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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DEFEAT OF “PUBLIC INTEREST” AMENDMENT REVEALS BILL 19
FUNDAMENTALLY ANTI-DEMOCRATIC**

Jan Slomp, Alberta Coordinator of the National Farmers Union (NFU), says the Alberta government claims Bill 19 does not undermine the public interest and the rights of rural landowners. However, the refusal of the government to adopt the amendment reveals the deep flaws inherent in Bill 19. The legislation, he said, is aimed at facilitating private projects, and is designed to force farmers and landowners to surrender their rights.

“The government had the chance to clean up the language of the bill and clarify its intention, but they refused to do so,” stated Slomp. “It is apparent the legislation is actually designed to push through projects that are clearly not in the public interest, but are in the interests of private corporations.”

On April 21, Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Act, passed second reading in the Alberta Legislature. Unfortunately, an amendment to Bill 19 which would have clarified its intent to respect the public interest was rejected by Conservative government MLAs.

The amendment, put forward by the NDP and supported by the Liberals in the Legislature, proposed that the Bill’s provisions would apply only to projects “in the public interest.” In its present form, Bill 19 specifically grants the Minister the power to approve any kind of use once the government takes control of a person’s property.

By rejecting this amendment, the new law will not contain any reference to “public interest”, but allows unprecedented discretion for the Minister to approve any project, for any purpose. At the same time, public participation in the approval process is eliminated.

Bill 19 was introduced into the Alberta Legislature on March 2 for First Reading. It was debated during Second Reading debates on March 16 and 17, April 14, April 16 and April 21. A series of public meetings across Alberta have resulted in considerable public opposition to Bill 19 from rural landowners who will face restrictions on their right to legal recourse in cases where the government decides to use their land for projects.

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