

[22nd July 2006 – Convenient Untruths – Morning Star](#)



Hey, sucker. Try this on for size. Climate Change is good for you.

The world's scientists may be screaming at us that never before has the way we live so threatened the prospects of life itself, but reassurance is at hand. A series of television adverts have just been shown in the USA claiming that increasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are to be welcomed.

"They call it pollution; we call it life," schmoozes the first advert; emphasising that the whole of our biodiversity depends on carbon dioxide for its growth, variety

and exuberance. You can just feel the comfort factor kicking in. Turn up the air conditioning, honey.

Now as far as I'm aware, none of the climate change scientists have ever been arguing in favour of a carbon-free planet. Their case is that never before have we been pushing carbon emissions to a level the planet cannot sustain, and that there is overwhelming (if not incontrovertible) evidence that carbon levels directly correlate to temperature change.

Here again, the advertisers have an answer. "Global Warming can be a good thing. Did you know that Yorkshire used to export wine in Roman times?" Now, before you all dash out in search of a bottle of the best Cotes du Rotherham, you might want to ask a little about the background of both the adverts and the advertisers.

The media campaign has been timed to coincide with the launch of Al Gore's documentary film 'An Inconvenient Truth'. The film is a powerful element in Gore's rediscovery of political purpose. In climate change terms, Gore has become an apostle of the urgent. He insists

on facing us with the costs and consequences of where we are heading.

The flow of ice from Greenland's glaciers has doubled in the last 10 years. The most severe hurricanes (category 4 and 5) have doubled in the last 30 years. On current terms, deaths from global warming will double – to 300,000 a year – in just under 25 years.

The media campaign against the Gore message comes from a different source. The Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) has paid for the adverts, though the Institute itself has been largely funded by Exxon Mobil, and prides itself as being a free market, anti-regulation, think tank.

The Institute sees global warming as little more than a cunning European plot to damage US competitiveness, and views the Gore campaign as "the regulatory equivalent of war." Sam Kazman, a CEI counsel member, described the whole approach to carbon foot printing as "the environmentalist version of criminal fingerprints – a basis for fines, restraints and punishment."

For Europeans, this may all appear as just another example of modern America's disconnection from the real world. Surely American's don't fall for this advertising crap. What if they do? To an extent, however, both questions are marginal to where the US is now. The free market lobby groups have bought their influence where it matters – in policies coming out of the White House, Congress and the Senate.

In real life, the West Wing of the White House is occupied not by Martin Sheen, but the vice President Dick Cheney. If the thought of this sucks away your will to live, the reality isn't much better. Cheney has pulled a number of Texan oil interests and carbon guzzling lobby groups into a highly secretive National Energy Policy Development Group. The Group has taken no minutes of its meetings, but has been behind the rolling back of over 200 environmental laws by the Bush administration.

Last August, the administration announced it would re-define carbon dioxide so that it no longer counted as a pollutant. Carbon dioxide, therefore, would not be subject to regulation under the Clean Air Act. What an act of genius. Problem solved. Re-define pollution as **not** pollution and the issue goes away. Better still, re-brand the legislation at the same time as emasculating it and you can even attach a feel-good factor to crapping on the planet. The Healthy Forests Restoration

Act may allow for widespread destruction of ancient US woodlands, but the act at least has a breathe-easy sound to it. Plus Good, Doubleplus Good.

The purpose of looking at this is not to make fun of Americans, nor to mock the plight of a country that will be knocked sideways by the seismic upheavals that increasing hurricanes, droughts, sea level changes and energy crises are set to bring it. The purpose is to look at the crude lobbying, the manufacture of confusion, and the propagation of convenient untruths that is already making its way from the US to the UK and continental Europe. As it was with the old lobby of cigarette manufacturers, the principal tool of the corporate 'business as usual' lobby, is the manufacture of doubt. It seeks to override the colossal basis of scientific knowledge (and consensus) with the notion that climate change is still open to dispute. A leaked memo from the American Petroleum Institute could not have been clearer: "Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the 'body of fact' that exists in the minds of the general public."

In the UK, their closest equivalent is to be found in the London based, Scientific Alliance. Their claim is to be an independent think tank of 200 or so 'sceptical scientists', though in practice they appear to do little more than regurgitate, wholesale, the views of right-wing lobby groups. Though the funding behind the Alliance is still unclear, you will find the Alliance arguing in favour of the nuclear industry, GM crops and against environmental regulation or environmental taxes.

Lift the curtain that notionally separates Downing Street from industry and you soon discover a plethora of well financed lobby groups pushing for deregulation and a 'cautious' approach to climate change issues. Some, like the Society of Motor Manufacturers, the Freedom to Fly Coalition, and the Supporters of Nuclear Energy, even want government subsidy (or tax exemptions) for the 'freedoms' or mock solutions they offer.

What we require is not just a head on challenge to the corporate 'confuse the public' lobby, but a more visionary advocacy of the practical choices about radically changing the way we live.

It isn't an accident that 80% of new buildings in Berlin generate their own energy. It comes directly from the German Renewable Energies Act (2004), which changed the rules of the energy markets. You now get paid four times as much for the energy you produce as for the energy you consume. Suddenly energy self-generation makes money

and becomes as much a part of building design as wiring and plumbing. Remove the ceiling on private wire networks and suddenly you make it attractive for local authority energy networks to exist on the same scale in the UK as they already do in Denmark and the Netherlands.

If China can develop a whole eco-city at Dongtan, including putting its waste into bio-digestors (to produce gas and bio-fuel) then so could we. All that's needed is for public authorities to have a power or duty to make this a development requirement.

I recently visited a remarkable farm just outside Loughborough where Professor Tony Marmont not only runs the place on solar and hydrogen cells, but where he continues to be a haven of inventiveness. Not the least of the things he has produced is a carbon-neutral aviation fuel. The trouble is the blank wall of disinterest that confronts him from the industry itself. Yet if we gave airports carbon quotas, rather than messing about with the nightmare complexity in tradable pollution credits, there would be a cavalry charge in pursuit of carbon-free or carbon-neutral fuels.

When Al Gore ran through his well groomed presentation about the climate change challenge, he finished with perhaps the two big points about the paradox of where we are now. The first is that never before in human history have we had such an array of sustainable technologies that might...just might... get us through this century. But never before have we so lacked the political will to break from the business as usual lobby.

The second paradox is about leadership. If leaders have already sold their allegiance to corporate lobbyists, and nations only negotiate treaties about how little they must do, maybe political leadership must pass from parliament to the public. For the sake of the kids... it's down to us.

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