

Global Warming and Other Environmental Myths: The Economic Consequences of Fact vs. Media Perception

By

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I believe in freedom. I believe in liberty. I believe that no one is so wise they can plan things for other people. And so, as we reach the end of the 20th century and as the 21st century approaches, I cannot help but reflect upon two different observations.

First — looking back — we in the Western industrialized nations have been privileged to live in a century of such progress in knowledge and in its use for the betterment of human society as has never before been experienced. From the vantage point of greater longevity, better health, expanded and more nutritious food supplies, large scale freedom from back breaking manual labor, the marvel of electronics, increased mobility, and unprecedented personal liberty, we appear to view it all as nothing more than a basic human right. Perhaps we should recall the words of Lord Chesterton, one of the great English writers of the past, who said at the beginning of the Industrial Age, and I quote, "We are perishing," he said, "for lack of Wonder, not for lack of wonders."

Second — looking forward — we seem not only to have lost a sense of wonder at human accomplishments but to accept the notion that all progress now must cease. It must stop because, according to some people, everything we have achieved has also caused too much damage to the earth. In the name of environmentalism we must change, they say, from a society that believes in progress to one that is dedicated to sustainability. Now it is by no means clear just what this condition of "sustainability" refers to, except that it is essentially a back-to-nature movement, and it is outspokenly anti-industrialization.

Mr. Maurice Strong, the head of the United Nations environmental programs, wrote, in August of 1991, "It is clear that current life-styles and consumption patterns of the affluent middle class, involving high meat intake [Mr. Strong is a vegetarian], consumption of large amounts of frozen and con-

venience foods, ownership of motor vehicles, small electrical appliances, home and work place air conditioning, and suburban housing, are not sustainable. A shift is necessary toward life-styles less geared to environmentally damaging consumption patterns."

And earlier this year, Mr. Lester Brown, who is the president of an organization called World Watch Institute, said, "Building an environmentally sustainable future requires restricting the global economy, dramatically changing human reproductive behavior, and altering values and life-styles. Doing all of this quickly requires nothing short of a revolution." Now all of that is a pretty big order, and I think that neither the "affluent middle class" to whom Maurice Strong refers or anyone else is going to like it very well! Remember, these two individuals are among the leadership of the much-publicized Earth Summit, which was held last June in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, but their positions were not reported by the press despite the fact that more than 7,000 reporters were in attendance.

More about the Earth Summit later. For now, the question I want to discuss is this: are the so-called global environmental issues so serious that they demand revolutionary changes in our modern, Western, high-tech society — changes that would have drastic economic consequences? Those environmentalists who are identified as "activists" — the ones who are spokesmen and who have political clout — maintain that, indeed, the following problems must be alleviated as soon as possible: 1) global warming; 2) ozone depletion, and; 3) the size of the human population. Are they correct in their position?

Global Warming

Nearly everyone believes that the earth is heating up. Is it? Probably not — at least there is no evidence that it is. Why then do so many believe in global warming? Because everybody says so. And that is the only position that is widely reported. Further, although there has been considerable coverage of the predicted consequences of climate changes, such things as harmful effects upon agriculture, the melting of polar ice caps, which will flood coastal areas and low lying islands, there has been little, if any, analysis of the economic consequences of proposed solutions.

Publicity has also been given to the assumption that the presumed climate change is caused by increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and that this in turn has been caused by burning fossil fuels in industrialized societies. But almost no attention, or very little, has been given to the possible causes

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other than humans using fossil fuels. The press itself has become an advocate for one answer to the question. Now all of this is pretty heady stuff. That is to say, the charges make good headlines. The only problem is, everything in the generally publicized situation is based upon assumptions, upon theory, upon computer models and computer simulations. What in fact are the facts?

Temperature records taken in North America and Western Europe over the past 150 years show many ups and downs but no clear trend either toward warming or toward cooling. This is also borne out by analysis of 135 years of recorded temperatures of the sea surface taken by ships and ships' personnel. And, more recently, satellite data recording 24 hours of temperature readings from all over the globe reveal, at most, there has been a possible 0.3° centigrade temperature rise during 13 years, that is 1978 to 1991, of continuous satellite temperatures. Now, 0.3° centigrade is hardly anything anyone can perceive without very special instruments. Were the global warming-greenhouse theory borne out in nature, we should have experienced an increase from between 2° and 4° centigrade during the past 200 years. But this has not happened.

Historical data also remind us that the earth passes through warm phases and cold ones. The medieval period, for example, was warm. It was followed by the so-called "little ice age," which lasted until about 1850 and from which the northern hemisphere is probably still recovering. On a longer time scale, we cannot overlook the fact that there have been ice ages and there have been warm periods in between. In fact, if we look at the entire history of the earth for as far back as we know it has existed, about 80 percent of the time the northern hemisphere has been covered with ice, and we live in a most unique period of somewhat warmer temperatures.

Climate changes, both large and small, tend to be cyclic and they are likely related to changes in the sun itself, where in fact all climate starts, and its cycles of sunspots and solar flares.

Two Danish scientists, E. Friis-Christensen and K. Lassen, reported last year that there is a clear parallel between the 11-year sunspot cycle and ocean temperatures, which have been measured in the northern latitudes as part of a harbor ice observation for the last 130 years.

And in April of this year, Dr. Robert E. Stevenson, who is Secretary-General of the International Association for the Physical Sciences of the Ocean, reported, "Mean sea level has not changed in the past century (which puts the lie to the ecologist's argument that global warming is melting ice and the polar caps), atmospheric temperatures though having up and down cycles, have not established a trend in either direction." *No measurement that has been taken and recorded in the past 200 years has been outside normal variations.*

Finally, when even the best of the global climate computer models is tested against the weather of the past few decades — where we know, indeed, what has happened — they don't fit! The very best ones, from the National Center for Atmospheric Research at Boulder, Colorado, predict that as much rain falls in the Sahara Desert as in Ireland. Anybody who would believe that needs to have some second thoughts. But anyone who watches the daily weather forecasts on the evening television programs knows that with the very best and most expensive computer technology available it is still not possible to predict, accurately and consistently, what the weather is going to be 5

days in advance. Why, then, should anybody believe that they can predict what's going to happen in 5 years, or 50 years, or 150 years?

Even so, the media do not report these contrary data, not even when more than 50 of the outstanding and leading atmospheric scientists in the United States signed a statement — a petition, if you will — saying that the global warming theory is "highly uncertain" and that it is "... based upon unsupported assumptions that catastrophic global warming follows from the burning of fossil fuels and requires immediate action." They ended their petition with this simple sentence: "We do not agree."

Now this statement is especially important since the nations that were present at the Earth Summit (and there were 178 in all) have already signed an international agreement to limit the production of carbon dioxide to 1990 levels. The consequence of this action is predominately economic. According to a study by the environment ministers of the European Community, it means that to limit carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels will require that coal prices jump 58 percent, heavy oil for industry 45 percent, natural gas for industry 34 percent. Heating oil for homes and offices would jump 16 percent, natural gas for home heating 16 percent, diesel fuel would climb 11 percent and gasoline prices 6 percent. These estimates are probably conservative. Industry sources maintain that the agreements already reached will probably cause a tripling in overall fuel prices.

In the United States, a reduction of carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels will require a carbon tax of \$200 per ton of CO₂ produced. This translates into a tax of \$150 per ton of coal burned, \$38 tax per barrel of oil and \$1.78 tax per 1,000 cubic feet of natural gas. To date, neither economists nor the press has shown any interest in the consequences of such price increases. And according to Maurice Strong these costs could run as high as \$600 billion per year to the industrialized nations.

Considering the lack of evidence to support the theory of global warming, coupled with the facts that 1) if global warming should occur, it is not carbon dioxide that is the important greenhouse gas anyhow, rather it is water vapor. It is water vapor and clouds that would account for 98 percent of the effect, and 2) carbon dioxide is not an air pollutant. It is produced whenever any kind of organic material is burned or oxidized and, more than that, it is absolutely necessary as a nutrient for all green growing plants. The plant world is the only source of oxygen on which all of us depend to stay alive. Carbon dioxide has a positive benefit for green plants — the more of it that is in the atmosphere, the better they like it. If the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere should double, and this has been done experimentally by controlling the atmospheres in which plants grow, it results in a 30 percent increase in growth and in harvest yield. But the public never hears about this. Well, so much for global warming.

Ozone Depletion

The facts about ozone are these:

- Solar radiation strikes the stratosphere — that is the area above the atmosphere — with its ultraviolet (UV) component it splits oxygen molecules, which then combine to form ozone. The UV energy is absorbed in this process, and consequently does not, therefore, penetrate to the surface of the earth.

- Ozone molecules are relatively unstable and under conditions of extremely low temperature, the formation of ice crystals, or the presence of chloride or nitrogen ions, the ozone will undergo chemical reaction, that is to say, the ozone will be destroyed. The formation and the breakdown of ozone occurs continuously, in amounts of about a billion tons or so every second. The amount of ozone present at any one time is the result of the balance between its formation by absorbing UV light and its destruction due to natural forces. Natural fluctuations in the amount of ozone are as much as 40 percent from day to day and, occasionally, very much more.

- Any reduction of ozone in the stratosphere of 50 percent or more is, by convention, called a "hole." There never is an opening, or a place where ozone isn't — it's just if that much is removed then it is called a hole. The unique conditions that occur at the south pole at the end of the antarctic winter result in the fact of 50 percent depletion or more almost every season. This situation lasts for from 3 to 5 weeks and then it is reconstituted. There is no such thing as a permanent loss of ozone. This phenomenon was discovered by Dr. Reginald Dobson in 1956 and 1957, long before chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) were in common use. But the widely accepted theory today holds that the CFCs are responsible for this event, which, may I emphasize again, preceded their use. The extent of the so-called antarctic ozone "hole" varies from year to year and is related to the length of the solar sunspot cycle.

- In 1961 there was a dramatic decrease in the amount of ozone in the stratosphere (nobody knows why that happened) and until 1970 it was on the increase, with the greatest amount of ozone ever measured occurring in 1979, and then it started decreasing again, until about 1986 when it reached a low point, and now is increasing once more.

None of these data — none of these actual measurements — supports the theory that CFCs destroy ozone. Nonetheless, the theory that CFCs are responsible for serious and, it is implied, permanent, destruction of the ozone layer in the stratosphere is perpetuated by the media. Not reported is the fact that actual measurements, taken since 1974, show that the amount of UV radiation reaching the surface of the earth is and continues to be decreasing slightly — not increasing as it would be if there were less ozone present in the stratosphere.

Now all of this would be merely of academic interest to scientists were it not for the association of UV exposure to the development of skin cancer. Scare stories about increased UV radiation have unduly frightened people because of what the press has not reported. That is, that slight increases in UV penetration related to the variations in ozone concentrations are far, far, far less than normal variations that people experience because of differences in geography. The plain fact is that, normally and naturally, there is more UV penetration at the equator than at the north or south poles.

If a person moves, say, from an area nearer either one of the polar areas toward the equator, by the time he reaches the equator his UV-light exposure will increase 5,000 percent! People from England or from Scandinavia who move to Northern Australia increase their exposure 600 percent. For every six miles closer to the equator that anyone goes, it increases his UV exposure by 1 percent. I have not heard of anyone turning down a vacation on the French Riviera, or a trip to the South Seas, or any such thing, because of fear of increased UV

exposure. There is also an increase in UV concentration for every 100 feet of elevation; but this does not prevent people from living at high elevations, or even living in a country like Switzerland, nor does it prevent people from climbing mountains. The human body is accustomed to these kinds of variations and we all know that.

Furthermore, the press has been negligent in not pointing out that there are three different kinds of skin cancer, only one of which has a high mortality. Common skin cancers are curable in 99 percent of the cases. Only malignant melanoma is the fatal type and it does not appear, despite enormous numbers of studies, that malignant melanoma has any kind of causal relationship with UV exposure.

Despite these realities, the production and use of CFCs has been banned by an international treaty known as the Montreal Protocol — signed in 1987, and revised in 1990 to make it even tougher and the penalties for using CFCs more severe. *Even the chief negotiators for this treaty admit that a scientific basis for it does not exist.*

What are the consequences of a ban, which will be total by the year 1995? Simply this: the most important of the CFCs is a substance known in the commercial trade as freon, and freon is used in hundreds of millions of refrigerators and air conditioning units, both domestic and commercial. Our entire food distribution, transportation, and delivery system depends upon refrigeration, as does the protection of medicinals, materials for inoculations and blood supplies. Another CFC that has important economic use is the group known as the halons — materials that are essential in fire fighting, particularly for electrical fires or fires that occur in close confinement, like in airplanes or on board ships. Loss of their use has been calculated to cost the Western nations anywhere from \$3 to \$5 trillion dollars. That sum should attract somebody's attention, but so far it hasn't.

The only segments of the economy to benefit from the ban of CFCs are the large chemical corporations who hope to sell substitutes. The substitute for freon, which is now being manufactured by DuPont, will cost ten times more. It is a substance that is less efficient than freon and it is so corrosive that it will require the complete redesign and reengineering of all existing refrigeration and air conditioning units. The media do not report these realities, nor has the community of economists expressed any concern for the unnecessary and very heavy financial burden that phasing out CFCs will cost.

Human Population

Population control is very high on the environmentalist agenda. One of their prominent spokesmen, Dr. Garrett Hardin, recently wrote, "It is a mistake to think that we can control the greed of mankind in the long run by an appeal to conscience.... The only way we can cherish and nurture other and more precise and precious freedoms is by relinquishing the freedom to breed, and doing that very soon." Garrett Hardin, by the way, has four children.

What nonsense. Mr. Hardin, Mr. David Brower, who is the founder of the group known as Friends of the Earth, and Paul Erlich, a Stanford University professor (who is in fact a butterfly specialist), recommend forced sterilization of all adults not chosen for producing children. They seldom put it in those stark words, but that is exactly what they are talking about — and what they fail to understand is this, that whenever a

nation, whenever a society's economic condition improves, its birth rate falls. That has been proved over and over again.

Who is to say how many human beings are too many? Or which ones ought to be eliminated? The approximately 5½ billion humans today alive on the surface of the earth live on no more than 16 percent of the land surface. If we could transport all of them to one place, they would fit inside the state of Arkansas, in the United States, with 10 square feet assigned to every single one. That would leave, for the rest of the world, plenty of space for nature, and growing food, and whatever else one wants to do. Because of our growing knowledge, natural resources, whether they are forests or minerals, are more abundant and more available today at lower cost than at any time in the past. And yet the Earth Summit Conference was based on the premise, the false premise, that natural resources are being depleted.

The Earth Summit's Socialist Agenda

An important document called the Heidelberg Appeal was signed by hundreds of scientists worldwide and issued on the 1st of June. It has been, with the exception, at least to my knowledge, with the single exception of *The Wall Street Journal*, totally ignored by the media. The Appeal states, in part, "... We are worried, at the dawn of the 21st century, at the emergence of an irrational ideology which is opposed to scientific and industrial progress and which implies that economic and social progress should not continue. We contend that a 'Natural State,' sometimes idealized by movements with a tendency to look toward the past, does not exist and probably never has existed since man's first appearance in the biosphere, and insofar as humanity has always progressed by increasingly harnessing Nature to its needs and not the reverse." But this does not reflect the theme of the Earth Summit, which is embodied in the so-called Agenda 21, which was adopted by the 178 nations present in Brazil without any fanfare on the last day of the conference.

Now Agenda 21 deserves study. It consists of 115 different and very specific programs designed to facilitate, or to force, the transition to "sustainable development." The objective, clearly enunciated by the leaders of the conference, is to bring about a change in the present system of independent nations. The future is to be World Government with central planning by the United Nations.

Fear of environmental crises, whether such crises are real or

contrived, is expected to lead to total compliance. If force is needed, it is to be provided by a new U.N. Green Helmeted police force recommended to be 500,000 men. Already the U.N. Security Council has expanded the definition of their charter to "threats to peace and security" to include "non-military sources of instability in the economic, social, humanitarian and ecological fields." That constitutes a very broad charter for intervention.

As Michel Rocard, the former Prime Minister of France and a leader at the Earth Summit, said, "Let us not deceive ourselves. It is necessary that the community of nations exert pressure, even using coercion, against countries that have installations that threaten the environment. International instruments must be transformed into instruments of coercion, of sanctions, of boycotts, and even outright confiscation."

In a stunning acknowledgment, also totally overlooked by the press, the Norwegian Prime Minister and vice chairman of Earth Summit, Gro Harlem Brundtland, publicly stated at a press conference that much of the agenda of the Earth Summit was derived from the goals of the Socialist International Party, of which he is, incidentally, vice president. One would have thought that such an admission was newsworthy; surely a socialist agenda should interest economists.

Human-caused environmental problems such as waste management and pollution are amenable to solution and great strides have already been made. But so-called environmental issues like climate change and the destruction of ozone are natural phenomena. The charges and accusations relating to them are not based upon scientific knowledge. It is the economic results of ill-advised, hasty, and costly solutions for problems that may not even exist that pose significant risks for modern society. Only if these realities are publicized can we maintain a healthy economy.

Only if we maintain a strong economy, can we also protect our freedom. "When one loses one's liberty one is correct to blame, not so much the man who puts the fetters on — as he who had the power to prevent it but did not use it." Who said that? It was the Corinthian representative to Sparta — and the year was 426 B.C. It is still true today — and it is the profession of economics that bears the heavy burden of explaining to the public at large what are the extraordinary costs of embracing, without healthy skepticism, the agendas of extreme environmentalism. There are still some issues that are worth fighting for — and liberty through progress is one of them.