

Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians

A collection of texts in response to

*Acting on Climate Change:
Solutions from Canadian Scholars*,

a consensus document released in March 2015



Faculty of
Science



ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

CENTRALE DES SYNDICATS DU QUÉBEC

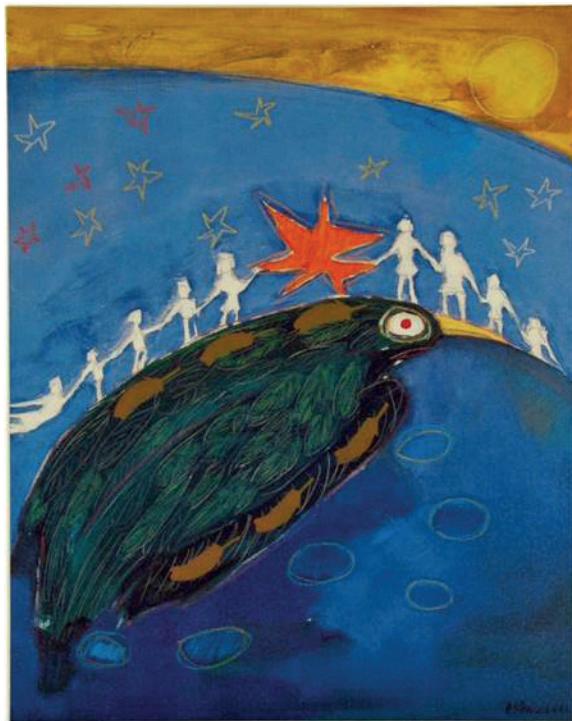
JEAN ROBITAILLE

The Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ) represents more than 200 000 members, nearly 130 000 of which are educational personnel. It is the largest trade union organization in education and early childhood in Quebec. The CSQ is also active in health and social services, childcare, municipal, leisure, cultural, community and communications sectors. The CSQ initiated the Établissement vert Brundtland (EVB)¹, a network of 1400 institutions that aspires to a more environmentally friendly, peaceful, united and democratic world. Created in the wake of the Brundtland Report², the EVB-CSQ movement is the main network of schools promoting this type of education in Quebec. Today, more than one-third of Quebec schools have an education plan based on promotion of these four flagship values.

What is the relationship between EVB and the CSQ? The CSQ works with teachers to train them in pedagogical approaches to issues related to sustainable development. This is to equip teachers to take action with youth and support them in projects that target youth involvement in concrete actions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT
robitaille.jean@lacsq.org

OFFICIAL WEBSITE
evb.lacsq.org



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The Role of Education in the Transition to a Low-carbon Economy

An Interview With Jean Robitaille, CSQ

Conducted by Ms. Divya Sharma, *Sustainable Canada Dialogues*

Original text in French available at www.sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/fr/vert/versundialogue

This contribution is an interview with Jean Robitaille, educational consultant for a sustainable future at Centrale des syndicats du Québec.

Question from Sustainable Canada Dialogues:

What is the role of education in the transition toward a low-carbon economy?

Jean Robitaille: Since the EVB-CSQ movement began in 1993, CSQ's concern has always been to inform the public and, in particular, young people about issues concerning environment, peace, solidarity and democracy – issues that must be addressed simultaneously if we want to move toward real sustainable development. The first observation we can make is that the dominant discourse still pits economy and environment in opposition, often to the detriment of the social aspect. There needs to be a new narrative and educative effort to show

that we cannot have one without the other. *Environment* is the basis on which societies are built, while the *economy* is a means to meet the needs of those societies. However, just looking out the window or listening to the newscast, one realizes the consequences of climate change are becoming apparent. I have the impression the population is beginning to make connections and to understand more about what's happening.

Education can contribute significantly to changing the discourse around issues such as climate change. The problem, often, is that people are made to believe the solution is merely technological. Canada's commitment at the G7 meeting in Germany in June 2015 illustrates this vision^{3,4}: by focusing on technology, it will be possible

³ <http://www.ledevoir.com/international/actualites-internationales/442197/sommet-du-g7-harper-discute-de-changements-climatiques-au-2e-jour>

⁴ http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/06/08/changements-climatiques-le-canada-et-le-japon-ont-dilue-la-declaration-du-g7_n_7536364.html

1 <http://www.evb.lacsq.org/accueil/>

2 <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

to have solutions that enable continued use of oil. That's an important problem because the main changes needed are changes in mentality.

During her visit to Montreal in June 2015, Ségolène Royal, French Minister of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, spoke about a third industrial revolution. I enjoyed that; it's something the average person can relate to. We can see to some extent how the first industrial revolution led, in the second instance, to changes in communications, opening of markets and even globalization. The idea of a third revolution is therefore positive. It would lead to dematerialization and a low-carbon economy. *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* is clear on this point. It develops well the idea that a low-carbon economy and society will be a transition similar to the way the industrial revolution was a transition. We need to insist a little on these ideas from the point of view of education.

Workers may see the transition to a low-carbon economy in a threatening light. It will be all the more threatening if we do not now set in place the actions needed to transform our economy into a low-carbon economy. This brings us to the link between environment, economy and employment, for example during discussions against the transport of oil through Quebec and into New Brunswick. The reflex of industry is to say "in any case, we have oil, so it should be used. It's a way to ensure economic development". The industry should instead speak of the transition to low-carbon, and the effort companies should make to break free from carbon. There's currently no transition action plan in Canada that offers an alternative to oil. To me, this is a major problem.

I work mainly in schools with teachers, support staff, professionals and indirectly with young

people. In the EVB-CSQ, we talk increasingly about how to rethink to some extent the way we present messages to young people. A few years ago we organized a symposium, entitled *How to talk to young people about the future*. Newspapers, television, radio bulletins – they all project an image of the future that is too dark, too bleak. We need to change to what we call "a pedagogy of hope".

We must present solutions and ensure that young people can participate in these solutions. We're working more and more toward youth engagement so that young people become aware of their chance to act on reality and be part of the solution, rather than be spectators of decisions that are taken above their heads and over which they have no control. So education has a very important role to play in that respect. We need to know about the initiatives undertaken by academics, civil society and businesses that are already following the green transition.

Promising solutions such as a circular economy, reductions at the source, and so on, are not put forward and are not presented to young people. Similarly there are no real choices offered to workers. They are given a false choice: either keep your job or end oil (or forest) exploitation. This is well illustrated by the tension between the papermaker Resolute Forestry Products and Greenpeace in Saguenay⁵. In this case, some tried to shift the blame to civil society when international action, that it's beneficial to respect, was taken over the forest. There is a lack of political will to change things. In conditions like this, since jobs are at stake, a major problem of perception is created because the alternatives are not presented. Thus in schools we have an important role to play: that of demonstrating the existence of solutions,

⁵ <http://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/saguenay-mayor-sparks-new-controversy>

which can often be applied right away but are held back due the lack of political will and political decision-making.

Another big problem is household debt, which is related to the increasingly individualistic society in which we live. Someone who is financially stretched would be more receptive to solutions that will help solve their problems than those that will allow redistribution of wealth. So we must make links between our consumption and the impact of our consumption on the use of oil and, therefore, on issues of climate change.

Question from Sustainable Canada Dialogues:

I would like to look to the past: Quebec has already experienced major transitions like the Quiet Revolution and, more recently, a revolution in communications with the advent of the Internet. Here, certain employment sectors have certainly contracted while others have emerged. Are there lessons learned that could inform the transition toward a low-carbon economy?

Jean Robitaille: Having very, very vast oil production has led to a rise in the Canadian dollar and done much harm to the manufacturing markets in Quebec and Ontario. It would have been a nice opportunity to redistribute oil profits, to get companies to change

their practices. I feel the damage is done, and the work environment is behind the times in this transition. It's certain that it will have an impact on the job market and it's important to train existing workers and new cohorts of students in a way that enables them to adapt to a labour market based on a low-carbon economy.

Therefore we work a lot with young people in high school on the idea of youth leadership. We seek to organize youth leadership days, open to secondary schools around Quebec, with around a hundred youth delegates to whom we present reasons to engage, as well as the means to engage. For example, we show them how to form a committee and how to publicize projects they're launching. These leadership days end with implementation of an action plan for their school together with school personnel, to educate the entire school community about current problems and solutions.

We appreciate the work done by Sustainable Canada Dialogues to build relationships and present solutions. We would be very interested in strengthening such exchanges, which could be realized in the framework of our activities, either through our national and regional sessions or directly with young people at major youth leadership meetings that we will organize as of next year.



ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

SUSTAINABLE CANADA DIALOGUES

This contribution is part of a collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, stemming from interactions between Sustainable Canada Dialogues, an initiative of the UNESCO-McGill Chair for Dialogues on Sustainability, and business associations, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, labour groups, institutions, organizations and private citizens.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues is a voluntary initiative that mobilizes over 60 researchers from every province in Canada, representing disciplines across engineering, sciences and social sciences. We are motivated by a shared view that putting options on the table will stimulate action and is long overdue in Canada.

Together, the contributions enrich the scope of possible solutions and show that Canada is brimming with ideas, possibilities and the will to act. The views expressed in *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* are those of the contributors, and are not necessarily endorsed by Sustainable Canada Dialogues.

We thank all contributors for engaging in this dialogue with us to help reach a collective vision of desired pathways to our futures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change