

### Green jobs and America

*Good Green Jobs in a Global Economy: Making and Keeping New Industries in the United States.* By David J. Hess, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2012, 293 pp., \$30.00/cloth.

There has been a lot of discussion about the need to create and maintain “green jobs” to combat the influence of global warming. So what is the extent of the problem? What forces are in play? What progress has been made to date? Why hasn’t more been done? These are just a few of the questions David J. Hess, director of the Program on Environmental and Sustainability Studies and professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University, attempts to answer in this book.

Temperatures in the contiguous United States in 2012 were reported to be the hottest in more than a century of recordkeeping, 3.2 degrees higher than the 20th-century average. Hess and others contend that this is the result of carbon emissions produced by the burning of fossil fuels and that the current trajectory emphasizing short-term interests over long-term planetary health must be altered. At the same time, Hess points out that the nation is facing historically high unemployment and other challenges. Between 2000 and 2010, 6 million U.S. manufacturing jobs were lost and the center of global power shifted toward China; real minimum wages peaked in 1968 and have been stagnant or in decline since. Hess refers to the dilemma as a “twin problem of sustainability and justice.” Somehow, he suggests, we need to move beyond the “jobs versus the

environment” mentality that has so dominated the discussion and adopt a mindset that can accommodate both jobs and the environment.

Hess notes that efforts at energy independence date back to President Eisenhower’s Mandatory Oil Import program, which imposed import quotas on foreign oil. Unfortunately, this program simply drained domestic sources more quickly, exacerbating the long-term problem and goading foreign producers into forming what would become the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). President Nixon called for energy independence in 1973 in response to the OPEC embargo, and President Ford mandated fuel efficiency standards. President Carter’s National Energy plan of 1977 recognized for the first time the need for a transition to non-fossil-fuel energy sources and called for lower consumption; in contrast, President Reagan rejected green industrial policy in favor of a market-based approach.

Since the 1980s, green policies have continued this uneven approach: across industries; across state governments; in scale (federal versus states versus cities); and by political party. The problem is exacerbated by geography: coal, oil, and natural gas deposits in the country are widely dispersed, and companies located in regions blessed with these resources have not been bashful about exercising their opposition to green policies. (Biofuels such as corn and soy are geographically more widespread.) China has also emerged as a rival superpower that accepts neither American hegemony nor Western traditions of parliamentary rule. According to Hess, across the political spectrum

most would agree that China has benefited from government policies that include subsidies, investments, and enticements to encourage green industries to locate and export from there, while free trade policies in the United States have hurt manufacturers here.

Hess identifies four distinct social movements that have arisen to address the problem: (1) social liberalism (typically favored by Democrats), tracing its roots to Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal and seeking “social fairness and openness to correct market failures”; (2) neoliberalism (typically favored by Republicans), espousing “limited government, fiscal prudence, the wisdom of markets and individual responsibility”; (3) developmentalism, maintaining that “the fundamental unit of the global economy is the large corporation” while opposing further trade liberalization; and (4) localism, promoting small, locally owned businesses and community efforts to solve the energy crisis (in contrast to the large-corporation approach of developmentalism).

Hess describes some of the challenges faced by those promoting the green industry in the United States. Over the years, labor groups and environmental organizations have combined forces to form a “blue-green coalition” to push green policies. The relationship has at times been uneasy, given that the union focus is more strictly on jobs, but overall both groups have supported the cause. Antipoverty and progressive organizations are another constituency. Although they have little economic power, they have been effective in mobilizing voters. Numbers and money nonetheless remain an obstacle: it is estimated

that between 5 and 7 times as many people work in the fossil fuel industry than in renewable energy and energy efficiency, and spending on lobbying in 2011 by oil and gas companies, electric utilities, and mining interests (\$166 million) dwarfed that done on behalf of clean energy (\$10 million). Some business leaders have proven sympathetic; for example Bill Gates and Jeff Immelt campaigned to get government subsidies for the conversion to a green energy future. Estimating the precise number of green jobs that will be created has proven problematic, however, and business leaders generally tend to focus more on competitiveness and innovation rather than the environment and employment.

Hess points out the advantages and the synergies that occur when green industries are “clustered” together. For example, Silicon Valley got its start as the home of the semiconductor and personal computer industries, but soon expanded to include the software industry, information and communications technology, biotechnology, and green technology as well. All firms in the area (including existing

companies) benefit from the highly skilled labor pool, which in turn attracts venture capitalists, research and training programs, legal and accounting firms, and so forth; collocation also helps reduce energy consumption. While California has taken the lead, “innovation clusters” now appear in Michigan and Ohio (wind), Massachusetts (innovation and technology transfer), and New Mexico (solar, wind, and geothermal energy), among other states. Retrofitting buildings to save energy has emerged as a type of green technology; as Hess observes, buildings currently consume 40 percent of the world’s energy production. Among the states, Minnesota, New York, and Washington State have taken the lead, as have the cities of Portland, Oregon, and Austin, Texas. There is also an effort underway to design future buildings to be “net zero energy,” meaning that they produce as much energy (e.g., through solar panels) as they consume.

Finally, Hess expresses his frustration with the failure of the political process to advance green technology. Whereas in 2008 both presidential candidates supported

climate change regulations, already by 2010 a sea change of doubt had occurred. Financial support from the fossil fuel industries (and wealthy individuals) opposing the green movement had a strong impact on the Republican presidential candidates and certain congressional races in 2012. Hess summarizes his frustration in the final sentence of his book: “Although there are glimmers of hope...the achievements to date are far too modest to allow us to ponder the world that we are leaving our grandchildren without a sense of shame.”

David Hess has done a great job in this book, both in outlining the need for good green jobs in the United States and for diagnosing why there has been so little progress to date. The issues he discusses are not going away. Hopefully, this book and others will be the catalyst to better address both climate concerns and the need for jobs in a timelier manner in the future. □

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