Europe Standing Tall Against a Rogue State

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I spent a week in May in European capitals (Brussels, the Hague, Berlin, London and Paris) discussing the role of tar sands and other unconventional fossil fuels in climate change. Mark Jaccard (Canadian professor of environmental economics) and I were invited to participate in a debate in the European Parliament, providing scientific evidence relevant to the European Fuel Quality Directive.

The basic issue of this Directive (law) that EU is discussing is whether unconventional fossil fuels should get higher GHG (greenhouse gas) values to include emissions that occur in mining and processing of the fuel. Europe has been a leader in recognizing the importance of climate change and the need to take account of emissions during the complete fuel cycle, e.g., during production of biofuels. Thus there is wide respect for the European position, which could affect potential world-wide expanded production of carbon-intensive unconventional fossil fuels. The EU has laws requiring automobile and other industries to reduce emissions, but this is the first time that the oil industry is asked to reduce its impact on climate. Hence the importance of this Directive.

We had meetings with officials in each capital and made a few public presentations during the tour. Our public presentations were shadowed by a Canadian government lobbyist for tar sands, but he soon learned that it was better that he not interject in the discussions, because Mark and I could readily counter his misinformation.

We were heartened by the reactions in these countries and in the European Parliament. The European Commissioner for Climate Action, Connie Hedegaard, is determined to have honest accounting of emissions from all fuels. We are optimistic that Europe will stand tall in resisting backroom pressure from a Canadian government and the oil industry, which seem intent on making Canada into a rogue state.

Canada agreed to match the United States goal of reducing CO_2 emissions 17% between 2005 and 2020. However, the present Canadian government's own audit division admits that, as a result of tar sands development, their emissions are instead likely to <u>increase</u> 7-10% by 2020.

I try to make this story clearer in a letter, "Tar Sands Debacle and the Hama-Hama-Hama Oil and Gas Corporation," to my oldest grandchild that is nearly finished. One thing I have learned is that the Canadian government's position re tar sands does not seem to be representative of Canadians in general. Supportive messages that I receive from Canadians outnumber criticisms by about ten-to-one. People in Alberta, the oil province, were very friendly when I went there in 2010 to testify against tar sands.

If Europe labels tar sands appropriately and the U. S. rejects the Keystone XL pipeline, expansion of tar sands development will be blocked temporarily and the oil industry will need to rethink its strategy of investing in highly GHG intensive fossil fuels. If a rising carbon fee is adopted in the next few years the infrastructure for that unconventional oil will never be needed. The economically sensible fee-and-dividend approach would result in millions of jobs as we move toward a clean energy future.

Upcoming decisions of political leaders have great implications for the future of young people and nature. If political leaders cave in to backroom pressure from the multinational fossil fuel industry, no explanation can succeed in cloaking their lack of moral courage in facing the demands of that industry.

We stand at a unique point in history when it is still possible to minimize climate disruption via an honest rising fee on carbon emissions that makes fossil fuels pay their costs to society, thus spurring our economies and a transformation to clean energies. If, instead, we choose to appease the fossil industry, subsidizing a move into unconventional fossil fuels, history and our children will surely recognize our connivance and cowardice and may judge us no less harshly than the judgment rendered upon the pre-war appeasers of the 1930s.