The Nation.

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beat the devil *by* Alexander Cockburn

Is Global Warming a Sin?

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In a couple of hundred years historians will be comparing the frenzies over our supposed human contribution to global warming to the tumults at the latter end of the tenth century as the Christian millennium approached. Then as now, the doomsters identified human sinfulness as the propulsive factor in the planet's rapid downward slide. Then as now, a buoyant market throve on fear. The Roman Catholic Church sold indulgences like checks. The sinners established a line of credit against bad behavior and could go on sinning. Today a world market in "carbon credits" is in formation. Those whose "carbon footprint" is small can sell their surplus carbon credits to others less virtuous than themselves.

The modern trade is as fantastical as the medieval one. There is still zero empirical evidence that anthropogenic production of carbon dioxide is making any measurable contribution to the world's present warming trend. The greenhouse fearmongers rely on unverified, crudely oversimplified models to finger mankind's sinful contribution--and carbon trafficking, just like the old indulgences, is powered by guilt, credulity, cynicism and greed.

Now imagine two lines on a piece of graph paper. The first rises to a crest, then slopes sharply down, levels off and rises slowly once more. The other has no undulations. It rises in a smooth, slow arc. The first, wavy line is the worldwide CO_2 tonnage produced by humans burning coal, oil and natural gas. It starts in 1928, at 1.1 gigatons (i.e., 1.1 billion metric tons), and peaks in 1929 at 1.17 gigatons. The world, led by its mightiest power, plummets into the Great Depression and by 1932 human CO_2 production has fallen to 0.88 gigatons a year, a 30 percent drop. Then, in 1933, the line climbs slowly again, up to 0.9 gigatons.

And the other line, the one ascending so evenly? That's the concentration of CO_2 in the atmosphere, parts per million (ppm) by volume, moving in 1928 from just under 306, hitting 306 in 1929, 307 in 1932 and on up. Boom and bust, the line heads up steadily. These days it's at 380. The two lines on that graph proclaim that a whopping 30 percent cut in man-made CO_2 emissions didn't even cause a 1 ppm drop in the atmosphere's CO_2. It is thus impossible to assert that the increase in atmospheric CO_2 stems from people burning fossil fuels.

I met Martin Hertzberg, PhD, the man who drew that graph and those conclusions, on a *Nation* cruise back in 2001. He remarked that while he shared many of *The Nation*'s editorial positions, he approved of my

reservations on the question of human contributions to global warming, as outlined in columns I wrote around that time. Hertzberg was a meteorologist for three years in the Navy, an occupation that gave him a lifelong mistrust of climate modeling. Trained in chemistry and physics, a combustion research scientist for most of his career, he's retired now in Copper Mountain, Colorado, but still consults from time to time.

Not so long ago, Hertzberg sent me some of his recent papers on the global warming hypothesis, a thesis now accepted by many progressives as infallible as Papal dogma on matters of faith. Among them was the graph described above, so devastating to the hypothesis.

As Hertzberg readily acknowledges, the CO_2 content of the atmosphere has increased about 21 percent in the past century. The world has also been getting just a little warmer. The not-very-reliable data on the world's average temperature (which omit data from most of the world's oceans and remote regions, while overrepresenting urban areas) show about a 0.5 degree Celsius increase between 1880 and 1980, and still rising. But is CO_2, at 380 ppm in the atmosphere, playing a significant role in retaining the 94 percent of solar radiation that the atmosphere absorbs, as against water vapor, also a powerful heat absorber, whose content in a humid tropical atmosphere can be as high as 20,000 ppm? As Hertzberg says, water in the form of oceans, snow, ice cover, clouds and vapor "is overwhelming in the radiative and energy balance between the Earth and the sun.... Carbon dioxide and the greenhouse gases are, by comparison, the equivalent of a few farts in a hurricane." And water is exactly that component of the Earth's heat balance that the global warming computer models fail to account for.

It's a notorious inconvenience for the Greenhousers that data also show CO_2 concentrations from the Eocene period, 20 million years before Henry Ford trundled out his first Model T, 300 to 400 percent higher than current concentrations. The Greenhousers deal with other difficulties, like the medieval warming period's higher-than-today temperatures, by straightforward chicanery, misrepresenting tree ring data (themselves an unreliable guide) and claiming the warming was a local European affair.

We're warmer now because today's world is in the thaw following the recent ice age. Ice ages correlate with changes in the solar heat we receive, all due to predictable changes in the Earth's elliptical orbit round the sun and in the Earth's tilt. As Hertzberg explains, the clinical heat effect of all of these variables was worked out in great detail between 1915 and 1940 by Milutin Milankovitch, a giant of twentieth-century astrophysics. In past post-glacial cycles, as now, the Earth's orbit and tilt give us more and longer summer days between the equinoxes.

Water covers 71 percent of Earth's surface. Compared with the atmosphere, there's 100 times more CO_2 in the oceans, dissolved as carbonate. As the post-glacial thaw progresses the oceans warm up, and some of the dissolved carbon emits into the atmosphere, like fizz from soda. "The greenhouse global warming theory has it ass backwards," Hertzberg concludes. "It is the warming of the Earth that is causing the increase of carbon dioxide and not the reverse." In vivid confirmation of that conclusion, several new papers show that for the last 750,000 years, CO_2 changes have always lagged behind global temperatures by 800 to 2,600 years.

It looks like Poseidon should go hunting for carbon credits. The human carbon footprint is of zero consequence amid these huge forces and volumes, not to mention the role of the giant reactor beneath our feet: the Earth's increasingly hot molten core.

Next: Who are the hoaxers, and what are they after?