"Brief Reviews"

Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving Time
Michael Downing
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by Jeff Bursey

In early August the *Globe and Mail* reported that the premiers, while in Alberta, might discuss the issue of Daylight Saving Time, compelled by George Bush's plan to extend it by one month in his country. The reasons given for the proposed extension are "complaints from farmers and airlines", and "limited savings on energy costs". As Michael Downing's latest book shows, these reasons are specious and empty, and have been thoroughly debated for nearly a century. In the aftermath of the First World War the U.S. Congress held hearings on the matter. In the summer of 1919, Sidney Colgate of Colgate Toothpaste testified that the nation would save energy. He began boldly: "There is a vast saving in coal and wood, but that fact might go without question. There are hundreds of thousands and even millions of tons of coal saved annually by this daylight-saving bill." Under questioning, he retreated from that assured position: "[Daylight Saving Time] does not do everything, and does not save all the coal in the country, but it saves quite a little. I know it was thought so, and that was not questioned at the time of the war, when we wanted to save coal. People thought we were saving coal at that time, and I am sure we were." In 1985, again it was argued by a U.S. politician that an eight-month stretch of DST would save consumers in the U.S. "as much as 100,000 barrels of oil a day." Four years ago, Congress considered the alleged benefits of Extended and Double Daylight Saving Time, but "no /**8**/ one could yet determine whetherDaylight Saving saved energy."

As for farmers, Downing shows in convincing manner that while they are often seen as the bogeymen—"Why can't the fuckwit farmers just set their bloody alarms back an hour and get out of bed earlier? Why must the whole population suffer for theit stupidity and laziness?" asks one blog writer rhetorically—they have generally been opposed to changing the clocks. "From the first [1917], farmers opposed Daylight Saving, which was an urban idea of a good idea, hatched in London and cultivated in the cities of Europe and the northern United States." In 1949 many farmers sought to have Standard Time "mandatory throughout the year."

But will no one think of the children? Many advocates and protestors do, at least twice a year. They are routinely listed as potential victims of dark mornings, but the statistical sample in the U.S. of accidents involving them, or motor vehicles in general, after the switch to DST is incredibly small and completely useless.

Downing lists those fondest of DST. Not surprisingly, the financial and mercantile sectors like it. For stockbroker and arbitrageurs in New York, being closer to the opening hour of London's stock exchange makes transactions more lucrative, though Downing doesn't provide even speculative figures on this. As for business, "In 1984, *Fortune* magazine had estimated that a seven-week extension of Daylight Saving would yield an additional $30 million just for... 7-11 stores... The $22 billion sporting goods industry was looking forward to a $20 annual million

boost" in the sale of sports paraphenalia. Candy makers, too, would reap gains from a brighter Hallowe'en.

In the past, when the U.S. government ruled that time must be one way, individual states often exercised their right to opt out. Downing goes into these disputes, and much else, in sufficient detail to clarify a confusing topic. He briefly sketches the situation in other countries and on other continents, with a special emphasis on England. This is essentially a light-hearted book on a continuing source of annoyance and political and media hyperbole. Though the humour is at times strained, and the grip on the material occasionally loose, it's a useful compendium of the arguments for and against changing the clocks.

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