

## ENVIRONMENT & TRAVEL

### Canada: the blackest sheep of the environmentally unfriendly family ?

By Caroline ADAM

**The idea of Canada being an environmentally friendly country is long-lived but simply wrong when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions.**

Between November 28<sup>th</sup> and December 9<sup>th</sup> 2005, environmentalists from 189 different countries gathered in Montreal for the United Nation Climate Change Conference, to discuss the progress, or lack thereof, made by the Kyoto Protocol signatories. With Chinese and Indian economies booming, the world's carbon dioxide emissions may be up 60% by 2030. So the question remains stubbornly the same : how to control and eventually reduce greenhouse gas emissions, given that the industrialized countries are responsible for about 35% of these.

For the time being, Canada is listed among the worst countries when it comes to curbing its gas emissions: they have been increasing continually and rose by 24% between 1990 and 2003, according to an alarming US environmental report released just before the Montréal conference. By contrast, Britain (-13%), Germany (-18%) and even the US (+13%) have done better !

The Canadian Environment Minister, Stéphane Dion, claims that Canada's increase is partly due to the country's economic growth, and more specifically to its booming energy industry.<sup>1</sup> Unconventional resources hidden in the oil sands of Alberta have recently transformed Canada into the home of the world's second biggest proven oil reserves after Saudi Arabia. It is currently the biggest supplier of oil and natural gas to the United States, and its exports to China have soared.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously Mr Dion made a public pledge that Canada would soon start to make amends : " At the end of the day in 2012 [when the Kyoto Protocol ends], we'll have far less emissions and also much more economic efficiency."<sup>3</sup> Mr Dion later added "The Kyoto Protocol isn't a Bible, we can improve it."

Yet, it will take more than words to put this well meaning declaration into practice. With new international talks on climate policy and new targets in the air, it looks as if Canada will have a lot of catching up to do.<sup>4</sup> The fact that the country is undergoing a deep political crisis will not help. As Canada braces up for its second general election in less than two years, environmental issues might very well slip down the political agenda and it is unlikely that much significant progress will be made in the near future.

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<sup>1</sup> « Dion, Environmentalists Hang Tough at UN Talks, » *The Globe and Mail* 29 November 2005.

<sup>2</sup> « Stormy Canada, a Survey, » *The Economist* 3 December 2005.

<sup>3</sup> « UN Poised to Launch Fresh Talks on Climate, » *The Globe and Mail* 10 December 2005.

<sup>4</sup> « Conference Delegates agree to Post-Kyoto Talks, » *The Globe and Mail* 12 December 2005.