

Watt's Happening? #164

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A just transition *Let no one be left behind*



Both BC and Alberta have immense wind, solar and geothermal energy resources and world-class energy expertise with a highly skilled work force. As global markets rapidly move money from conventional energy

to these new energy industries, it is time for provincial and federal politicians to step up and help with a just energy transition. (Photo: pouring wind turbine foundations at Bear Mtn. Wind Park, Dawson Creek.)

The energy world is changing, and there is no politician or political party that can stop it. You can't blame politicians or tree-hugging environmentalists because these changes are not being driven by politics or ideologies. They are being driven by global money markets, and no politician has control of, or can even influence, global money markets.

Big dollars are fleeing from coal, oil and gas and flowing directly into renewables. Quickly. Right now, not some time in the distant future.

Why? As one oil exec recently put it: "It's quicker and easier to build wind farms than pipelines."

YOU CAN SLOW IT BUT YOU CAN'T STOP IT

Local politicians can slow the transition down for a while, trying to "make bla bla great again" gathering support by building up the anger and confusion that will always come with major change. But such efforts will be temporary and will come at great human and economic cost.

First, cancelling renewable energy projects, subsidies and training programs will instantly INCREASE joblessness, as thousands lose the new jobs they had just found in the clean energy sector. This

happened in Ontario when Ford cancelled hundreds of solar and wind projects, significantly increasing unemployment in his province.

Secondly, that region, province or country that tries to work against the global transition to clean energy will fall behind, lose opportunities and create unnecessary conflict and suffering. Politicians can feed on this conflict and anger for a while, but eventually people will tire of it, especially when they see those regions, provinces and countries that embrace the transition growing their new energy economies and prospering.

REAL CLEAN ENERGY JOBS

I have worked professionally in the clean energy sector for about twenty years now. I was deeply involved in the creation of BC's first commercial wind facility, Bear Mountain Wind Park near Dawson Creek, where 34 giant wind turbines now power some 34,000 homes with 102 megawatts of clean wind energy.

As a photographer hired to document the two-year construction of Bear Mountain, I was in a unique position to see who and what was actually involved on the ground, at the site. Here is a short list (by no means complete) of some of the jobs I saw there: project managers, surveyors, cement workers, electricians, welders, electrical and structural engineers, heavy equipment operators including crane operators (biggest cranes in the world!), carpenters, general laborers, environmental consultants, biologists, truck drivers, mechanics...and one commercial photographer.

(To have a closer look at who and what it takes to build a wind farm, check out my photo book *Power Shift* available free of charge from Peace Energy Cooperative).

Now I am deeply involved in the business of solar energy, helping to design and build some of the largest solar projects in BC. Here is a short list

of some of the on-site jobs required to put up solar arrays: electrical engineers, solar designers, solar sales consultants, roofers, electricians, carpenters, labourers, truckers, heavy equipment operators, welders and metal fabricators, clean energy educators and trainers, and project managers.

BUSINESS CHANGES

Over my 45-year self-employed small business career, I have had to re-invent myself five times. I managed to stay in my chosen field of visual arts, but had to change my business model as technology advanced and the markets and opportunities for my skills came and went. This included a very unwilling, very expensive and difficult change from analogue imaging (film) to digital. But I made the changes, survived and thrived.

You can too, but from the list above you can see that most workers won't have to change or retrain at all. You'll just be building geothermal plants, solar farms and wind farms instead of what you're building now.

Money is flowing out of the conventional fuel sector, causing down turns in the industry, shrinking markets, job loss, business bankruptcies and real hardship. The longer we deny the reality of the

global energy transition and hopelessly try to fight it, the more it will hurt us.

What politicians CAN do is welcome these new energy industries and provide training and incentives – a just transition, with nobody left behind. If that is NOT what they're doing, then they're letting us all down and not doing their jobs.

Prosperity, countless opportunities and a clean energy world are at our doorsteps. There's no point in getting angry and playing the victim. It's just business... as usual.

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