

***Climate@Work* book review by Dimitris Stevis – Originally published in Labour \ Le Travail, Issue 74, Fall 2014, pp. 344-346.**

Climate@Work, Edited by Carla Lipsig-Mummé
(Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing 2013)

Climate@Work is the first publication of Work in a Warming World (W3), one of the most far reaching and necessary research programs to understand and offer solutions regarding the impact of climate change and policy on work and workers. The project was initiated in 2008 and, in 2010, received funding for another six years. Director of the project and editor of this volume, Carla Lipsig-Mummé states the first question the project asked was “what do we really know about the impact and implications of climate change and policies to climate change for jobs in Canada?” (8) Over time the project has broadened its scope to explore “what is being done to adapt the world of work to lower its greenhouse emissions? What role can labour play?” (9)

This book brings together some answers to the first question, including the identification of areas in which knowledge about the relations between climate and work is limited. In short, it provides the foundational knowledge that will inform the project’s further work. The first section consists of three chapters which aim to situate the project within broader contexts. The second section examines six sectors of the Canadian economy.

The first chapter, by Elizabeth Perry, offers a quantitative overview of the literature on climate change and work from 1995 to 2009. The author concludes that less than twenty per cent of the work that she has been able to identify came from academics, perhaps due to the disciplinary inflexibility of some of the most prestigious journals in industrial relations and management. In the second chapter, Lipsig-Mummé situates the project within similar efforts around the world with respect to three analytical questions: what is the impact of climate science on economic activity? what should be the role of the state? and what is the impact of climate change an policy on jobs? In addressing the first question the author argues that rather than focus on mitigation or adaptation we should focus on both as integral elements of any meaningful policy. In addressing the second question she argues that the state has to play a central role and that such calls are now also coming from conservative circles influenced by the Great Recession. Finally, tackling climate change requires not only a focus on jobs but a broader focus on greening work and the economy. Important research in all of these areas has come mostly from Europe while Canada has fallen behind but, in general, research on the world of work is underdeveloped. In the third chapter, Stephen McBride and John Shields situate Canadian efforts to respond to climate change within the broader global political economy. Specifically, they argue that the rules of the World Trade Organization (wto) have been exercising a dampening effect on Ontario’s Clean Energy Act. They also suggest ways, however, to avoid being at odds with the wto. In general, this chapter highlights two important elements: First, the leading role that sub-federal units can play and, second, the deep reach of wto’s provisions.

The second section consists of six chapters, each focusing on one sector. Generally, all chapters examine the characteristics of the sector in Canada, including its labour force, the impacts of each sector on climate, the effects of climate policy, if any, and of other factors on employment and work, and close by summarizing what we know and what we need to learn. Clearly, this is a set of chapters produced by people participating in a project with well-defined research questions intended to provide a baseline to inform future research.

John O'Grady examines the construction industry, the major source of greenhouse gases (ghgs) in Canada and worldwide. In the first section, he outlines the various components of the industry and provides information on employment, unionization, and environmental initiatives. In the second section, he examines the likely impacts of "green construction" on employment and skills. One issue that seems relevant to the sector is the broader organization of space, something briefly raised by John Holmes with Austin Hrcs in their chapter on the transportation equipment industry (113–114). In the same way that efficient public transportation requires density, a green construction industry should aim at both efficient units and a different arrangement of these units. Marjorie Griffin Cohen and John Calvert focus on the Canadian energy sector. This is an important sector because "Canada is unlike the U.S. and European countries: it is not experiencing reductions in oil and gas production as is occurring elsewhere" (101). Thus, climate policy is likely to have an adverse employment impact, even though the energy industry is capital intensive. As a result, renewable energy has not made significant inroads in Canada with the exception of large scale hydro. This trend has been reinforced by the federal government's support for marketization. Sub-federal initiatives have played an important if variable role, with Ontario paying closer attention to employment while British Columbia much less so.

John Holmes with Austin Hrcs examine the transportation equipment sector, fully recognizing that motor vehicles are a major source of ghgs in their use rather than manufacturing (106–107). The industry has been losing ground in Canada in terms of employment. In terms of the ghg impacts of motor vehicles, the Canadian industry has harmonized with the USA and Europe in terms of fuel emissions and efficiency. The authors conclude that very little has been "written regarding the likely impacts of climate change on employment and skills requirements in the transportation equipment industry" (120). Forests are an important part of the Canadian landscape and economy and are dealt with in a chapter by John Holmes. He notes that climate change is likely to affect both the range of different forests, thus affecting employment and communities, as well as the types of jobs and skills required. As he points out "the technological and innovative advancements made in the forest industry – viewed as a low-tech, dying sector with minimal opportunities and with minimal concern for environmental issues – are often overlooked" (138). This statement is appropriate not only for forestry but for a number of older sectors, many associated with agriculture, which can be revolutionized by innovations. Steven Tufts' chapter on the tourist industry further underscores the need to cast a wide net when dealing with the impacts of climate change and policy. Tufts recognizes the importance of migrant workers for such a labour-intensive sector and more explicitly than the other chapters focuses on the ingredients of a high and low road strategies in the sector. Finally Meg Gingrich, Sarah Ryan, and Geoff Bickerton examine

the postal and courier sector where unions are actually quite strong – especially the postal sector. This allows the authors to contrast the environmental attitudes of an activist union to those of management and state authorities.

The sectors examined cover the vast majority of Canadian ghg emissions as well as a substantial part of the labour force, although not the majority. The decision to organize this baseline research around sectors is eminently defensible at this point. Perhaps some additional sectors require closer attention, especially transportation and infrastructure. These are important sectors in their own terms while tightly connected with other sectors, such as automobiles and energy.

The project is still unfolding. Judging from its recent international conference and its other activities, W3 is expanding its horizons in order to draw lessons from other parts of the world that can inform the project's recommendations to policy makers and unions. It is also casting a wider net in terms of specific and crosscutting economic activities and in terms of policy drivers and obstacles. The project is explicit in its aim to identify best practices in addressing global warming, particularly those that affect work and workers and, even more so, those in which workers and their unions are active contributors.

This book does not stand alone but must be seen as part of a broader project whose goal is both analysis and praxis. It is a progress report whose ultimate utility is the degree to which it helps inform ongoing and future research. Readers, both academics and practitioners, will benefit a great deal from the contextual chapters and the profiles of the various sectors, all the more so because this is an accessibly written volume. Reading this book in conjunction with visits to the website of the project will allow readers to get a more dynamic understanding of this important project and of the great deal of work that needs to be done to place work in the midst of climate politics and policy in a manner that sees workers and unions as agents rather than objects.

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