

Environmentalists and Captains of Capitalism - allies at last?

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Last week, thousands of scientists gathered in Copenhagen to prove that their worst-case scenario models for climate change are being realized. Yet there are still those who remain skeptical of the data.

In fact, the picture of the total environmental situation that these erudite individuals have painted is so depressing that some of the participants complained that their dark data would prompt some people to casually “accept the inevitable reality” of a doomed planet with fatalistic indifference.

For example, according to leading British scientists, efforts to preserve the Amazon rain forests, the poster place for the environmental movement, will ultimately fail because, according to their study, climate change, not the ax, will be the real culprit that destroys the South American jungle – the so-called ‘lungs of the planet.’

“A temperature rise of anything over 1 Celsius commits you to some future loss of Amazon forest,” Chris Jones, who headed the research, told the conference. *“Even the commonly quoted 2 Celsius target already commits us to 20-40 percent loss.”*

The millions of acres of verdant vegetation of the Brazilian jungle, which provides a rich diversity of life below an impenetrable canopy of foliage, would not survive any dramatic fluctuations of global temperatures. Scientists at the conference argued that a 4-Celsius rise in global temperatures would represent an 85 percent loss of Amazon jungle due to the lack of rainfall. It seems that Earth really is in the balance, and it will not tolerate too much give one way or the other.

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The conclusion that Jones draws from his data is unnerving, to put it mildly: *“On any kind of pragmatic timescale, I think we should see loss of the Amazon forest as irreversible.”*

Whether Mr. Jones is right or wrong, most people – even the most deeply pessimistic – expect to see some silver lining in their storm clouds; a challenge that is not so formidable that it cannot be set right by a bit more tinkering from the scientific community (ironically, the very same gentlemen who got us into this jam from the beginning). If nothing else, with the environment hanging on the edge of the precipice by a monkey hair, mankind gets a rare chance to play god, and ‘resurrect’ the very thing that gave him life many eons ago. Talk about an ego trip! The situation resembles the child who is hurrying to finish a sand castle along the seashore without the slightest idea that a high tide is rolling in.

"These type of gloom and doom speeches are dangerous," commented one conference participant, Jean Paul Bienvue, a French apiarist. "They make people walk away with the feeling that whatever they do the situation is hopeless. If anything, we need to agree upon an immediate course of action to confront this threat."

Meanwhile, although the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (UNIPCC) concluded that global warming was a definite byproduct of human activity, there is a hardcore group of self-deluding delusionists that remains stubbornly skeptical of the researchers' apocalyptic forecasts.

Thus, while the world's leading climate researchers were attempting to outdo each other in apocalyptic scenarios in Copenhagen, pouring over the spooky conclusions of their sophisticated computer models, about 600 so-called 'climate deniers' from the conservative Heartland Institute were hunkered down in New York City, talking trash against the "Gore toadies" [a reference to the creator of the 2006 Academy Award-winning documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," by former US vice president Al Gore, which argues for immediate action to confront global warming. Subsequently, Gore has been accused by his detractors of promoting the film for personal political gain]. According to the deniers, the planet may be warming up, but even if it is, it is a natural occurrence. The other more annoying members, who are thankfully in the minority, go so far as to argue that even if man is really responsible for warming up the planet, it is his natural right as a human being to do so. After all, the argument goes, if God had not wanted him [man] to tinker with the natural world he would have placed man on the good earth minus his intelligence.

The feather in the cap of 'the deniers' is the recent enlistment of Czech President , who accuses his European peers of succumbing to "alarmist" tendencies when it comes to the issue of climate change. The mass hysteria, argues Klaus, could give rise to unprecedented "assault on freedoms."

"They probably do not want to reveal their true plans and ambitions to stop economic development and return mankind several centuries back," Klaus told the conference.

Klaus failed to mention what would happen if the researchers' projections suddenly turned out to be right, or what would come of the global economy if a gigantic tidal wave suddenly splashed across the third rock from the Sun.

But considering that there were more corporate sponsors of the Copenhagen event than were for the climate deniers (Exxon Mobil, for example, one of the environmentalist's favorite foes, has reportedly stopped funding the climate denier's annual denial fest), it is rather easy to say what side is winning the public relations race.

The financial crises – an opportunity for the environment?

The present global financial contagion demonstrates in stark relief the severe, almost retarded I imitations of the business community. Despite past depressions, recessions and other unsightly seizures, the denizens of the global village, heeding to the invisible hand of the market, once again entrusted the captains of capital and finance to manage their affairs with the minimal amount of government interference. And once again we got burned.

But here is the \$50,000-dollar question: If our business leaders cannot be entrusted to accurately and honestly balance the account books and guard the safe every time the

CEO's wife has a birthday, how can we expect them to run their businesses in an 'environmentally friendly' way? To date, it has been the 'wisdom' of the market, as opposed to the wisdom of the scientific community that determines exactly what products and services make it into mass production. When push comes to profit, the business community and the halls of power have an uncanny way of dealing with the harmful side effects of any particular business venture.

Let us consider one product, which is readily available and used by every motorist: windshield washer fluid, a seemingly innocuous necessity of modern living, until somebody ingests the stuff, of course. Last week, 10 children at an Arkansas child-care center accidentally drank windshield washer fluid after a worker mistook the brightly colored fluid for blueberry Kool-Aid. Fortunately, all of the children survived the painful ordeal, and the director of the facility, pediatrician Carolyn Bynun, surrendered her state license. But here is the irony, if you will, of this tragic story. Every year, millions of gallons (or billions of liters) of noxious windshield washer fluid, which contains high levels of alcohol and methanol, amongst other dangerous chemical agents, are spilled onto our roads, highways and byways each year by automobile drivers. Naturally, this fluid then ends up in our water supply. But when was the last time a corporation suggested that this one product might pose a substantial risk to the health of humans, animals and plants? Only when 10 children consume the deadly product at a nursery school is it then considered life threatening.

Apart from the dangers of this fluid being present in large amounts in our water supply (and sometimes mistakenly in our kitchens), there are other lesser concerns. First, according to consumer advocacy groups, the alcohol and methanol components of windshield washer fluid are an enemy not just to children who don't know better, but to automobiles as well. Yes, over the course of a rather short period of time, windshield washer fluid has a corrosive effect on a car's paint job. Moreover, a recent Japanese study determined that windshield washer fluid, due to some sort of chemical reaction that I am not qualified to explain, hastens the deterioration of road surfaces, which adds up to millions of dollars in infrastructure costs per year. Now some readers might be asking, "So what?"

Well, presently the human race, and all of the little creepy crawly things that share this planetary home with us, are approaching a deadly intersection at full speed. We are locked in a fast car called progress without seatbelts or airbags. Coming in the opposite direction in a car loaded down with elephants, monkeys, birds, giraffes and trees is the environmental problem. And these guys aren't wearing their seatbelt either.

Now the choice has come down to two urgent alternatives: Slamming on the brakes and consulting an atlas for directions, or accepting our 'fate' and let the dice fall as they may once we reach that nasty intersection. Of course, accepting the latter choice means speaking for future generations of humans who are as yet unborn, as well as the millions of other living species that call Earth home sweet home, mostly because there is no other choice. At least for the present moment, and despite our galactic wanderlust, we've only got one planet. There is no star ship enterprise, or friendly Spock that will whisk billions of us off to a distant stadium at a distant solar system if and when things go helter-skelter on Earth. So we've got basically one chance to get this right, and it would seem, ironically, that the present global crisis offers a perfect opportunity to change.

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