

CAN CANDU DO IT AGAIN?

LRC

Literary Review of Canada

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The Kyoto Debate Continues

Two more writers weigh in on Canada's climate change conundrum, and Mark Jaccard responds.

RICHARD GILBERT AND LAUREL MACDOWELL AND MARK JACCARD

Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning George Monbiot

Doubleday

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George Monbiot's *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning* could be an upsetting book because it tells what appear to be uncomfortable truths about the way we live. More upsetting for Canadians may be the exercise in publishing colonialism that passes for the book's Canadian edition.

Heat is about why we need to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 90 percent, and how we might do it. The original book, published in the United Kingdom in September, has just one mention of Canada, and it was incorrect. The Canadian edition, published in October, is the UK version dressed up with a new foreword, endorsements from several Canadian environmental notables (which they may want to reconsider) and one of Edward Burzynsky's stunning photos on the cover.

The Canadian foreword is a lecture from the mother country, full of the ignorance that used to make Canadians squirm. Monbiot asks, "Do so many of you [Canadians] really need air conditioning at 50° of latitude?" He has not figured out that 85 percent of us live south of the 50th parallel, many south of the 45th parallel, and that Toronto is at the same latitude as Marseille, France (1,230 kilometres south of London, England).

The Canadian edition of *Heat's* purpose is "to equip you [Canadians] with the political tools you need ... to turn one of the most polluting nations on the Earth into a place which commands the rest of the world's respect."

Monbiot began by noting how in May 2005 he thought the climate change problem could be solved with an 80 percent cut in greenhouse gases and was then convinced that a 90 percent cut is required. Why he thought 80 percent was necessary is unclear; the given source—as often in the book—does not provide the promised information.

Cuts of 90 percent are required, Monbiot now claims, to stop the average global temperature rising by more than 1.4°C, the threshold of "cata-

strophic warming" where warming causes more warming through positive feedback. The argument for 90 percent reductions looks passably good in the text, but falls apart when those of his sources that can be examined are scrutinized for the details. The diligent reader could well be left with the impression that the proposals for 90 percent reductions are alarmist rather than based on science.

Monbiot provides several prescriptions for achieving 90 percent reductions in greenhouse gases. His main solution for transportation is extensive use of buses running on expressways between terminals at expressway junctions. He bases this solution on a statement made by a British minister that a person travelling from London to Manchester by bus is responsible for emission of 88 percent less carbon dioxide than a person travelling by car. What UK government data actually show is that *at typical occupancies* bus travel is responsible for only 15 percent less carbon dioxide than car travel for a given journey. To do as well as Monbiot assumed, the car would have only one person in it, not the UK average of 1.6, and the 40-seat bus would have 54 passengers rather than the UK average of 12.

Buses on expressways could mostly replace only car journeys by expressway, which in the UK comprise about a fifth of car travel, as in Canada. Monbiot has relatively little to say about the remaining 80 percent of car trips. He damns bio-fuel production as being more environmentally damaging than open-cast coal mining, equivocates on hydrogen and concludes by arguing for a bundle of measures that he claims—with almost no justification—"could cut emissions by more than 90 percent across the journeys that [the expressway bus] system could not replace."

Again, Monbiot's stream of opinions seems calculated more to shock than to inform. At first glance, many of the opinions seem well justified by data, but closer analysis too often reveals that the support is spurious, selective or nonexistent.

North Americans and Europeans do need alerting to the likelihood that business as usual cannot continue, whether because the climate is changing or because petroleum fuels are becoming relatively scarce, or both. But *Heat* raises the question, not intentionally, of whether provocative overstatement is a valid tool. Monbiot writes well about the morality of denying climate change, but not at all about the ethics of exaggeration.

If you can ignore the insulting aspects of the Canadian version, and enjoy the narrow focus on the UK, you might find much to like in *Heat*.

Monbiot has an easy, flowing style and an eye for the far-fetched. His arguments are often thought-provoking, particularly on intercontinental travel. But readers should be warned: much of what is presented as fact or analysis in *Heat* is hot air.

If Monbiot had written a little about what has been happening in Canada concerning greenhouse gases he might well have touched on the ground covered by Mark Jaccard in "Canada's Kyoto Delusion" in the January/February 2007 issue of the *LRC*. Jaccard describes the sorry tale of an international commitment by our government that was abrogated by incompetence or design. Jaccard writes that "Canada ... will stand out as the worst offender." (He may have overlooked the even more egregious performance of Spain, which is on a trajectory to exceed its Kyoto commitment by 50 percent. Canada is set to exceed its commitment by "only" 49 percent.)

Jaccard distinguishes between the "drivers" of Canada's growth in greenhouse gases—population growth, economic expansion and burgeoning resource industries being the principal ones—and the Canadian government's "actions" in this regard, which have been inconsequential. His main proposals for action have for years been taxes on greenhouse gases or regulations to limit them, each of which has been introduced elsewhere with some effect.

But there are two challenges that Jaccard overlooked. One is that at least half of the net growth in greenhouse gases from our oil and gas industries since 1990 has been incurred to provide exports to the United States. The North American Free Trade Agreement requires us to maintain these exports unless we reduce our own consumption. Do we a) breach or leave NAFTA, b) insist that these greenhouse gases are not ours, c) "let the Eastern bastards freeze in the dark" (a popular bumper sticker in early 1980s Alberta), or d) do nothing?

The second challenge is the disproportionate contribution of trucking to Canada's growth in greenhouse gases, in part another consequence of NAFTA. Heavy trucks contributed a quarter of transport's greenhouse gases in 1990 but half the growth between 1990 and 2004. Do we a) push freight on to rail by taxes or regulations, b) buy more local products, c) buy less overall, or d) do nothing?

Canadian discourse on climate change will become more intense during 2007 if the memory of the warmest December lingers and a federal election is fought on environmental issues. Jaccard will likely make a useful contribution. *Heat* will not.

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Response to Monbiot and Jaccard

To the Editor:

I was interested in your timely article in the January/February 2007 issue during this non-winter by Mark Jaccard on "Canada's Kyoto Delusion." It explains why instinctively the Canadian public has become so anxious about the government's inaction on climate change. It must have been very frustrating to do research and reports for the government and have them adopt only advertising campaigns as opposed to effective actions to cut carbon emissions.

There is one area in which I disagree with Jaccard and indeed also with George Monbiot, author of *Heat: How to Stop the Planet From Burning*. Governments seem to be interested in two ideas when they express any interest in climate change. One is alternative biofuels, such as ethanol, which are a good idea up to a point, but their production takes up growing space that might otherwise be used for growing food. So that option is limited. Policy makers also are very interested in the technology that allows carbon dioxide to be captured and buried in underground storage (carbon dioxide pipelines), as Jaccard explains. Some of the gas can be used to push out more hard-to-reach oil, but the rest is to remain underground out of harm's way. I find the optimism behind this idea very misplaced. It seems unlikely that any solution to capture the gas would make it impossible for carbon dioxide to leak out at some point in some place, and if it did leak it would smother many people. The attitude is not unlike that of the nuclear industry: that all we need to do with nuclear waste is bury it, even though that is recognized globally as a non-solution to a problem that has not been solved. The idea is to bury everything we cannot deal with, but it only pollutes the planet further.

The approach is a high-tech "we can invent our way out of the problem of global warming." It reflects a refusal to examine our way of living, our lifestyles, our attitudes and our ethics. North Americans have become so wealthy, overweight, sedentary and self-indulgent since the end of World War Two—a state we call modern—that we have forgotten that we rely on the natural world to live. In our sped-up, hyperactive, status-ridden society we see no reason to think about the impact we are having on the planet. Would it really be such a hardship to exchange the gas-guzzling SUV that we use to drive to the grocery store for a hybrid or very small car? Is it really asking too much for people in cities to hop on the subway to get to work or live close enough to work to walk? Is it outlandish to urge people to buy products such as eggs and garlic from a local market rather than to purchase similar items that have been shipped in from the other side of the world and trucked in to the supermarket, using unbelievable amounts of energy? Dealing with climate change is going to be a tough sell, because it is essentially a "conservative" idea that we need to simplify our lives and slow down our pace.

I also object to an approach in many of the "realistic" books and articles about the admittedly complex issue of climate change whereby authors discuss wind and solar power less than more problematic options such as hydrogen and carbon capture. And yet the wind blows somewhere all the time and the sun shines somewhere all the time, and neither gives off carbon or waste that needs a foolproof disposal system. The approach of the pundits and experts is to tinker

with existing industries rather than working to create new industries. The Ontario government, for example, has given relatively little money to start up wind farms, has not upgraded the grid so that all wind power produced can be utilized, and yet has spent millions on the nuclear industry.

As Monbiot discusses in *Heat*, large wind farms can be built offshore (or, in the case of Canada, in out-of-the-way places) and the energy can be transferred long distances to a national or a provincial grid through high-voltage direct current cables. An increase in this non-carbon source of energy would reduce the use of energy sources that emit carbon. Such cables can also be used for solar power. In addition, solar power, using cells or panels, can be used locally by households or small communities for specific tasks such as heating water. European countries are far ahead of North America in using solar power. Why are we not putting money into creating new energy-producing businesses to assist concerned consumers? Not only have the Canadian policy makers done nothing, but they have also not considered all of the options seriously.

I hope that public and political discussion about the issue of global warming reverses the do-nothing trend that Jaccard documented, and I appreciate the Sierra Club of Canada's website, which tells citizens what they can do right now to contribute to reducing carbon emissions in our environment.

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Mark Jaccard Replies

The comments of Richard Gilbert and Laurel MacDowell prompt me to point out that my article on "Canada's Kyoto Delusion" was about policy failure: explaining the regulatory and financial policies that are essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contrasting these with our historically ineffective voluntarism and subsidy approach. My hope is that the policy debate will shift in Canada so that we do not repeat the disasters of the past, and I am encouraged by what I hear more recently from all four major federal political parties.

Policy discussions are challenging and so people avoid them. It is easier to argue that Canadians should use less energy by radically changing their lifestyles (MacDowell) while avoiding the challenge of designing policies that would actually make this happen. In *Sustainable Fossil Fuels: The Unusual Suspect in the Quest for Clean and Enduring Energy*, my recent book with Cambridge University Press, I detail the energy efficiency policy evidence of the last 20 years (and there is a lot) that has shifted my thinking about the magnitude of the policy challenge when it comes to dramatic reductions of energy use. Like it or not, the evidence is compelling that it will be much easier from a policy perspective to get Canadians to switch to cleaner forms of energy than to get them to cut their energy use by, say, 30 percent. (Nonetheless, I have argued—and always will—for strong energy efficiency regulations, and the greenhouse gas charges that I advocate will encourage efficiency.) I also explain that if we are serious about substantial greenhouse gas reductions, our policies must eventually shift our fossil fuel industry from producing oil and refined petroleum products to producing hydro-

gen, electricity, heat and extremely low carbon fuels, whether for domestic use or export. I agree with Gilbert that this will not be easy, but in the book I provide evidence of what this might cost, according to the best independent sources we have, and I explain what policies (such as the carbon management standard and the vehicle emission standard) are required. It will not be easy, but we have to require lower emissions if we want a low emission world.

I hope we will have the honesty and courage to design, debate and then implement the real policies that are necessary for profound technological change over the long term, as difficult as these may be. I also hope we will push ourselves to take an unbiased look at the extensive evidence that challenges cozy assumptions about the actions people are likely to take when faced with these policies.

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