

Kelman, I. 2010. "Review of 'The Fire Dogs of Climate Change: An Inspirational Call to Action'". Weather and Society Watch, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 8-9.

Full text:

"In the Chinese Year of the Fire Dog (February 2006-2007), I opened my heart a little to the Earth" (p. 10) writes Sally Andrew as the first sentence in *The Fire Dogs of Climate Change: An Inspirational Call to Action*. Her discoveries send her into despair at the wreck that humanity is making of the planet, followed by elation at those around the world who select different pathways—pathways that reduce and undo the damage. Her focus is contemporary climate change, one of humanity's many environmental and human catastrophes.

Fire Dogs is 142 pages plus a greenhouse gas emissions flowchart. The book is balanced between Andrew's personal journeys and facts about climate change, covering the science and actions necessary to tackle the problem. These chapters are interspersed, continually keeping the reader engaged with different writing styles, a plethora of ideas, and varying perspectives of the same challenge.

Andrew's exploration to understand and constructively deal with the horrors that climate change brings is based in her previous anti-apartheid activism and personal battle with a debilitating illness. The personal anecdotes are highly emotive, conveying the meaning of learning about the mess that humanity has created of Earth—and what can and should be done to change.

Fire Dogs becomes an impressive collection of inspiring examples on action and on technology. That clever separation ensures that the reader does not fall into the common trap of assuming that technology can and will be a saviour. Much more is needed. Andrew's educational examples, including a "Educator's Guide," further reinforce the need for education, behavioural change, and attitude change, rather than investing all expectations in technology.

While some might criticize the heavy focus on referencing Web sites, the focus appeals to those who most need to change to deal with climate change and other sustainability concerns—those who are affluent enough to have Internet access. Consequently, Andrew is astute in admitting and emphasising the root causes of climate change.

It's not simply greenhouse gases, but that "Our Western Capitalist approach to development has failed. We can't continue with 'growth' and 'development' that is driven by profit, rather than the needs of this planet and the life (including people) that lives on it." (p. 44). We cannot solve problems through similar solutions that created them. For instance, Andrew makes a well-argued plea against nuclear power, providing common sense for a debate often obscured by the factoids and half-truths of the pro-nuclear lobby.

Similarly, Andrew asks pointed, poignant questions that are often sidestepped: "There is no choice about whether to switch over to renewable energy. The question is when: now or later?" (p. 52). Highlighting fundamentals leaves room for direct arguments on solutions that are often trampled in rhetoric, such as Andrew's common sense and accurate description of how sustainable energy solutions create jobs—not harm the economy as is usually claimed without evidence by the fossil fuel lobby.

The major approaches presented by *Fire Dogs* are all given a healthy dose of realism. Examples are the succinct descriptions of the advantages and disadvantages of biofuels and carbon capture and storage. Andrew raises needed questions about today's use of wind energy and then explains the importance of alternative approaches involving wind energy. As such, the book does not paralyze with fear or hopelessness. It grasps the problem, personalizes it, and pragmatically explains what can and cannot—as well as what should and should not—be done.

Some minor inconsistencies emerge, such as on page 74, where Andrew indicates support for the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which is “opposed in principle to all whaling by any people”. On the same page, she implies that she has solidarity with indigenous lifestyles and peoples. Many indigenous groups prefer sustainable whaling to flying in more tinned food. Nonetheless, Andrew writes and acts from the heart, while remaining refreshingly hyperbole-free.

An example is Andrew mentioning but not emulating Bill McKibben's campaign, which favours style over substance. McKibben effectively uses social media to mobilize crowds, particularly youth, to advocate for 350 ppm or less of CO₂ in the atmosphere. He has had an impressive impact and is worthy of notice. Yet McKibben does not address deeper issues beyond the superficial number. Examples are: (i) how his goal could be achieved without causing more harm and (ii) whether ppm CO₂ in the atmosphere is the best metric—or, more philosophically, whether a quantitative metric is an appropriate target.

In contrast, Andrew displays both style and substance. One chapter asks “How Can You Make a Difference?” and then provides practical answers. *Fire Dogs* thus achieves its aim of “An Inspirational Call to Action” but goes further. A call to action, yes, but also providing what you need to make your own blueprint for acting.

*The *Fire Dogs of Climate Change: An Inspirational Call to Action* by Sally Andrew is available from Findhorn Press, 2009. For more information, please visit <http://sallyandrew.findhornpress.com>

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