



Environmental Despotism

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I didn't really have any strong views on Stéphane Dion one way or the other. He seemed a personally pleasant fellow, at least when compared with the more nakedly vindictive streaks of his immediate predecessors. And I take my old confrere Paul Wells at his word when he hails Dion as the intellectual colossus of the age. One regrets that such a colossus has nothing useful to say about a resurgent Islam, nuclear psycho states, a dying Europe and whatnot. But then it seems to be something of an occupational hazard that in Canada the approved towering colossi have a somewhat narrow range of interests. Thus, as part of his curious assertion that "water is more and more a cause of wars," M. Dion attributes the woes of Afghanistan to a lack of H₂O.

So much for war, terrorism and other peripheral issues. But in his self-advertised area of expertise one expects a little more from the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. The other day, M. Dion was interviewed by the Ottawa Citizen's editorial board and the first question was an environmental softball about what he personally did to "reduce his footprint" (that's the way the eco-types talk). And this was the Liberal leader's answer:

"We wash everything in cold water. We choose the best products. We have only one car, and she's not a great consuming one. I use the public transit. . . and so on and so on."

That's it? His ten-point list on what he personally is doing to save the planet from "climate change" exhausts itself after four vague gener-

alities? Isn't that, you know, totally mega-lame? I'm a renowned climate-holocaust denier and I could have improvised that cold-wash laundry list off the top of my head and added a few other feeble bromides--light bulbs, organic yogurt--before getting on to the "and so on and so on." And I'd be interested to know the last time M. Dion used any "public transit" other than his taxpayer-funded car and chauffeur. Under Messrs. Chrétien and Martin, one didn't see a lot of Ministers of the Crown strap-hanging on the Montreal metro.

For a quartet of nothings cumulating in an et cetera, it was, in its way, a revealing answer. M. Dion may be thinking globally but he evidently sees no need for him personally to act locally. As a member of the natural governing class, the Liberal leader takes it for granted that saving the planet will require big government and regulation and transnational agreements and emissions targets and so on and so on and so on. What will be accomplished by this? It's hard to say.

M. Dion is right that "climate change" is happening. That's because "climate change" is always happening. There is no natural state of global climate that would be otherwise unchanging, century in, century out, if only we'd eschew the Chevy Suburban and line-dry our briefs. So the first question is whether the increase of 0.7 of a degree Celsius or so in the course of the 20th century is out of the ordinary. The second question is whether, if so, man is responsible.

The third is whether, if so, reducing CO2 emissions will make any difference.

On the first question: I think it's very hard to argue that that smidgenette of an uptick is out of line with various other fluctuations in the centuries since the Little Ice Age. On the second: gee, I dunno. Fourteen thousand years ago, a local geomorphologist informs me, Edmonton was under an ice sheet a mile thick. But then the ice sheet went away. Now that's what I call a warming trend, and, unless those mammoths were driving Chevy club-cab pick-ups, no selfish North American consumers with unsustainable lifestyles were involved. On the third question: the solutions proposed by M. Dion will make no difference. Had America and Australia ratified Kyoto, and had Canada and Europe complied with it instead of just pretending to, by 2050 the treaty would have reduced global warming by 0.07C--a figure that would be statistically undetectable within annual climate variation. But, in return for this meaningless gesture, American GDP in 2010 would be lower by US\$97 billion to \$397 billion--and those are the U.S. Energy Information Administration's somewhat optimistic models. That seems a lot of bucks for a damp squib of a bang.

So we could do everything M. Dion wants and whatever global warming and/or cooling trend the planet's undergoing right now would be entirely unchanged. Insofar as it's economic growth that enables wider prosperity, better

health, longer life and a greater range of individual opportunities, environmentalism is a conspiracy to keep the developing world from developing.

I was interested to see, in one of the daily scare stories, that unless we go the Dion route "one million people" will die by 2100--from droughts, hurricanes, wildfires and the like. That's according to Kevin Trenberth, one of the many authors of the new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

One million dead? Big deal. Right now 10 million children die each year from preventable diseases. If you leave them in Third World economies, they'll continue to die--10 million per year, or 930 million by the year 2100. Versus one million projected to get whacked in various unspecified meteorological catastrophes. Which will probably happen anyway. You can make arguments for action on "climate change" based on your concern for polar bears and krill and all the rest but not for human beings. Humans are pretty much the one species you can guarantee will die in greater numbers if the warm-mongers get their way.

The aphorism usually attributed to Chesterton seems pertinent here: once man has ceased to believe in God, he'll believe in anything. Most of the post-Christian West seems to have decided that, if the here and now is all there is, then we have to keep the here and now right here and exactly as it is now for all time. Environmentalism is, in that sense,

the apotheosis of our present-tense culture. It is, of course, anti-nature. Far from "honouring your mother" (as the Gaia bumper stickers commend), it explicitly dishonours her: it assumes she is not a living evolving entity but exists in a fixed state whose condition is determined by man--or, at any rate, wicked capitalist Anglo-American man.

That's not just nonsense but the worst kind of vanity. If capitalism does despoil the environment, it does so less than any other kind of system, and certainly less than big government. Compare pollution on either side of the Iron Curtain. I was in Romania not long after the fall of Communism and I've never seen grass that colour. And it wasn't caused by rampant consumerism--not in a country where for 40 years Ceausescu had the car. In Saddam's Iraq, 30 per cent of arable land had to be abandoned because of environmentally ruinous irrigation practices. It took the Bush-Blair invasion to end the devastation of the country's marshes.

But for M. Dion and co. "climate change" is a way of blaming America even when they're not invading anyone. Previous great powers were threats because they coveted your territory, as, say, the Third Reich and the Soviet Union did with Poland. But the United States is an even bigger danger to Poland not because of its troops but because of its "lifestyle." The Yanks don't have to climb into a tank to roll right over you. All they have to do is climb into the Ford Explorer and head for the drive-thru lane at McDonald's--

and just by having a shake and a cheeseburger they're wreaking more havoc on the planet than Hitler could ever have dreamed of.

Stéphane Dion is supposed to be the Liberal party's latest Great Thinker. But his lazy answers to the Ottawa Citizen suggest a man who doesn't think terribly much at all beyond the assumption that a vast transfer of power and resources from the

dynamic efficient part of the economy to an already overbearing and ever more ambitious transnational regulatory class is, by definition, a good thing. If we survive his plans for us, circa 2050 we'll look back at the turn-of-the-century warmongers and have a grand old laugh. But, if the Dions of the world get their way, a degree or two on the thermometer will be the least of our worries.