

## Denying Climate Change—Still!

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**James Hoggan with Richard Littlemore, *Climate Cover Up*, Greystone Books, 2009.**

Like other books that have tread this territory,<sup>1</sup> this book is a fine investigation and report regarding the disinformation campaign against evidence of global warming. The book also traces the money trail that is financing it. Hoggan and Littlemore have done us a public service by showing who is behind the denial of global warming and who sponsors them—the fossil fuel industries. In a sane world, this would be enough to entirely discredit the naysayers. That it has not shows the pervasive influence of money over science and reason, to speak nothing of the tactics first developed by Goebbels in the thirties. If you repeat a lie often enough, some will begin to believe it.

The authors present their case more from a Canadian perspective, with a cast of both U.S. and Canadian characters—an appropriate word in this case. They argue that the Canadian government, especially the conservative regime of Stephen Harper, has done virtually nothing to implement the Kyoto accords, taking a page from the Bush regime in the U.S.

Hoggan and Littlemore note the overwhelming scientific consensus that global warming is occurring and that humans cause it through the use of fossil fuels. Thus there is no real “controversy,” despite media hype to the contrary [Preface and ch. 9]. The “controversy” has been manufactured by the fossil fuel industry, fearing regulations, reduced market share, and the development of sustainable alternatives by an awakened public. The naysayers have been well funded and well organized. None of the “experts” among the deniers are climate scientists, although some have PhDs. Instead, they are drawn from other fields that have nothing to do with climate modeling. This would be as if a Ph.D. in sociology was asked his or her opinion on diagnosing a rare disease in medicine—the sociology degree would be totally irrelevant and any answer a mere guess.

Moreover, the naysayers make totally undocumented assertions in many cases without scientific evidence of any kind, a tactic designed to sow confusion among the public. The press has played along under the banner of “balance,” in pursuit of controversy. But does every crackpot theory have to be vented by the press? Isn’t it the job of the press to investigate such claims and reject specious ones?

The authors maintain that global warming, like almost all scientific predictions, is only “highly probable,” not certain. Yet they note that certain facts about the climate have been known and well documented for centuries, such as the Greenhouse Effect: postulated by Fourier in 1824! The fossil fuel industry argues that the science is only a “theory,” echoing fundamentalist critics of Darwin. They have ignored the melting of the glaciers, the rise in ocean levels and worldwide

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ross Gelbspan, *The Heat is On: The Climate Crisis, the Cover-up, the Prescription* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1997); Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); Stephen H Schneider, *Science as a Contact Sport: Inside the Battle to Save Earth's Climate* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2009).

temperatures, to speak nothing of CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere (all of these covered in Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth"). The fact that three Pacific island nations, Kiribati, Vanuatu, and Tuvalu, are facing the need to relocate due to rising ocean levels has been virtually ignored by the mainstream media, who are often sponsored by the fossil fuel goliaths.

In chapter three the authors examine the public relations industry and how it "spins" the facts to "engineer consent," detailing public relations tactics that have been used to disrupt scientific evidence and hoodwink the public. In chapter six, they argue that language has deliberately been twisted to deceive with euphemisms. One example is the innocuous sounding term "energy exploration," which means oil drilling. Another common tactic is to give anti-environmental organizations names that imply that their main concern is to protect the environment at all costs. Some examples are the Canadian Coalition for Responsible Environmental Solutions, which fought against environmental action to prevent global warming, and the Citizens' Alliance for Responsible Energy, which advocates oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Hoggan and Littlemore also chronicle the naysayers' use of so-called think tanks funded by the industries to issue papers contesting the science [ch. 7], whereby scientists without climate credentials are paid handsome salaries to write skeptical articles. They distort known facts, for example arguing that carbon dioxide, the main global warming gas, is "not a very powerful" greenhouse gas [ch. 8]. Compared to methane this has a grain of truth, but the argument ignores the tremendous volume of CO<sub>2</sub> that has been pumped into the atmosphere since the beginning of the industrial revolution. The enormous quantity of CO<sub>2</sub> more than makes up for its relatively smaller greenhouse effect. The larger point, however, is that the naysayers are trying to change the subject, not address the problem.

Again, Hoggan and Littlemore show how the critics attempt to employ past climate patterns to argue against the human origin of our present crisis, ignoring the buildup of CO<sub>2</sub> due to human use of fossil fuels. They also ignore the accelerating release of methane previously trapped in permafrost layers in Siberia and Northern Canada, an effect of global warming that serves to push the process of global warming even further.

Still another tactic, one favored by the Bush and Obama administrations and other irresponsible governments, is not to deny but to delay implementation of steps to stop or reverse global warming [ch. 10]. The argument here is that we must learn to "cope" with its effects, instead of dealing with the problem. Imagine if this argument were used with respect to rape, or murder! But these industries are raping the earth and murdering its flora and fauna, as anyone who has seen a mountaintop blown off to extract coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel, can testify.

Hoggan and Littlemore also detail the economic arguments global warming deniers use. In addition to arguing that it would be too expensive to reverse, the deniers play the fear card of an economic downturn to argue for a "balance" between action on global warming and the economy. We saw similar arguments made at the tragically failed Copenhagen conference. There the Obama administration not only lost an opportunity to use the downturn to move the economy in the direction of a sustainable economy that may never come again, or come too late, it played the heavy in sabotaging any meaningful action to seriously deal with global warming, which will exact its harshest toll on the world's poor. Cynically, as Hoggan and Littlemore point out, global warming deniers argue that we should place other priorities ahead of action on global warming,

including poverty—as if action on poverty would preclude action on global warming, or moving to a sustainable energy grid would prevent us from ending poverty.

The book covers the naysayers' and their backers' old but effective trick of lawsuits or the threat of them to silence their opponents [ch. 11]. It also casts an eye on the fossil fuel industry practice of showering politicians—particularly Republicans in the U.S. and their conservative counterparts elsewhere—with large amounts of cash.

The final chapters are a call to action by the authors. Anyone concerned with the fate of our planet, and the impact on future generations—our children—should be outraged by this book and heed the call to action. If there were any justice in the world, the corporate leaders behind these tactics would be arrested for fraud, conspiracy, bribing public officials, and other crimes. But in the capitalist world we inhabit, Hoggan and Littlemore remind us that, sadly, it's just business as usual.