 2020 - [Issue 3](#)

840 | 8 | 6
Views CrossRef citations to date Altmetric

Mining Contradictions and Struggles

Producing Alberta's Tar Sands: Oil, Ideas, Rents, and New Enclosures

Eliot Tretter

Pages 94-113 | Received 13 Mar 2018, Accepted 26 Apr 2019, Published online: 12 Jun 2019

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2019.1625559>

Check for updates

Sample our
Politics & International
Relations Journals
>> [Sign in here](#) to start your access
to the latest two volumes for 14 days

Full Article

Figures & data

References

Citations

Metrics

Reprints & Permissions

Read this article

Share

ABSTRACT

The production and transfer of knowledge are essential for producing oil. In this paper, I examine the nexus between a subnational quasi-state publicly funded hydrocarbon research program and a novel knowledge-production regime and explore how this relationship resulted in the production of oil from Alberta's oilsands. In particular, the paper highlights the significance of the Alberta Oilsands Technology and Research Authority (AOSTRA), a quasi-public institution credited with financing research, which among other finding, made the in-situ oilsands' mining method steam-assisted gravity drainage (SAGD) commercially viable. SAGD proved essential in enlarging the Province's oil reserves, but this paper focuses on AOSTRA's novel intellectual property regime. Under that regime the intellectual property AOSTRA (the Provincial government) held the licensing rights to the research it funded and commanded its future revenues. In contrast to accounts of the development of the current mode of

entrepreneurial knowledge production that emphasizes the new knowledge-enclosures of the biosphere, I suggest this was a novel system of knowledge-enclosure of the "necrosphere." I stress how this knowledge-production-transfer regime only emerged in Alberta because of the specific material characteristics of bitumen and the Provincial government's tripartite role as resource rentier, funder of the research, and owner of the resource.

KEYWORDS:

Tar sands (oilsands)

knowledge rents

state entrepreneurialism

intellectual property regimes

AOSTRA

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sean Carlton, Francis Cody, Dean Curran, Maarten de Kadst, Mazen Labban, William Max Nelson, Darren Sjogren, Kevin Taft, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank Josh Rosenblatt and Adi Forkasiewicz for copyediting earlier drafts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Related research

People also read

Recommended articles

Cited by
8

Information for

Authors

R&D professionals

Editors

Librarians

Societies

Opportunities

Reprints and e-prints

Advertising solutions

Accelerated publication

Corporate access solutions

Open access

Overview

Open journals

Open Select

Dove Medical Press

F1000Research

Help and information

Help and contact

Newsroom

All journals

Books

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources
by email

 Sign me up

  

  

Copyright © 2026 Informa UK Limited Privacy policy Cookies Terms & conditions

Accessibility



Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG