

Cheering the Climate Criminals

Posted by

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Media Lens - Where were the declarations by governments of radical action on energy, trade, transport and food production? Where were the impassioned newspaper editorials? Where were the urgent television and radio debates? Nowhere. One can only conclude that our society is, quite literally, insane.

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MEDIA ALERT:

[CHEERLEADING THE CLIMATE CRIMINALS - PART 1](#)

September 1, 2005

A Raging Debate in Nowhere Land

Earlier this month, New Scientist reported the astonishing news that the world's largest frozen peat bog, comprising an area the size of France and Germany combined, was melting. According to researchers who have been studying the permafrost of western Serbia, the bog could unleash billions of tonnes of methane, a greenhouse gas twenty times as potent as carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere. If this were to happen, the consequences for the climate system, and for humanity, would be appalling. (Fred Pearce, 'Climate warning as Siberia melts,' New Scientist, August 13, 2005)

One of the researchers involved warned of an 'irreversible ecological landslide.' Another concerned scientist said: 'When you start messing around with these natural systems, you can end up in situations where it's unstoppable. There are no brakes you can apply.' (Ian Sample, 'Warming hits 'tipping point', The Guardian, August 11, 2005)

In response, Tony Juniper, director of Friends of the Earth, said: 'If we don't take action very soon, we could unleash runaway global warming that will be beyond our control and it will lead to social, economic and environmental devastation worldwide.' (Sample, *ibid.*)

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But within just a couple of days, a surreal silence had descended. Where were the declarations by governments of radical action on energy, trade, transport and food production? Where were the impassioned newspaper editorials? Where were the urgent television and radio debates? Nowhere. One can only conclude that our society is, quite literally, insane.

The devastation wreaked by Hurricane Katrina, with hundreds killed, is likely a portent of worse to come in a warming world. Although +individual+ extreme events cannot unambiguously be causally linked to human-induced climate change, climate modellers predict that the severity and frequency of such events are expected to increase under global warming. Indeed, the calamitous weather-related events of 2005 ? such as the wildfires in Spain and Portugal, and devastating flooding in India ? fit the predicted pattern resulting from human-induced climate change.

A recent study published in Nature by Kerry Emanuel, a climate researcher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, makes sobering reading. Emanuel reported a near doubling in power of tropical cyclones since the mid-1970s, noting that this ?should be a matter of some concern, as it is a measure of the destructive potential? of such violent events.

Although it is not yet clear to what extent climate change may be playing a role here, the climate scientist concluded that ?future warming may lead to an upward trend in tropical cyclone destructive potential, and ? taking into account an increasing coastal population ? a substantial increase in hurricane-related losses in the twenty-first century.? (Emanuel, ?Increasing destructiveness of tropical cyclones over the past 30 years,? Nature, Volume 436, pp.686-688, August 4, 2005)

In July, researchers from the Benfield Hazard Research Centre at University College in London predicted a very active hurricane season in the tropical north Atlantic ocean. (?Hurricane season set to be stormy,? BBC news online, July 2005; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4671535.stm>) This has been tragically borne out in recent days.

The main driving force, warned the Benfield Centre?s Professor Mark Saunders, is likely the unusually warm sea temperatures in the region. Although fluctuating sea surface temperatures in this part of the global ocean have a natural cycle of 50-60 years, Professor Saunders believes that climate change may be contributing to ?another exceptionally active Atlantic season in 2005?. He adds: "I think one has to wonder whether at least part of this activity could

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be due to global warming. Certainly, sea temperatures where hurricanes form have been the warmest on record over the last year or two."

One Decade To Save The Planet

Before the New Scientist report on melting permafrost appeared, it was already known that we have vanishingly little time to avert climate chaos. An international task force on climate, co-chaired by former Blairite minister Stephen Byers, concluded earlier this year that we could reach "the point of no return" in as little as a decade. (Geoffrey Lean, 'Apocalypse now: how mankind is sleepwalking to the end of the earth,' Independent on Sunday, February 6, 2005)

The United Nations estimated in 2004 that global warming has already led over the past decade to nearly 500,000 deaths, has impacted over 2.5 billion people and has generated economic losses of over \$690 billion. (Ted Glick, 'Needed: A Global Survival Movement,' Future Hope column, August 17, 2005, via email)

But none of this is allowed to divert media managers from faithfully serving the cause of business as usual. Look at the Guardian newspaper, for example. Less than two weeks after the shocking news of the melting Siberian permafrost, this custodian of liberalism was waxing lyrical over 'buoyant corporation tax receipts' and the US 'defy[ing] economic gravity?'; and was recklessly calling for "stronger world growth?". This, the reader was assured, 'would be very welcome in Britain.' (Leader, 'The luck factor,' The Guardian, August 22, 2005)

What lunacy is this? How can any responsible editorial writer welcome the stoking up of 'world growth?', further exacerbating the climate catastrophe that already faces us? Accelerating the global juggernaut of unsustainable economic "growth" would not simply be reckless, but it would constitute the greatest ever crime against humanity. To behave as a cheerleader from the sidelines, as the Guardian is doing, is to act as an accessory to that monstrous crime.

And all this from the newspaper hailed by Friends of the Earth's director, regular readers may recall, as 'the voice of progressive and sound environmental thinking both in the UK and in Europe.' (Tony Juniper, quoted by Ian Mayes, 'Flying in the face of the facts,' The Guardian, January 24, 2004)

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It is obvious to rational observers that the Guardian is reluctant to alienate Tony Blair, his ministers and his advisers. It would not do for the paper to be too challenging of the government, and of the establishment generally, for fear of cutting off its crucial fount of 'lifeblood'; namely, access to the corridors of power for what counts as 'news'.

More to the point, the Guardian's senior managers - the board directors of the Guardian Media Group plc - are themselves intimately part of the establishment. They are wealthy and influential people, such as chairman Paul Myners, who sits on the board of the Bank of New York Inc; finance director Nicholas Castro, previously a partner with KPMG, one of the world's largest professional services firms; company secretary Philip Boardman, former financial controller of Hickson International, a large chemicals concern; John Bartle CBE, who has worked for Cadbury Schweppes, the giant food and drinks corporation; and Sir Robert Phyllis, a former BBC deputy director-general and chief executive of ITN. (GMG board of directors, <http://www.gmgplc.co.uk/gmgplc/aboutus/directors/>)

These individuals are all members of a social, political and economic elite that benefits from a deeply divisive and unjust capitalist system of privilege and exploitation. It is no surprise that the newspaper group they manage is loath to challenge this same system.

Charles Lewis, a former producer of the US current affairs programme '60 Minutes', who resigned to fund the Centre For Public Integrity, put it this way:

'The values of the news media are the same as those of the elite, and they badly want to be viewed by the elites as acceptable. Socially, culturally, and economically they belong to the group of people they are covering.' (Quoted, Alexander Cockburn and Ken Silverstein, 'What the papers don't say,' The Observer, May 26, 1996)

Take, for instance, a recent interview with Hilary Benn, the UK international development secretary. 'If the prime minister had wanted an easy life', Benn told the Guardian, 'he wouldn't have picked these two subjects (Africa and climate change) for the [G8] summit'. On the topic of Blair and climate change, Benn claimed - presumably with a straight face - 'he's committed and determined.'

Judging by the absence of any critical questioning in the published piece, the Guardian's reporters - one of them the paper's political editor - swallowed this guff wholesale. (Michael

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White and Patrick Wintour, 'G8 summit: Interview. Benn tells how G8 and African leaders must prove themselves,' The Guardian, July 5, 2005)

Bequeathing a Dying Planet to the Next Generation

This obsequiousness in the face of government propaganda on climate is not limited to the Guardian.

In an interview with the right-leaning Daily Telegraph, Elliot Morley, minister for the environment and climate change, said the government was committed to a review of its policies on climate by the end of the year:

"We should have an open mind about the kind of levers that we apply and not be afraid to think the unthinkable.' Morley claimed that 'my job is to consider quite radical new approaches.' (Charles Clover, 'Energy ration cards for everyone planned,' Daily Telegraph, July 2, 2005)

These 'quite radical new approaches' may include personal energy ration cards. However, they do not extend to cutting the huge fossil fuel subsidies given annually to the fossil fuel industry (see Part Two tomorrow), and giving them instead to the renewable energy sector or to public transport systems. That would not be 'radical' to established power and its sycophants; simply unthinkable.

Also unthinkable is the notion that our leaders prioritise policies that benefit the few at the expense of the vast majority. The message from Downing Street, doggedly relayed by even the 'best' news media, is that we should praise Tony Blair, or at least accept that he is acting in our best interests. Thus, an editorial in the Financial Times tells us: 'the prime minister deserves credit for getting significant progress on some of the broadest issues ever tackled by the G8 - aid to Africa, climate change and world trade'. (Leader, 'Now G8 leaders must follow up their words,' Financial Times, July 9, 2005)

The Independent's environment editor toes the same establishment-friendly line in a comment

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piece that glows with admiration for the prime minister's efforts:

Mr Blair's attempt at Gleneagles to start a climate change partnership with the developing world, or at least initiate a dialogue, is vital. (Michael McCarthy, 'Waiting in the wings: the other leaders who must take a giant leap for the planet,' The Independent, July 5, 2005)

Sadly, as rational observers saw at Gleneagles, the G8 summit was a pathetic failure in terms of meaningful action on climate. In particular, the US, which has never signed up to Kyoto, continues to drag its oil-soaked feet. Tearfund, a Christian relief and development agency, noted that the 'G8 failure to act on climate change puts millions of lives at risk'. (www.tearfund.org.uk news item, July 8, 2005)

Veteran environmentalist Mayer Hillman spoke of his 'dismay in seeing world leaders failing to deliver what its citizens have a right to expect of them.' Hillman called on Blair and other world leaders to endorse the Global Commons Institute's Contraction & Convergence framework based on equal per capita emissions of greenhouse gases. (See Global Commons Institute website at www.gci.org.uk)

Hillman urged that only such 'urgent action... far more ambitious and visionary than reflected in the final Gleneagles communiqué', will prevent them [world leaders] handing over a dying planet to the next generation. ('The G8 and climate change: a campaigners' scorecard,' http://opendemocracy.net/globalization-G8/climate_reaction_2672.jsp , July 13, 2005)

Tragically, but true to form, the G8 summit 'not just on climate, but on aid, trade and Africa - was marked by empty promises, deceit and deception. The reality of the Gleneagles meeting, notes historian Mark Curtis, 'makes a mockery of Brown and Blair's claim that poor countries are now free to decide their own policies.' (Curtis, 'How the G8 lied to the world on aid,' The Guardian, August 23, 2005)

However, the mainstream media is incapable of seeing the Machiavellian strategy that lies behind Blair's 'leadership'. Blair knows that Iraq rumbled him as a ruthlessly dictatorial liar and cynic; Africa and climate change are transparent attempts to restore his fraudulent moral

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capital. He knows that the root of his power has always lain in +appearing+ to be an enlightened politician of the so-called centre-left, while acting in the service of ruthless, violent state-corporate power. But nothing is too much, nothing is the final straw, for the liberal media. Blair is always given one more chance to prove that his heart is in the right place.

On occasion, space on the comment pages is provided to allow accredited experts, such as distinguished scientists, to express their concerns; but only if such invited guests remain within the required boundaries of acceptable debate.

Thus, eminent climate physicist John Houghton, former chief executive of the UK's Meteorological Office and former chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, claims that "Tony Blair has shown unflagging determination" in addressing the climate crisis. He goes on: "Blair, admirably, wants the G8 to rise above parochial interests and act on the world's most pressing problems." (John Houghton, "Take the flood tide now. Britain's top climatologist says a G8 fudge on global warming could be disastrous," Independent on Sunday, June 26, 2005)

Sadly, the government's "commitment" and "achievements" on aid, Africa and climate change are but cruel myths. As discussed above, the prime minister's hopes of "moving on" from Iraq by exploiting the issues of Africa and climate are little more than a desperate bid to divert attention from his war crimes. Blair is assisted in this task by many industrious media professionals.

Consider John Rentoul, one of the most slavish cheerleaders for Tony Blair anywhere in the British media, who outdoes even his own exalted standards of high-flown rhetoric when he proclaims of the British leader:

"Not having to face the electorate again he has made saving the planet from climate change one of his legacy projects for his third term." (Rentoul, "G8: he who has no election to face is well placed to save the planet," Independent on Sunday, July 3, 2005)

As inane interview mounts upon farcical editorial upon vapid "news" article, the media "consumer" is lulled into a false sense of "something being done"; and that the prime minister is grappling with the climate threat with great tenacity. These are dangerous delusions.

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Part Two, including Suggested Action, follows tomorrow...

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