

Review of *Stormy Weather: 101 Solutions to Global Climate Change*

By Guy Dauncey, with Patrick Mazza (New Society Publishers, 2001)

‘Well, what would you do then?’ is the question most commonly thrown back at critics of the dominant social order. Often, such questioning is dishonest, actually a smokescreen to steer debate away from the problems themselves and the forces causing them. Sometimes, such questioners pretend to accept the argument that things are going wrong when, in reality, they simply do not agree and, even if they did, they have no intention of doing anything about it. Yet there are many more people, willing to recognise that society urgently needs to change direction but who also need persuading that there is a practicable alternative to the status quo.

Picturing those alternatives has been a perennial problem for all radical groups. Two very different but equally unrealistic ways present themselves. One is the ‘maximum’ programme, an uncompromising slate of demands for total transformation, right here and now. It is unrealistic since it will not attract sufficient support. History is full of tiny revolutionary grouplets, doomed to political impotence, no matter how eloquent or detailed their blueprints for a brave new world.

The other is the ‘minimum’ programme, most often associated with organisations like Social Democratic and Labour parties. In the name of realism, they produce a modest shopping list, one which will rally large numbers of supporters across the political spectrum but not drive the powers-that-be to block the proposed reforms to the system. Yet it too is unrealistic. The limited changes proposed won’t really solve the problems society faces.

In any case, society’s rulers have shown time and again that, as long as they retain power, they will resist even modest reforms or sabotage ones they cannot stop. A common device to undermine a reforming government is a staged ‘run’ on a country’s currency or the threat to relocate businesses out of the country. Then there is the assassination of radical leaders and military coups such as toppled the Allende regime in Chile back in the 70s. Indeed, the USA has been the world’s worst ‘rogue state’, mounting an unmatched number of covert and overt economic and military assaults against perceived threats to the interests of the country ruling élites, not least those of big business, as critics such as Noam Chomsky have documented in great detail.

The problems of programme formulation already divide the anti-globalisation movement, on top of arguments over the appropriateness of aggressive direct action and other tactical issues. Some elements believe that the World Trade Organisation can be made more accountable and responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens while GATT can be reframed to serve long-term sustainability. Others believe that they should be chucked straight into the rubbish bin of history along with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other such agents of global destruction.

Climate crisis

As the title of the new book by Guy Dauncey and Patrick Mazza, *Stormy Weather*, suggests, the biggest single problem in the world today is adverse climatic change. Even if global warming were to turn out to be the figment of a few overheated imaginations, it still should be treated as priority number one since contributory causes such as the burning of fossil fuels or the clear-cutting of the world forests cause a multiplicity of other serious dangers. Conversely, answers to global warming are also solution multipliers, solving many other problems at the same time.

The subtitle of the book, *101 Solutions to Global Climate Change*, underlines its focus on what could and should be done. Furthermore, it focuses on who should be doing these things, with the solutions grouped in terms of levels of action, from the individual citizen and local community groups through various business sectors to national governments and intergovernmental bodies. It also distinguishes action appropriate to ‘advanced’ industrial countries from those more suitable to the ‘developing world’.

Given that the book has sections such as “15 Solutions For Energy Companies” and “5 Solutions for Auto Companies”, it would seem natural to categorise it as a reformist tract. Yet it is certainly not of the ilk of *The Green Consumer Guide* (with its revealing subtitle of *From Shampoo to*

Champagne) or *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save The Earth*, with their fatuous message that we only have to make minor changes to our lifestyles. Many measures proposed in *Stormy Weather* will not be easy and will make big differences to the way we live. It is also better than programmes like *Caring for the Earth* (IUCN, UNEP and WWF) with their vague talk of identifying, monitoring, coordinating, and indeed anything other than proposing hard and specific measures. Nor does the book play down the seriousness of the rocky road ahead, unlike, say Easterbrook's *A Moment on the Earth: The Coming Age of Environmental Optimism*, with its reassuring message that things are on the mend. Indeed the lengthy introduction (some 20% of the book) is a first class exposition of the nature, causes, and likely consequences of global warming. Furthermore, a chapter called the 'Carbon Barons' spotlights various forces fuelling the crisis as well as trying to block remedial action, including the 'carbon minstrels' ('scientists' who deny that there is really anything to worry about, most singing from the song sheet of the energy corporations that fund them) and the 'carbon politicians' who - at best - fiddle while the Earth burns.

Treasure Chest

Dauncey and Mazza also deserve full marks for the rich variety of ideas they bring together in the 'Solutions' sections. There are also many interesting and persuasive case studies, plus a wealth of guidance about further sources of information. Many Green and 'Alternative List' Parties could learn from this book. Study of their manifestos is a depressing affair. Most are little better than a dog's dinner, a mishmash of grievance lists, with no sense of priority nor internal logic. They might do better by scrapping what they've got and starting again, adapting and filling out the programme provided in this book.

Apart from their more direct value, some of the material will be ideal ammunition for asking politicians, business executives, university principals and the like, why they aren't doing what their more enlightened colleagues are doing elsewhere. The lie is given to the classic apology for the status quo, namely that "there is no alternative". The case studies also undermine the wilder exaggerations of the anti-globalisation which make it look as if the hands of national and local governments are totally tied up. Yet *Stormy Weather* shows that the track record of different administrations varies widely and that, even within the straightjacket of the global economy, so much more could still be done by governmental bodies, community groups and individual citizens. To some extent, both in terms of content and especially the positive tone, the book builds on work Dauncey in particular has been doing for years, the public face of which is his newsletter, *Econews*, now on-line, published from his base in Victoria, Canada. Some of the ideas were also featured in his book *After the Crash* which again featured his 'be-positive-but-don't-pull-punches' approach. Mention must be made as well of the very accessible layout design and style of writing in *Stormy Weather*.

Inevitably, the structure adopted creates its own problems. One is of balance. Chapter 83, "Build Ecological Cities", a rather big issue, has two pages. But so too does Chapter 16, "Organise a Car-Free Sunday", a doubtless a worthy activity but not quite in the same league. Another is that certain policy ideas such as the Tobin tax (a charge on global financial transactions to discourage today's destructive speculation) are buried under a heading that might not be obvious to those new to the arguments. Furthermore, it is not possible to give some sense of timescale and prioritisation (the Swedish Green Party provided one example of a rolling programme).

In some cases, the suggestions beg further clarification or additional measures. This is the case with forestry where the Forest Stewardship Council and its programme of certification is advocated. This reviewer's limited knowledge of the subject from books like Drengson and Taylor's *Ecoforestry* suggests that a more thorough transformation of both forestry practices and especially land ownership may be necessary.

As with many 'alternative' tomes, there is also an exaggerated faith in the potential of energy sources such as wind power and the so-called solar-hydrogen economy. Conversely their drawbacks and side-effects are somewhat downplayed. Here the assessment of more sober analysts like the Australian ecological writer Ted Trainer seem a better guide. Generally, across fields such as energy production, agriculture, forestry and water supply, the sustainable cake will cater for much smaller demands than assumed by Dauncey and Mazza. As those great ecological thinkers, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards once observed, "you can't always get what

you want” ...and, as they might have added, “what you’ll sustainably get is much less than you expect”.

Missing Numbers

Of course the level of demand ultimately depends on the one thing that Dauncey and Mazza studiously ignore: population growth. The biggest single cause of deforestation, for example, is people pressure and resultant clearance of forest for cultivation, animal grazing, and firewood. There is not one problem discussed in this book that is not worsened by the on-going surge in human numbers. Conversely most, if not all of the solutions identified would be easier to implement if there were fewer people.

Yet neither ‘population’ nor ‘overpopulation’ even make the index. Single sentence mentions are made in the chapters on India and China since the scale of human numbers in those lands can scarcely be ignored. That is all. It is as if human numbers do not count. Certainly they are not the only factor in the equation of global ruination but they are the most significant.

In terms of what they call “individual solutions”, the biggest single contribution couples could make to the resolution of the global crisis is to parent fewer offspring. In terms of what they call “solutions for states and provinces”, governments must promote smaller family sizes by education and assorted incentives as well as frame all their policies, including immigration, within local and regional carrying capacity. Though the exploding populations in what used to be called the “Third World” represent the longer term nightmare, the problem is most urgent in what Paul Ehrlich once rightly called the most overpopulated country in the world, the USA and its rich cousins. (See, for example, Hall, C.A.S., et al. *The Environmental Consequences of Having a Baby in the US. Wild Earth*, 5(2), Summer, 1995: 78-87).

Given that their solution 1 is “Grasp the Big Picture” and solution 101: ‘Now Think’, it seems that Dauncey and Mazza need to do some big rethinking. Indeed, it is amazing how many people confuse a slowing down in population growth rates with a stabilisation and indeed fall in absolute human numbers. Britain’s population has, in the words of *The Observer* newspaper, recently “soared past 60 million”, with an annual increase of some 250,000, most of it is the SE of England. Immigration, internal population movement and increasing life expectancy all play a part, as do the spread of ‘second’ families (couples divorcing, remarrying and having yet more children) and a penchant for a third child later in life (a trend spotted by manufacturers of “people carriers” but ignored by most environmentalists). Whatever the reason, the impact can only make matters worse.

Take London’s transport crisis. No matter what ‘solutions’ are adopted about the financing of the Tube system and other current controversies, the fact that her population is set to grow 9.4% by 2021 (producing numbers bigger than those of Ireland, Latvia and Estonia combined), will frustrate whatever measures are adopted. In the USA, the fastest growing cities and towns are in some of the driest areas. That too will make the growing water crisis there worse.

Of course, the issue of migration is terribly difficult to raise without attracting accusations of ecofascism and the like. Similarly it is hard to imagine what socially acceptable means can tackle the issue of lengthening lifespans, though the sight of so many old people living in pain and in isolation, often not wanting to be kept alive, demands compassionate consideration. Such problems will not go away by wishful thinking that they do not exist.

Technofixation

At times, Dauncey and Mazza display an excessive taste for ‘technofixes’. This is most evident in the sections on transportation where the concept of the ‘green car’ lurks beneath the bonnet. Certainly there are many good ideas in these pages about things that could be done to ameliorate many of the problems caused by the infernal combustion engine. Having just returned from Colorado and seen the damage being done to local ecosystem by the explosive growth in the use of all terrain vehicles, it seems to this reviewer that the harm done by private *and* public motor transport is far greater than just the (very real) problem of exhaust emissions.

Elsewhere the book seems to underestimate the global warming costs and other negative environmental impacts of computers. Indeed the manufacture, use and disposal of the technology at the heart of the much hyped ‘information society’ all contain big environmental and indeed cultural downsides, only some of which are hinted at by Dauncey and Mazza. Readers will have

to turn to critics such as Clifford Stoll, David Shenk and especially Chet Bowers for a fuller picture.

Dauncey and Mazza also place much faith in the capacity of (transformed) global institutions to facilitate the change to a more sustainable society. They may be right. But the record of organisations like IUCN and especially UNEP suggests that, even with due reforms, such bodies, by virtue of their remoteness from everyday life, are likely to become hopelessly bureaucratic and out-of-touch. This also seems to have happened in certain aid agencies. Recurrent reports about luxury living amongst their upper echelons and other scandals might make a bit more scepticism about 'global answers' in order. Furthermore, talk later in the book about a 'global village parliament' seems somewhat far-fetched on logistical grounds alone.

Taming Capitalism?

The really 'reformist' strand to this book, however, lies in chapter 40, called "Embrace Natural Capitalism". There is no such creature, it has never existed nor will it ever do. Readers are more likely to see pigs flying past their bedroom windows. The case has been long established. It was outlined in the 60s by people like K. W. Kapp and his *Social Costs of Business Enterprise* and Barry Commoner in his *The Closing Circle*. More recently Saral Sarkar's *Eco-Capitalism or Eco-Socialism* demolished the idea that capitalism can be made to go green.

Certainly Dauncey and Mazza are right to see one set of solutions being the withdrawal of public subsidies for practices that aggravate global warming. Yet, even with perfect competition and a perfectly level playing field in the market place, the problems would return. The reason lies not just in private profiteering but in the very essence of capitalism and the compulsive urge on all economic 'players' to expand. Sooner or later, such growth must overwhelm what can be achieved by greater resource efficiency and more use of pollution prevention technology (See Al Bartlett's class paper, 'Forgotten Fundamentals of the Energy Crisis' in *Am. Jnl. Physics*, 46(9), 1978: 876-888).

Generally, public regulation is the better option than dependence on 'market mechanisms'. The cumulative effect of all the microdecisions made by individuals in the market places is not the happy outcome predicted by Adam Smith and his heirs. Even if they are made rationally and with the best of intentions, uninfluenced by advertising, with full freedom of product information and the like, the net outcome can still be disastrous.

The explanation lies in the dynamic of the 'tragedy of the commons' (or what ought be renamed, the tragedy of commonplace decisions). Most associated with the famous paper by Garrett Hardin and a model often dismissed as but an expression of elitist disdain for the masses, it seems to this reviewer to provide the cornerstone for understanding why systems like capitalism can never be made sustainable and why only socialist framework (albeit radically different from the state capitalist systems of the USSR and its clones) is needed to really solve the global climate crisis and all the others we face.

In any case, the business community overall has done little to green ways. Often any changes amounts to little more than a lick of green gloss to coat otherwise unchanged goals and practices. The auto companies, for examples, are churning out gas-guzzling sports utility vehicles, the biggest selling car in the American market. They are also planning plan to flood countries like China with cars (see Gar Smith's 'Buick Does Beijing' in *Earth Island Journal*, Spring 1997, pp26-27).

At the same time, greener taxes may not trigger the fundamental differences assumed in this book. For most employers, it is the wage bill that dominates their costs and so there is a greater incentive to sack people than save energy and other resources. Similarly, by the time such taxes work their way down to individual products, the increase might not be sufficiently high to deter unsustainable consumption practices. British drivers, for example, have swallowed, albeit with much grumbling, several increases in the cost of petrol yet it has not dented the scale of motoring. As this review is being rewritten it is reported by the media that some 23 million people have taken to their cars for the Bank Holiday weekend.

Such arguments should not detract from the suggestions this book makes about changing the overall fiscal framework and specific new taxes. Perhaps they come up with too many ideas in this respect. There is a case for one basic energy tax as the core financial measure, not least to minimise bureaucracy and the dangers of tax evasion (the case is made in *The Management of*

Greed by Slessor, King and Crane). This might be supplemented by depletion quotas in certain cases, as suggested by Herman Daly.

Gap

No-one would expect a book primarily about global warming clearly to even mention all the other ills that plague the Earth. Of course, there is no point advancing solutions to one problem that aggravate another. Dauncey and Mazza seem to be sure footed in this respect. A moment of doubt occurs when they distinguish fair trade from free trade. Large-scale long distance transportation of even the most fairly traded goods should surely be treated as something to be minimised, sometimes unavoidable and sometimes quite beneficial to all concerned but always a drain on fuel supplies and a source of greenhouse gases as well as the despoiler of vast areas through the construction of infrastructure such as ports, motorways and airport runways.

Despite the admirably comprehensive nature of the overall programme, there are some surprising omissions. Perhaps the biggest is the military-industrial complex. Passing mention is made of its existence in the section on subsidies. Yet the very operation of huge arms factories and large military forces exacerbates problems like global warming even before a single shot is fired in anger. Just look at the huge quantities of aviation fuel burned off by jet training flights.

Some proposals of a salutary or even downright outrageous nature might have been good too. Of course we are spoiled for choice when it comes things that combine profligacy and pointlessness but motor car racing would be in my top ten. More seriously and even more outrageously, let me suggest the phased termination of regional allowances. Despite the pained howls of protest this measure would doubtless provoke, it must surely be part of a strategy to get some balance back into living patterns. It is one major subsidy of unsustainability that our authors overlook.

To be fair, care is taken to spotlight many other things we need to be doing apart from tackling the global warming crisis. The final sections are a call to arms on issues such as the on-going holocaust of other lifeforms. The final quotes suggest that philosophically the basis of this book is deeply humanistic, with Teilhard de Chardin figuring prominently. Those coming from a 'deep ecology' perspective like this reviewer might lift an eyebrow at that point (some 'New Age' followers of de Chardin tend to a position favouring intensive technological manipulation of the planet) but what really matters is that there is so much with which to agree in the pages of *Stormy Weather*.

Agents for Change

Any programme for change must have an audience. This book calls on just about every section of society to do their bit. This is certainly a strength but it is also a weakness. It can be seen, for example, in the sections dealing with local communities and citizens groups. Dauncey and Mazza are certainly right in their appreciation that part of the overall crisis is the tearing of the social 'fabric', alongside the unravelling of Nature's web. The rebuilding of human community is a necessary precondition for long-term sustainability. Without popular participation, action against global warming is likely to be as successful as Prohibition was against alcohol consumption.

Yet, within most communities today, there is little communality of interest. In Britain, for example, a few people are getting rapidly richer, many people are struggling and quite a few are being crushed by poverty. There are fundamental conflicts of interest between, say, tenants and landlords or between employees and employers. Any programme for sustainability must address the reality of such social contradictions or be doomed to irrelevance. Dauncey and Mazza, however, seem to assume that men and women of goodwill will simply pull together for the common good.

Furthermore, 'ordinary' citizens do not have equal power. Several community groups are mentioned. They are mainly formal ones such as school and churches or informal citizens organisations. Only passing mention is made of citizens in their role as workers and then chiefly in relation to job security. Yet workers acting together through organisations such as trade unions have a potential power far greater than the same number of citizens in their position as residents and consumers. The same applies to what Dauncey and Mazza call 'affinity' groups. Some readers may remember Jack Mundey and the 'Green Ban' movement amongst Australian building workers in the early 1970s. There is no need to romanticise the working classes in the manner of the traditional Left to see that the power of organised labour could be decisive in the battle for sustainability.

This brings the discussion finally back to the question of what kind of programme we need. There is an alternative to the dichotomy of reformist pusillanimity versus revolutionary posturing. It was most clearly formulated by Leon Trotsky in his notion of the 'transitional programme'. It is a list of demands devised on a quite different basis. On the one hand, it is made sufficiently attractive to mobilise large numbers of non-converts, whilst at the same time developing their understanding, confidence and level of involvement. Here Dauncey and Mazza score well since their list of solutions can be readily connected to popular concerns about health, job security and especially parental fears for the future awaiting their children.

On the other hand, the demands a transitional programme raises seek to undermine the power of those forces committed to the defence of the status quo, thus widening the door to further advance. This might be done subtly rather than by head-on assault but the aim is the same: weaken the machinery of exploitation and destruction. Here *Stormy Weather* scores rather less well. Ultimately the measures it contains will leave basically intact the very structures that have done so much to create the problem in the first place.

That said, there is so much good material in this book that all reservations should be put on one side. It is now easily the best book of its kind on the shelves. Every activist should have a copy.

Sandy Irvine