

Roger A. Sedjo

Surviving Global Warming: Why Eliminating Greenhouse Gases Isn't Enough

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Is it possible to reach across the aisle and have a conversation on climate policy? Can one find common ground in a centrist position, given the polarised political environment today? And can one articulate such a position without playing fast and loose with the science? Suppose one can: would this allow one to come up with a good plan for *Surviving Global Warming*, the title of the book?

If there is one author who could pull off this feat, it might be resource economist Roger A. Sedjo, who contributed to a chapter on geo-engineering in the IPCC Third Assessment Report (TAR 2001, Working Group III, chapter 4, second lead author) and is cited in a chapter on forestry in the Fourth Assessment Report (AR4 2007, WG III, c. 9). Sedjo serves as a consultant to institutions such as the World Bank, and he is a Senior Fellow Emeritus at the U.S. non-profit think tank Resources for the Future (RFF). According to the non-profit's homepage, its major donors are British Petroleum, Chevron and Duke Energy (a holding company whose electricity generation comes from coal and gas, plus some nuclear power). Resources for the Future, which, as Sedjo notes, has not sponsored *Surviving Global Warming* (p. 6), counts among its associate donors the Koch brothers. Here is an author who contributed to climate science but, at the same time, is affiliated with a think tank funded by fossil fuels and libertarian conservatives; an author who knows the scientific side and the corporate side, and who aspires to RFF's stated core value: *balance*. Can this balance be maintained?

A first impression raises a question, although one should perhaps overlook it, since a centrist policy proposal deserves the benefit of doubt. On the cover, Sedjo bills himself as a Nobel co-laureate. He refers to the Prize given to the IPCC upon release of the AR4 in 2007. This self-identification is technically correct since the Nobel Committee recognised the IPCC's work in general, including that of earlier Assessment Reports. But considering that the IPCC was recognised after AR4, in which Sedjo is merely cited; considering that the IPCC Reports are the largest collective enterprise in the history of science, whose authors number in the tens of thousands; finally, considering that the IPCC won only *half* of the award – the other half went to Al Gore – considering this, billing oneself as 'Nobel Peace Prize Shared Recipient' seems a bit Trumpy. But, one should not judge a book by its cover.

The book consists of the following chapters: 1) 'Al Gore and the Greenhouse Gas Theory: Plan A'; 2) 'Natural Climate Change: GHGs Are Not the Whole Answer', 3) 'Plan A: Mitigation – A Bridge Too Far?', 4) 'Plan B: The Adaptation Solution', 5) 'Adaptation through Reflectivity and Geoengineering', 6) 'Political Challenges', 7) 'Plan B as Insurance', and a conclusion followed by notes and an index. Sedjo concedes the reality of climate change but misleadingly states that 'alarms from both sides of the political aisle are being voiced over the apparent (*sic*) intensification of climate change' (p. 8). Anyone keeping up with U.S. news knows, of course, that this is a lie: *one side of the aisle* voices alarms, while

the other side, the Republican leadership, thinks climate change is a Chinese hoax. Telling is also Sedjo's characterisation of the intensification of climate change as only 'apparent'. Such antirealist and scepticist verbiage seems to be Sedjo's way of reaching across the aisle to the right wing, while aspiring to the centre. As he puts it (p. 9), 'Al Gore has directed attention to GHG emissions as the cause of global warming ... although I share his concerns, I tend to disagree that this is the whole story'. Why? Because 'there is a lack of attention to natural forces affecting climate change' (p. 10). As he writes, the 'assumption of stronger solar fluctuations' would add what is missing from the bigger picture (p. 83); 'solar activity', in other words, is a decisive and overlooked 'climate agent' (p. 39). In short, the climate is warming because the sun is ballooning. Thus, the IPCC climate models are incomplete, and as evidence Sedjo cites 'Kelvin Droegemeier, President Trump's top science and technology adviser', who 'repeatedly points out the limits of climate models' (p. 39).

With such inanities, the centrist proposal flames out. Sedjo's bridge between progressives and conservatives is to accept one part of the science and to deny another. This strategy reveals the lack of a scientific common ground for a bipartisan solution. Only the progressive side of the aisle is up on the science. The conservative side fears science, rightly so, and therefore casts doubt. This is the American Disenlightenment, and it has global implications. Over the mitigation of climate change, America has left the world stage, with leadership now shifting to China. Since 2007, China has been building a 'Socialist Ecological Civilisation' 社会的生态文明 or *shehuide shengtai wenming*. The policy of creating an ecological civilisation is guided by a socialist approach to sustainability and a scientific take on climate. Thus, the socialist world power relies on science and is decarbonising, while the capitalist world power regards mitigation as a 'bridge too far' (as Sedjo argues in c. 3) and sticks to fossil fuels. China is carving out a 'common destiny for all humankind', as Xi Jinping put it in 2017, while the America envisioned by Sedjo and his conservative allies finds itself on the wrong side of history.

A last question raised by *Surviving Global Warming* is the emphasis on adaptation at the expense of mitigation. This is Sedjo's touted 'Plan B', elaborated in the remainder of the book. He falsely accuses the IPCC of dismissing adaptive strategies (pp. 84, 176), conveniently omitting that Working Group III contributions after 2001 had been about mitigation *and* adaptation. He falsely declares that an economy powered by sun and wind, as in Germany, runs out of energy when 'the weather is windless and cloudy' (p. 198), seemingly ignorant of the hydroelectric storage plants that link tiered mountain lakes in Europe (and in Asia) to compensate for fluctuations in supply. That a member of a think tank funded by the Koch brothers would misrepresent post-carbon technology makes sense, but only partly explains the author's emphasis on adaptation. What, then, is so attractive, for right-wing libertarians and predatory capitalists, about a plan that ramps up adaptation and slow-walks mitigation? In her 2007 *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein suggests an answer: disaster capitalism.

Imagine we followed Sedjo's 'Plan B' and did *not* mitigate. Instead, in the spirit of *laissez faire*, we keep the Koch industries in business, let the climate respond at will to our carbon pulse, and, as it responds, we adapt. Obviously, the climate system will then tip into a

hothouse state before the century is out. But consider the money that could be made by partial civilisation collapse – all the walls that would have to be built; all the guns that would have to be sold; all the privatised infrastructure of the super-rich that would have to be hardened by then. These are *vast* business opportunities. That's adaptation without mitigation, and this is Sedjo's plan for *Surviving Global Warming*.

Recommended to any reader interested in artefacts of the American Disenlightenment.

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