

Canada: a House Divided Against Itself

Canada as well as each of the provinces, is pursuing a very contradictory approach to climate change and global warming. Canada is a house divided against itself.

On the one hand many new regulations and policies aim to forcefully reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions and set meaningful targets. The Paris Climate Agreement has been ratified and endorsed. It commits every province to reduce its GHG emissions 15% by 2020, 37% by 2030 and 80% by 2050. To implement this agreement the Canadian government is planning to impose a general carbon tax or an equivalent cap-and-trade program on each province in order to achieve its GHG reduction targets in the coming decades. Ontario, for its part has presented its own comprehensive five year plan, called the *Ontario's Five Year Climate Change Action Plan, 2016-2020* as well as its cap-and-trade program. The five year plan, which is based on *Ontario's Climate Change Strategy* of 2015, covers a broad range of carbon reduction measures for transportation, buildings and homes, land-use planning, industry and business, agriculture, forests and lands, government, research and development, and collaboration with indigenous communities. The plan includes provisions for funding and timetables for each area. It is an ambitious and promising program even though it reads like a fairy tale at times. Nevertheless, it is an encouraging initiative.

On the other hand, in contrast to these excellent plans, Canada and the provinces are committed to long-range policies and actions that contradict and severely undermine these attempts to reduce GHG emissions. Based on present practices and commitments, many researchers have concluded that Canada as a whole will continue to *increase*, instead of decrease, its GHG emissions for decades to come. These are precisely the two or three decades most scientists believe are crucial to slow down the total accumulation of GHG in the atmosphere and keep global warming below an average increase of 2 degrees Celsius. Limiting the accumulation of the total amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere during the next two decades is the most urgent issue, not what we do 40 or 50 years from now. Without drastic action the goal of an increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius will be out of reach within the next few years. See the *Climate Action Tracker (November 2, 2016)* and other studies for a careful analysis.

The *two* most crucial sets of economic policies that contradict Canada's attempts to reduce global warming are its on-going commitment to *expand the extraction and export of fossil fuels including pipe lines and expanded harbour facilities* and to *expand the export of 'raw' agricultural products*. Both have a large carbon footprint and a high cost to global communities creating more poverty, hunger and dispossession.

Without a clear plan to phase out fossil fuel extraction and subsidies during the next two or three decades and a moratorium on new licenses and explorations, Canada will continue to increase its GHG emissions. A new report by Oil Change International (2016), *The Sky is the Limit; why the Paris climate goals require a managed decline of fossil fuel production*, once more highlights this requirement. Carbon emissions must be limited and gradually reduced at the source and not just at the smokestack and tailpipe. It is telling that the Ontario's Action Plan does not make any explicit mention of the mining industry. There are many carefully worked out alternatives to an export orientated economy and transitioning to a green and socially just economy. Gordon Laxer, for example, in a *CCPA Monitor* article (Nov./Dec., 2015), "Alberta: Fossil-Fuel belt or green powerhouse?", gives a careful and positive account of how even Alberta can phase out its oil sands projects and transition to a low carbon economy.

Likewise, without a strong commitment to phase out industrial agriculture over the next decades, which is an inseparable part of the total food industry, Canada will not be able to meet its GHG reduction targets. A small number of large chemical, seed, processing and food companies control Canadian industrial agriculture. Without setting strong limits and phasing out the agri-food industry, with its chemical pollution, high fossil fuel use, loss of medium and small family farms, increase in processed food and health costs, loss of food sovereignty, Canada will not be able to fulfill its commitments. The well-written moving account by Ingeborg Boyens' *Another Season's Promise; Hope and Despair in Canada's Farm Country* (2001) puts a human face to what is happening to farming and farmers in Canada as a result of the domination and take-over by industrial agriculture and speculative markets.

There are other policies that limit Canada's efforts to battle climate change, like trade agreements (CETA, and others) that lock-in Canada to high carbon emissions for decades to come. However, these two, the fossil fuel industry and industrial agriculture, are sufficient to illustrate our point. Without a drastic *change in direction* there is little hope that we will limit global warming and climate change with all its devastating consequences.

Canada is deeply committed to reduce the effects of global warming primarily by means of *market and technical solutions*. There is a strong faith among corporate and political leaders that we can solve the rise in GHG emissions by means of better and more efficient business and technical solutions. Most believe that we do not have to transition from a one-dimensional, free market ideology, with its unlimited economic growth, consumerism and materialistic values, to an alternative 'economy of enough' that serves all of life. To limit global warming, promote social justice for all, reduce poverty and hunger, heal the land and the oceans, we need a radical change in economic direction and a fundamental change of values. Many religious leaders, including Pope Francis, the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, indigenous people and First Nations everywhere, the majority of scientists and tens of thousands alternative groups are in the forefront of this call for a radical change and recapturing our basic human values of fairness, equality and care of each other. To counter climate change and global warming we need to transition to a multidimensional, ecologically sustainable, socially just and sharing society. It is the opposite of a free market, forever expanding, for profit only, consumer society that is destroying the earth.

To make this issue of the rise in global warming even more urgent is that the proposed measures of putting a price on carbon emissions will not be effective. Many *forms* of a carbon tax and/or cap-and-trade schemes will have very little effect on reducing global warming during the next few decades. Corporations and businesses are strongly opposed to any measures that will affect their profitability or curtail their operations and expansion. They are fundamentally committed to the free market and unlimited growth. B.C.'s carbon tax is a good example of the failure of certain kinds of carbon tax as the report by Food & Water Watch, (2016), *The British Columbia Carbon Tax; A Failed Experiment in Market-Based Solutions to Climate Change* illustrates, as well as other studies. Ontario's cap-and-trade approach, as it presently stands will fair no better. There are no examples of where cap-and-trade schemes have been successful in reducing GHG emissions. Instead there are many studies of its failure and subversion in Europe, Russia, California and Quebec. Business will not allow meaningful carbon taxes and cap-and-trade policies that have a high enough price to start with and significant yearly increases thereafter.

Finally, to complete this dark picture, Ontario's reliance on nuclear energy is highly questionable. In view of many careful evaluations, nuclear power plants and uranium mines need to be phased out as well

during the coming decades instead of expanded. Nuclear generated power does not provide clean and low cost electricity for the rate payers in spite of the propaganda. It is only by isolating a small segment of the actual production of nuclear generated electricity that such claims can be made and even then the risks are not acceptable. The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission is biased in favor of the nuclear industry and for that reason cannot function as a true watchdog for our common safety. Nuclear power plants represent 'a failure of the market', because the nuclear industry including uranium mining can only survive by very extensive subsidies from the government, that is, by means of public funds. There are many studies and reports to validate these points.

The extensive use and continual development of hydro power in Ontario needs to be re-considered as well in view of the ecological effect of dams and reservoirs on the flow of hundreds of rivers and their GHG emissions, especially methane. New studies are highlighting these effects even for our northern latitudes. Such an ecological review may necessitate decommissioning some/many dams and restoring the flow of rivers and river beds. Many call for a moratorium on developing new dams, like the C- Dam in B.C. or Muskrat Falls dam in Labrador, which looks like an 11 billion dollar 'boondoggle' as the CBC put it. One only need to read Ellen Wohl's, *A World of Rivers; Environmental Change on Ten of the World's Great Rivers* (2011) to become aware what happens to rivers when they are dammed. See also the many articles by *Ontario Rivers Alliance* and *International Rivers*.

In the end it is the corporate and business leaders that decide the nature and extent of reduction in GHG emissions and not the government, as they did in Paris and presently at Marrakesh in Morocco. The government is very limited in what it can do as prime minister Trudeau is finding out, like Obama and Nelson Mandela before him. From a larger perspective it would be more accurate to say that governments generally share the same free market ideology as corporate leaders, except that they have the difficult task of appeasing and controlling large groups of citizens that want a different world, guided by a very different vision of life and set of values.

Thus, without a radical change in direction, business-as-usual will prevail in spite of significant energy saving measures. By all calculations Canada and Ontario, as well as the other provinces, will not meet their emissions targets in 2020 (15%), 2030 (37%) or 2050 (80%). Governments and industry are unable and unwilling to bring about more radical changes that will give us and our children half a chance to keep global warming below 2 degree Celsius. It is against this dark background that we need to develop an ecologically and socially just electrical system. It will be up to us as small communities and organizations, like *Protect Mono*, *NDACT*, *CORE*, *MC²* and thousands of others in Ontario alone, to bring about a different way of living. Today's topic challenges us as a community, home owners and renters to work toward a low or carbon neutral approach, as many have already begun to do. Finding ways to conserve on energy and developing renewable energy systems will help us to become a transition community along with many other towns near us and across our province and Canada.

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