Why Al Gore's Nobel speech rates just a "B"

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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With the U.S. government's willful, Earth-h(e)ating position befitting a rogue state -- as 190 countries meet to cut greenhouse gas emissions -- Al Gore is already the moral leader of the U.S. in the eyes of the world. He hits the Bali United Nations meeting full of momentum, fresh from receiving the world's top honor in Oslo. On Monday he gave an historic speech on the state of the global climate and what is to be done about it, when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize along with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Nevertheless, I'd give Al Gore's speech no better than a "B" grade, to encourage a better rating very soon. He has come a long way, even since "An Inconvenient Truth," by calling for a 90% cut in greenhouse gases -- but, by the time he wants to see it phased in, 2050, it would be too late. At root, his message is compromised by his imperative to push for acceptable notions of environmental economic reforms. If you believe he is your savior of the planet, examine his assumptions and priorities, and be prepared to be your own leader as soon as you finish reading this (and use our tools in the first link).

The strengths of Al Gore's Nobel Prize acceptance speech were worthy of the highest grade for his revealing what our world's environmental crisis is about, and how serious it is. Also, he scored points for not calling for economic growth as the solution, although he still cheer-leads for global economic opportunity. His improvement over the years is heartening, but is it quick enough? Is he still trying to be both a corporate-state player and tree-hugger?

Gore's failure to turn in an A+ performance in his speech rests mainly on his omissions (e.g., reduce the birth rate big-time, deal with peak oil). Another error was his implying that mainly we have available to us a technological approach to reverse drastically our greenhouse gas emissions. Although changing our technological capabilities to make across-the-board replacements of machines and other items of manufacture -- principally petroleum-derived/enabled -- is partially underway, it is too limited and not nearly so effective as slashing consumption and restructuring our way of life. Gore implies that we can have it both ways: ongoing energy use and consumerism, and save the planet along with all manner of ills such as AIDS. He stated,

"This new consciousness requires expanding the possibilities inherent in all humanity. The innovators who will devise a new way to harness the sun’s energy for pennies or invent an engine that’s carbon negative may live in Lagos or Mumbai or Montevideo. We must ensure that entrepreneurs and inventors everywhere on the globe have the chance to change the world."

Al, the bicycle has already been invented.

If you want to promote the hell out of it, we don't even mind if you take credit for inventing it. (Sorry, couldn't resist a cheap joke.)

Just as disturbing may be Gore's endorsement of carbon credits. Although the system worked "well" for cutting back on acid-rain pollutants, we are no longer in those innocent days where we can afford to accommodate powerful corporate polluters and their corrupting, financial clout. Now that we are facing extinction of ourselves and perhaps most species, it is time to turn off the power -- while a minimum is produced for basic subsistence. If that sounds outrageous and barbaric, what would you prefer: subsistence or extinction?

Would you rather be an obedient tax-payer, and wait for "leaders" to do the right thing for the climate? News item: "Washington rejected stiff 2020 targets for greenhouse gas cuts by rich nations at U.N. talks in Bali on Monday..." (Reuters, Dec. 10). Who is your friend and who is your enemy now, in our changing, precarious world? Should your government be rewarded with taxes and maximum consumption to keep the economy going? Ask Al Gore about this, as he believes the crisis is such that we have a seven-year window to start reversing CO2 emissions, as reiterated by his co-awardee of the Nobel Peace Prize, IPCC's chairman Rajendra Pachauri, with Gore in Oslo on Dec. 9.

Let's give a hearty "Bravo!" for Al Gore's advocating a carbon tax. But wait a minute, what if we didn't buy stuff? Then the products would tend not to be made or transported with all that petroleum.

An inconvenient truth is that people will keep doing what is convenient, such as running the hot water tap freely, or hopping in that car for whatever anthropocentric purpose. Does this hard reality about human nature (or is it our culture?) spell the end of the world as we know it? Maybe, but it definitely means energy-shortage-related collapse just

ahead, given that global peak oil extraction has hit. As long as there is petroleum and money available, there will be little change. What Al Gore is not yet grokking is that a culture change is what he should really want. (Give him time; he may call for it soon.) But in his acceptance speech, he sees losing our civilization as the biggest risk:

"We, the human species, are confronting a planetary emergency -- a threat to the survival of our civilization that is gathering ominous and destructive potential even as we gather here." [Editor's note: this statement can be read two ways: the civilization is gathering ominous and destructive potential, or the threat to our survival is. It is both, but let's ask Al Gore if he knows.]

The day before, he told the world press, ""CO2 increases anywhere are a threat to the future of civilization everywhere," as he drew a parallel with Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Gore also quoted Gandhi in the Nobel acceptance speech. But Gore needs to personally "walk a talk of simplicity and sufficiency, rather than opulence and excess... What if Gore were to sail to Bali, having planned and traveled for months to get there? Then he would be making a leap and his words would be much more powerful, and he would get an "A-Plus" (peace activist Brian Willson, Arcata, California).

Gore also sees and encourages "the world's first people-power movement" to save the climate (Dec. 9, Reuters), and earlier this year he called for civil disobedience to shut down coal-fired power plants. However, can the engine of global warming be turned part way off, or does it function on-or-off only?

The change from our culture to a sustainable one -- however that can be accomplished, as fairly as possible -- won't happen without bringing down the old one. Will Al Gore ever advocate that? The Al Gore we knew would not allow it, and would use his establishment clout -- just as he used it to make sure the present occupant of the White House was not challenged over taking office, when in the U.S. Senate where Gore presided, he opted to ratify the election-selection. As much as Gore is a hero today on the climate issue, we must never forget that it's relative to the bumbling planet killers who are part of the same political system and dominant culture as Al Gore. The begs the question, what would we really like to see happen, if we didn't settle for compromising the climate and Mother Nature?

So, brothers and sisters, while a friend of the earth can revel in Gore's eloquence and well-crafted speech for his deserved Peace Prize, and one can applaud his life purpose, what happens when Gore has distracted us from making radical change? Is that not the role of politicians ensconced in the status quo? Oops, we got fooled again. What are you going to do now? Try taking the Pledge for Climate Protection (link below) and pass along your results. Get an A+ in the eyes of your Mother Earth.

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Pledge for Climate Protection

culturechange.org/global_warming_pledge.html

Al Gore's Nobel acceptance speech

thinkprogress.org

"The inconvenient truth about 'An Inconvenient Truth': Why Al Gore is part dangerous politician", by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #138

culturechange.org

Al Gore's ten-point climate plan: scroll down in "Al Gore and the Wedges Game" by Kelpie Wilson:

truthout.org

Al Gore sees hope in "people power"
Sun Dec 9, 2007 6:40pm GMT
By John Acher and Wojciech Moskwa

uk.reuters.com

"U.S Rejects Stiff 2020 Greenhouse Goals in Bali - Washington Wants Two More Years of Negotiations"
by Emma Graham-Harrison, Reuters, Dec 10, 2007

abcnews.go.com

"Where the '08 Contenders Stand on Global Warming" by Brad Knickerbocker, Christian Science Monitor and Truthout.org:

truthout.org

Join the Global Warming Crisis Council listserve, a comprehensive series of postings on cllimate and energy news and opinion. To receive from and post to gwcc "at" lists.riseup.net, email Wanda B. The Raging Grannie: wsb70 "at" comcast.net

A reader wrote back to us right away:

Gore's biggest omission (in his speech and film) is the insanely destructive environmental impact of the US military machine -- close that down and we are well on the way to reducing GGE by half !!

Please talk about this-

Close our bases world wide, and we have a HUGE effect. Driving Priuses means nothing if the military machine stays open for business.

Thanks-

DR