Book Review

Reviewed by Junaid B. Jahangir

Email: binjahangirj@macewan.ca

Between Doom & Denial
by: A. Leach
Published 2023
by Sutherland House
Toronto, Canada, 100pp
ISBN: 978-1990823497

I recall Andrew Leach from the mid 2000s. He was newly hired as an Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta. I was working on my PhD dissertation on the Alberta electricity market restructuring. I remember being impressed by his sheer brilliance as he offered suggestions on strengthening my work. I believe that some of us are made strong so that we can serve the weak. This is why I am glad that he wrote the book, *Between Doom & Denial*, "to push back at half-truths that abound in public discourse" (p.1).

Leach is clear that climate change is "the environmental, political, and societal challenge of our time" and that global warming is "mostly human-caused" (pp.1–3). As an economist, he is also clear that mitigating climate change is a public good, and many countries are not incentivised to mitigate climate change, instead free riding on the efforts of others (p.4). This is because the benefits of mitigating climate change are global, but the costs are local (p.9).

Leach dismantles the idea that climate change will not be that bad for Canada because of the benefits of longer growing seasons, increased agricultural productivity, tourism, and lower heating costs due to warmer temperatures (pp.12–14). He counters by pointing to the increase in wildfires including Slave Lake in 2011, Fort McMurray in 2016, Lytton in 2021, and in April and May 2023 (p.20). He also discusses the pine beetle infestations that leave dead trees and amplify fire weather, increased smoke that increases the use of ACs and decreases solar power generation, and the global impact through political crises and mass migration that potentially affect Canada (pp.20–21, p.24).

In Chapter 4, he impugns the idea that a carbon tax in Canada will not have a significant impact, as Canada is responsible for only 1.6% of global emissions (p.25). He counters that Canada ranks fourth in the G-20 countries on GHG emissions per capita (p.27). Thus, he offers carbon pricing as the best policy to reduce emissions, even though he has also argued for phasing out coal-fired power, and for government procurement of renewable energy (pp.31–33). Additionally, he emphasises the stringency of "policies, not targets", as Canada often promises outcomes it cannot guarantee (p.30).

While the first four chapters are concise and simple to follow, Chapter 5 offers an involved exposition. Leach argues that assuming there will always be demand for Canadian oil and gas is irrelevant. Instead, he emphasises that with stringent climate

change action there will not be much demand for Canadian oil and gas exports and both supply and revenues in that industry would fall (p.44).

In Chapter 6, he acknowledges the decoupling of emissions from economic development through renewable energy but argues that neither solar nor wind energy provide reliable capacity (pp.57–61). This is because expensive seasonal storage is required for renewable energy especially given Canadian winters (pp.62–63). As such, he cautions against superimposing the US experience with renewable energy onto Canada. Instead, he argues for transmission lines that would facilitate sharing hydro, nuclear, and renewable energy across Canada (p.64).

In Chapter 7, he argues that a just transition based on "nobody left behind" hides the cost of climate change mitigation policies, as the costs of transitioning away from oil and gas would be "unprecedented, painful, and costly" (pp.72–89). He states that there is no guarantee that the displaced workers from the oil and gas industry would benefit from green jobs (p.73). Moreover, there is a risk of parallel "polarizing conditions" as witnessed in the USA after the decline of the manufacturing sector (p.73).

Finally, he is critical of the Canadian economist Jim Stanford, author of the book, *Economics for Everyone* (2015), who does not view energy transition as unique and who is optimistic that other industries can replace the oil and gas industry (pp.74–84). Leach instead argues that transitioning away from oil and gas has no precedent. This is because in the phase out of coal in Alberta, Ontario, and Germany; or of oil and gas in Denmark, these industries were already in decline whereas the Alberta oil and gas sector is a "huge wealth and government revenue generator" (p.74). Furthermore, while jobs can be created through government work, the sheer size and scale of the oil sands cannot be replicated (p.4).

I am a fan of Jim Stanford, as he offers an economic narrative that goes against the mainstream naysaying on corporate taxes and on the single-minded obsession with inflation at the expense of full employment. As such, I am partial to heterodox approaches to economics. Additionally, in the context of climate change and carbon tax, I would ascribe more to Keen (2020) and to the case made for degrowth, as in Hickel (2020).

However, Leach raises strong and nuanced points, which I acknowledge. His emphasis on "policies, not targets", not copy pasting US studies onto Canada, not generalising from coal phase out to the transition from oil and gas, and reframing data on Canadian emissions, all evidence that he is a deep thinker. Overall, I admire him for making a strong case on mitigating climate change in a conservative Albertan context and appreciate that his book pushes back at the half-truths peddled by many in public discourse.

References

Hickel, J. (2020) *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*, Penguin Random House, London.

Keen, S. (2020) 'The appallingly bad neoclassical economics of climate change', *Globalizations*, Vol. 18, No. 7, pp.1149–1177.

Leach, A. (2023) *Between Doom & Denial*, Sutherland House, Toronto.

Stanford, J. (2015) *Economics for Everyone: A Short Guide to the Economics of Capitalism*, Pluto Press, London.