

## Book Review

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Review of *STORMY WEATHER: 101 Solutions to Global Climate Change*, by Guy Dauncey with Patrick Mazza, Foreword by Ross Gelbspan. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001.

257 pp. + Notes and Index. CAN \$27.95, US \$19.95.

Reviewed by Richard Arnold

This may be the most important book published in North America in the past five years. But before I get into my review, I'd like to mention the actual production of the book. There are three categories of publishers in the world: those who don't care about the environment; those who say they care, but make only a few feeble gestures in that direction; and those who live a genuine commitment to ecological sustainability.

New Society falls into this latter category, exemplified by the titles it publishes, as well as the materials and methods it uses to make books. Inside the back cover of *STORMY WEATHER* is the most detailed colophon a reader is likely to encounter in the publishing world. It starts with the impressive statement that the book is printed on "100% post-consumer waste, processed chlorine free and old growth free," then lists the resources saved by using this method—trees, gallons of water, pounds of greenhouse gases, et cetera.

Greenhouse gases are really the focus of this book, and it would be difficult to overstate the seriousness of their threat. In a broader context, 2002 may have been the worst year yet for the natural environment, the strongest evidence so far that human activity is having a big impact on global climate. Record fires in the American west. Record drought in the Canadian prairies and U.S. southeast. The worst flooding ever seen in Central Europe. Yet another El Nino (he's coming more frequently, and staying longer) predicted for this winter. Here on Vancouver Island, heat records were set on at least four individual days—in June, August, and September. When I backpacked for three days in Strathcona Park—where I read *STORMY WEATHER* at my campsite each evening—it was too hot to climb in the alpine: 32 degrees Celsius. I felt more strongly than ever this summer that I may be witnessing the final

unravelling of earth's systems that ecologists and poets have been warning us is coming. "It's over, folks," I found myself thinking—too often.

Then this book came along just when I needed it. The authors continually stress two huge, but simple, points: we must promote sustainable industry, and we must wean ourselves off fossil fuels. The general theme, that uncontrolled human activity is causing a rapid aberration in Earth's climate, is, sadly, not news to most of us; I say "sadly" because, although "global warming" is virtually a household word to anyone with access to the media, there seems to be virtually no political will or leadership to address it, at least in North America. In the Foreword, Ross Gelbspan, well-known author of *THE HEAT IS ON*, calls the threat "perhaps the most profound challenge ever faced by humanity" (xii). Near the end of the book, the following two paragraphs could be taken as its credo:

When nations faced crises of this magnitude in the past, they formed alliances to work together against the common threat. In the past, the threat was usually a military one, requiring a shared commitment to stop the invader. Today, it is a threat to the ecological balance of the entire planet. The threat has a name: unsustainable development.

Overpopulation, pollution, water shortages, habitat loss—these are all aspects of unsustainable development. Global climate change is its biggest manifestation, bringing the potential for catastrophic disaster to cities, farmlands, forests, fisheries, glaciers, rivers, coral reefs, and species around the world. (252)

However dire and depressing these facts, figures, and predictions, we must not forget that the book's subtitle is "101 Solutions...", which for me is what makes *STORMY WEATHER* so important: it proposes clear, achievable options which can be implemented at all levels of society, ranging from the schoolyard to the Supreme Court, and from the home to the halls of Parliament. There are "Solutions for Individuals," "Solutions for Towns and Cities," "Solutions for Businesses," even "Solutions for Energy Companies and Auto Companies." The bad news is offset by good, when possible; for example, we find out that Ford Motor Company is retrofitting its huge Dearborn plant to be more eco-friendly, with "natural habitat for migrating songbirds, fuel cells, solar energy, and the world's largest 'living roof'" (171). We read how many cities in Europe, and a few in North America, are making energy efficiency a top priority. It is comforting to find out about Ontario's tax on inefficient vehicles, and California's new Zero-Emissions legislation (186). The authors begin with 53 pages of background to show how we arrived at the current energy and climate crisis, then proceed into the "101 Solutions" which form the backbone of the book. (The highlight

for me of the “historical” portion is “Our Story,” with a chronology of earth events dating from 15 billion years ago to the present.) The layout, as in other New Society books I’ve seen, is very attractive, with shaded “Resources” boxes which list websites, toll-free phone numbers, and titles of related books and journals. There are nine pages of Notes, plus an Index. Overall, the book is a captivating read, and impressively researched.

“Kyoto is a starting point”—but the authors of *STORMY WEATHER*, backed by many scientists, prescribe no less than an 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2025 (22). This is certainly a bold, and seemingly unreachable target—but the threat, the enemy, is also huge and bold: potentially the worst invader we’ve ever had to face, one with the ability to change—if not destroy—many of the privileges we take for granted. In the face of inaction and inanity by most of our so-called “leaders,” we may have good reason to give up, retreat into dejection and hopelessness and just watch the earth die—and us with it. But I took courage from reading this book, when I realized that its authors did not let themselves fall into an abject funk—they *did something*.

If you’re worried about earth’s environment, as everyone should be, this book may be good for your sanity and health. It gives the facts—but it also gives the solutions. All you parents, CEOs, MPs, and citizens: now there’s no excuse! Buy *STORMY WEATHER*. Give it to your kids’ teachers. Show it to your preachers and city councils. Order it for your libraries. Spread the word...and spread the hope.

At the end of the book, in Solution 101, the authors ask, “Can we stop burning fossil fuels and cease destroying our soils and forests?” , then answer: “Of course we can” (256). I admit I find this a bit too sanguine. I might echo the “Of course we can”—but I would add: “But *will* we?”

I fear the day is coming when we will all be eco-refugees, fighting to the death over precious water and cropland, darting from shade to shade like desert rats, always hiding from the terrible sun.

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