

Kyoto, Biodiversity, and the Hypocrisy of World Leaders

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In 1992 almost every country in the world, including the richest and most powerful, signed the Kyoto Accord. Its objective was to reduce the burning of fossil coal, gas and oil in order to stop and, in time, reverse global warming.

But, over the past decade, it turns out that the wealthiest nations have been deliberately subsidizing the fossil fuel industry and steadily increasing their burning of fossil fuels – ignoring commitments made at Kyoto. Globally, estimated subsidies to the fossil fuel industry (or, the global warming industry, if you will) exceeded \$200 billion US per year with over 100 billion of subsidies in the USA and some 11 billion annually in Europe. Australian subsidies amount to about 6 billion annually. Since the Rio Summit in 1992, the World Bank (WB) alone provided 9.2 billion of subsidies. In a report by the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), Washington, D.C. entitled "Changing the World Climate for Business" we learn that the WB financing went to 51 power plants, 20 oil and gas fields, 10 oil or gas pipelines, four coal projects with 26 mines and two oil refineries. Note that the WB also houses the Global Environmental Fund (GEF) but the IPS study shows that WB spending on fossil fuel development outweighs the GEF by 100 to one. Clearly, at the highest levels there are no commitments to prevent global warming.

In Canada the situation is no different. The new government in British Columbia has announced an expanded subsidy program to "energize" the province's economy. Speaking to participants at an oil and gas development conference in Vancouver, the premier said that his government wants private-sector investment in B.C.'s on-shore petroleum resources to increase to \$24 billion over the next five years. He described how the government is streamlining the sector's permit process and developing a new subsidy that eliminates the sales tax on machinery and equipment used for oil and gas development. The Premier also left little doubt that exploration of B.C.'s offshore oil and gas reserves in the Queen Charlotte Basin will proceed quickly if a government task force report, due on January 15, 2002, gives it the green light.

The situation is as bad or even worse at the federal level. For example, in December 2001, Canada's Minister of the "Environment" refused to undertake a review of CO₂ emissions in several coal-fired CO₂ generating plants in Ontario as requested by the Governors of states located downwind of the smokestacks.

In the meantime, the Earth is witnessing the consequences -- rising sea levels, major expansions of deserts with losses of crops and livestock, violent storms, melting of polar ice, and other serious impacts. A recent U.N. study predicts that in the next decade, more global warming will cause major crop failures that will lead to serious global food shortages.

What can be done about this terrible hypocrisy – where the powerful of the world are knowingly directing global policies toward more global warming and inevitable degradation of the Earth's biodiversity. This journal would be interested in hearing your considered views.

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