

Cheering the Climate Criminals II

Posted by

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Medialens - September 2, 2005 - Where are the leading articles or news reports highlighting the insidious efforts of big business to obstruct the rational policies on energy, transport, food production and trade that we need so urgently? Where are the news stories addressing the billions spent annually by business and the public relations industry on promoting unsustainable consumer consumption?

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MEDIA LENS: Correcting for the distorted vision of the corporate media

MEDIA ALERT:

CHEERLEADING THE CLIMATE CRIMINALS - PART 2

September 2, 2005

The Independent: As Good As It Gets?

The Independent - like the Guardian, a newspaper with supposed progressive credentials - noted blandly in a recent editorial that "Global warming is given little coverage by the US media." (Leader, "The American consensus of denial is crumbling," August 19, 2005). True enough. But look at our own doorstep; at the wholly inadequate coverage of climate change in the British media, the Independent very much included.

Effusive praise for the Independent's climate coverage appeared recently in the paper's letters page from a reader in the United States who wrote:

"The Independent has been a cut above the rest. The frequency with which you address global warming is entirely appropriate to the seriousness of the problem." (Lead letter, "US still in denial over global warming," The Independent, August 20, 2005)

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One can imagine the glow of satisfaction felt by the letters page editor on being able to print those remarks.

Is Media Lens being too critical? Surely, the Independent does address climate change quite frequently, even providing occasional front-page coverage. Yes, but look at the +content+ of this coverage. In leaders and news reports, the paper's editors and reporters ignore the unsustainable nature of endless economic growth on a finite planet. They overlook the links between climate catastrophe and the damaging core practices of global corporations and investors.

Where are the leading articles or news reports highlighting the insidious efforts of big business to obstruct the rational policies on energy, transport, food production and trade that we need so urgently? Where are the news stories addressing the billions spent annually by business and the public relations industry on promoting unsustainable consumer consumption?

Where are the editorial denunciations of the British government's active role in this madness, driving humanity inexorably towards the climate 'tipping point' and into the abyss beyond? Why, instead, do the major news media so often uncritically channel propaganda from the number 10 Downing Street press office about Blair being 'passionate' about and 'committed' to tackling the climate challenge?

The reason, of course, is that the corporate media are themselves very much ad-packed, consumer-driven parts of the problem.

Profligate Consumption = Doomed Children

Tackling climate change rationally would also reduce global poverty. The great Gleneagles G8 jamboree, and its attendant media circus, ignored this dangerous truth. The London-based New Economics Foundation (NEF) conservatively estimates that global fossil fuel subsidies, paid to rich corporations out of the public purse, amount to \$235 billion annually. Just one year's worth of these subsidies could wipe out all of sub-Saharan's entire international 'debt', with billions to spare. (NEF, 'The price of power,' 2004, downloadable report from www.neweconomics.org)

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Will the new UK 'Climate Movement' which includes Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Christian Aid and Oxfam - launched on September 1 with the slogan 'Stop Climate Chaos', speak such uncomfortable truths? Will the campaign point to the astonishing collusion of leading politicians in corporate criminality in blocking effective action on climate? Will the Climate Movement critically appraise the media's role in perpetrating climate crime? Or, looking at the campaign's new website (www.stopclimatechaos.org), as well as judging by the past performance of several large NGOs in the new coalition, will it instead pull a veil over such crucial matters? ('Silence is Green,' Media Alert, February 3, 2005; http://www.medialens.org/alerts/05/050203_silence_is_green.php)

Aside from the massive public handouts given to fossil fuel dinosaurs, there is also the enormous damage to the planet associated with burning oil, coal and gas. According to NEF, the costs of natural disasters mostly linked to global warming have now reached \$60 billion annually. This sum excludes the human misery resulting from global warming related death, illness, injury and loss. Consider, too, that the US has spent around \$300 billion in the last three years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq - wars in which oil is a major motivating factor. (Ted Glick, 'Needed: A Global Survival Movement,' Future Hope column, August 17, 2005, via email)

As the authors of the NEF report conclude:

'[I]t doesn't have to be like this. Clean renewable energy sources have huge, barely tapped potential. Not only can they provide all the energy needed for human development, they can also abate the pollution that adds to climate change and kills countless people every year. They can supply +power+ to communities, but where the technology is developed, implemented and maintained by local people, they can also +empower+ communities who have in other ways been marginalized.' (NEF, *ibid.*)

Why can't Blair, Brown and the rest of our corporate leaders see this? What would it take to make them change course? Would the system of corporate capitalism, whose goals they project, even +permit+ them to change course? Quite literally, what are they thinking? Psychologist Oliver James, author of 'Britain on the Couch?', hints at the truth:

'Both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown are utterly committed to economic growth and for that to keep happening, we have to keep on consuming new products. I have talked to two of Blair's key advisers at some length, and the fact is that the Treasury refuses to countenance any

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ecological legislation that threatens affluence... [Blair and Brown] know perfectly well that unless we call a halt to our profligate consumption, their children or children's children are doomed.? (James, ?Heat: Heads in the sand,? The Guardian supplement on climate change, June 30, 2005)

Blair and Brown may indeed know that this is the case. Both have expressed concern about climate change. They are clearly not wholly blind to the dangers; dangers that do, of course, represent a threat to entrenched power. After all, even the mighty system of global capitalism is not immune to the chaos of climate instability.

But the fundamental point is that, to reach their powerful positions in society, Blair, Brown and other western leaders have had to subordinate the planet's future to the prerogative of global economic "growth"; or, to put it more honestly - to the bottom-line corporate expediency of endless profit benefiting privileged sectors of society. Any would-be political leader determined to change the current patterns of production and consumption would barely get out of the starting blocks, never mind reach the finishing tape of real political power.

As Canadian philosopher John McMurtry once shrewdly observed of the prime minister:

?Tony Blair exemplifies the character structure of the global market order. Packaged in the corporate culture of youthful image, he is constructed as sincere, energetic and moral. Like other ruling-party leaders, he has worked hard to be selected by the financial and media axes of power as ?the man to do the job?. He is a moral metaphor of the system.? (McMurtry, Value Wars: The Global Market Versus the Life Economy, Pluto Press, London, 2002, p.22)

The same filtering process applies to the vast majority of leaders in positions of authority. They have all risen to the top in a hierarchical society that is shaped largely by the intertwined requirements of corporate interests and geostrategic power.

If current trends continue, the consequences for humanity could well be terminal.

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SUGGESTED ACTION

The goal of Media Lens is to promote rationality, compassion and respect for others. When writing emails to journalists, we strongly urge readers to maintain a polite, non-aggressive and non-abusive tone.

You could ask questions along the following lines: Why do you rarely, if ever, address the disaster of global economic ?growth? for climate stability? Why not report more critically on the gap between government rhetoric and climate reality? Why do you not undertake more investigations into corporate lobbying of governments ? lobbying that is designed to minimise +any+ enforced legislation of activities that are detrimental to climate stability? Where are your reports and editorials on business and political opposition to sane climate policies, including the redirection of fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy?

Write to Michael McCarthy, environment editor of the Independent:

Email: m.mccarthy@independent.co.uk

And to his editor, Simon Kelner:

Email: s.kelner@independent.co.uk

Write to Geoffrey Lean, environment editor of the Independent on Sunday:

Email: g.lean@independent.co.uk

And to his editor, Tristan Davies:

Email: t.davies@independent.co.uk

Write to Charles Clover, environment editor of the Daily Telegraph:

Email: Charles.Clover@telegraph.co.uk

And to his editor, Martin Newland:

Email: Martin.Newland@telegraph.co.uk

Write to John Vidal, environment editor of the Guardian:

Email: john.vidal@guardian.co.uk

And to his editor, Alan Rusbridger:

Email: alan.rusbridger@guardian.co.uk

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Write to Roger Alton, editor of the Observer:

Email: roger.alton@observer.co.uk

Write to Andrew Gowers, editor of the Financial Times:

Email: andrew.gowers@ft.com

Please also send all emails, particularly any replies from the media, to the Media Lens editors:

Email: editor@medialens.org

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