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Commentary by Muriel Wiens

The Eighth Day of the Week

Time's up.

As I watched on CPAC the woeful dragging of feet on the part of the Conservatives and the representatives of the energy industry in the parliamentary committee which is supposedly re-writing the hot air bill, it reminded me of the totally different response of our government in 1939 to Hitler's threat to take over the planet.

I began to imagine what would have happened, had such whingeing gone on about the difficulties of re-tooling and technological change, of production of materials and necessary changes in human behaviour. Today's snail-like pace and polite refusals to make any sacrifice for the common good, had they operated then, would have resulted in parliament being surprised in the midst of its complacent obfuscations by a Nazi general walking into their midst. Parliament would have delayed itself into catastrophe.

That is what is happening now. Here is an example. One energy spokesman has such a comfortably leisurely approach to the threatened collapse of the ecology of our planet that he is willing to allow ten years to go by, using minimal remedies to the CO2 emissions of his industry. Even so, he complains because after ten years these small interim measures would have to be scrapped, since by then radically new systems would be designed and the industry would have to go to the expense of re-tooling. Yet in Hitler's war, and in the war in Afghanistan, no-one gave, or gives, a second thought to spending billions to make weapons which are destroyed in an instant. In fact, Harper is swiftly converting Canada's economy to an American-style military-industrial complex, with various provinces howling over getting their share of the profits. So much for priorities.

In that same meeting, it was enlightening to hear the views of another of the invited witnesses, the New Zealand Environmental Commissioner, Mr Williams. His job was defined by his government as an advisor and ombudsman for the planet. The reason he was there as a witness was to support an opposition motion that a similarly independent, ombudsman-like Environmental Commissioner be appointed in Canada, free of the insanity of being dictated to by an

accountant, even if she is the Auditor General of Canada.

Mr Williams, when asked how he conducted his responsibility, replied that he knew he had to provide a vision of a way out of the dilemma, and since this was a problem caused by humanity, so would it be solved by understanding humanity, as well as the science we have created. He has drawn around him the best informed minds he could find, many of them with dual doctorates in different fields, ranging over all the knowledge we have about human behaviour, and about the necessity which is our planet. Out of that group of experts have come recommendations and information upon which the elected government could act and has acted.

One of Mr. Williams' team's most significant findings was that what was needed was 'empowerment'—of local governments. This empowerment is the very thing which TIILMA (the Trade and Investment Labour and Mobility Agreement), arranged secretly between Campbell and Klein, is designed to thwart. The Campbell government has already crippled the regulatory powers of municipalities.

It is relevant to add that early in the last century, New Zealand was one of the first socialist governments in the world to prove that a state can finance the well being of all its citizens, even within the boundaries of a very small economy. In the seventies, New Zealand fell into the hands of 'The Market,' but after several years, during which its economy was devastated, came to its senses and has reclaimed the powers of the state. It has since been successful in retrieving its ethical and economic integrity as a nation.

I have watched every single Conservative member of the Federal Parliamentary Environmental Committee vote against appointing an Environmental Commissioner free enough of the constraints and control of the government to be able to be a genuine ombudsman of the planet. Every one of them. We know who they are obeying. Harper has been recently quoted as referring to this horrible reality we face as 'so-called Global Warming.'

This morning, that committee interviewed Mr Brown, a respected financier, who has done his own homework. He told us that the thawing of the Canadian permafrost will release so much

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com.

Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>

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methane that we will be responsible for one sixth of global warming before the end of the century. Mr. Brown has grandchildren and great grandchildren. He realizes that their lives are at risk. He told the committee this, and strongly suggested that we should spend a great deal now in order to avoid paying a terrible price later on. One of the 'bright lights' of the Conservative party questioned this, quoting a recent poll indicating that the average Canadian is only willing to spend one hundred dollars on any effort to fight global warming, and that Mr Brown's suggestion would mean that a two income household would have to pony up over six thousand dollars.

Mr Brown's response was to say that if the media were doing its job and actually informing all of us of the huge price

our descendants will pay if we do nothing now, he's pretty sure we would be willing to pay any price to make sure the species, particularly our own genetic strain, survives.

These people only listen to money. I saw a few shocked Conservative faces at that meeting. Perhaps reality is piercing past the cloud of fundamentalism.

It is the eighth day of the week. The fight against global warming is the war we should be tooling up for, not Afghanistan. Our media and politicians are slow to wake. If aliens had invaded from outer space and manipulated our ape-like acquisitive nature as consumerism has done, would we have taken this long to taste the poison inside the candy?



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