

Spinning Out Of Control: Governments, Banks and Energy Companies “Fuelling Climate Change”

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Global Research, March 15, 2013

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

Being born ‘with a silver spoon in your mouth’ means that you start with an advantage that others don’t have: parents with money, property, influence, business connections and so on, connections that can last for generations. A silver spoon that appeared recently was the exceedingly generous [compensation](#) paid to British slave owners when the UK abolished slavery in 1833, though not one penny went to the freed slaves. The ancestors of many well-connected people (including David Cameron) benefited. One way or another, the silver spoon allows you to inherit the best of old boys’ networks and a guaranteed place at all sorts of top tables. These days you also appear to be born with a revolving door.

As I pointed out in [Revolving Wars](#), the door between retiring senior military personnel or ministerial-level politicians and a well-paid position in companies supplying the military revolves at great speed, although sadly not at a fast enough rate as to fire the users into outer space – nor would they go without a profitable contract in place. But other such doors exist. And just as the links between government ministers, senior armed forces personnel and the arms trade make it almost impossible to stop our forces from fighting illegal and unnecessary wars, so the links between the government, banks and fossil fuel companies make it impossible to get politicians to take action to mitigate climate change or achieve realistic funding for renewable energy.

The World Development Movement has just published a [briefing](#), *Web of Power: the UK government and the energy-finance complex fuelling climate change*, and it makes for disheartening reading. Of the 125 MPs and Lords that make up the UK government, no less than 32% have links with finance and/or fossil fuel companies, while the top 5 banks give financial backing to fossil fuel companies *and* politicians (the City funded David Cameron’s campaign for the leadership of the Tory Party), and the fossil fuel companies give financial backing to government while lobbying hard for their industry. There is a merry-go-round of people serving in government and sitting on the boards of financial institutions and energy companies. It creates a cosy closed shop resulting in a lack of funding for research into and building the infrastructure for renewable energy.

Even worse, despite the noises made by politicians, any effective action to halt climate change is blocked because that would damage business. It would ‘harm’ the economy – meaning that they, all of them, would lose money. But they probably think they *are* the economy. And of course their mantra – that climate change is not caused by human activity and we can therefore go on chasing and making money from every scrap of oil or gas to fuel our modern lives – is [funded](#) and publicised by some very rich people indeed, many of them with links to... you’ve guessed it... fossil fuels and high finance. Anything that might puncture that magic bubble of oil, money and power has to be fought (or bought) off by whatever means.

The thought of losing our comfortable lifestyle is challenging, which is why we are persuaded by their spin machine to see that as more of a threat than the destruction of our climate would be. Even while we are asked to put up with cuts forced upon us by the government, they are proposing to, despite undertaking not to, [subsidise](#) companies like EDF with our money, in the hope that they will build nuclear reactors here. And don't even mention fracking and the carrot they hold out about 'cheap' gas. It won't be. We are also encouraged to allow the bankers to continue paying themselves too much; otherwise they will all go somewhere else. And of course, they'd all far rather we worried about the price we pay to fuel our lives than think about a warming world. Because business as usual means profits as usual. And also because, whatever else happens, the economy (by which I mean that we remain poor and live economically while the rich grow in riches) must be encouraged to grow.

And here is a very basic question that no one is asking, not politicians, bankers nor economists. Even those campaigning about environmental destruction and climate change are not asking it. Why do we have to have growth?

Nothing grows forever, even though it may live for a very long time. Humans, having reached their maximum height, stop growing. Either that or they collapse. Their bones cannot support a body too tall or too fat. It is the same for anything else that grows. Everything has limits. Endless growth is not sustainable. We cannot grow beyond what this planet can supply, nor should we assume that it can, no matter how much we are persuaded to. So why is it a given that the 'economy' has to grow? Why can't it drop back to a level where it might be more sustainable, and maintain a steady position instead?

What most of us want is stability and security, and we have let ourselves be persuaded that these only come if we have more - more money, more possessions, bigger televisions, faster cars - more, more, more. Yet the majority of humanity has spent not centuries but millennia successfully existing by having sufficient. We need enough, not more. And let's face it, the growth that is demanded by governments and corporations always has and always will go into the pockets of those who are already rich, already have far more than they need and certainly far more than their fair share.

Years ago manufacturers made things that could be serviced and repaired, things that we went on using until they fell to pieces. Then what we bought came with 'built-in obsolescence'. It wasn't a question of buying something new when the old had collapsed. The new was designed to collapse and be replaced. Then we were treated to 'the latest model' and encouraged to throw away anything that was out of date. But students at Brighton University are now being asked to design a toaster that the buyer would want to keep! On the Today programme Professor Jonathon Chapman [explained](#): "It's actually very easy to design and manufacture a toaster that will last 20 years; that can be done. What's not so easy is to design and manufacture a toaster that someone will want to keep for 20 years, because as people, as consumers, we haven't been trained to do that."

No. We've been trained to always think there is something better out there, and that we both want and need it. And in the same way the people with their revolving doors are doing their best to train us into thinking that, as consumers, our behaviour has absolutely nothing to do with climate change and we can carry on as usual while the government 'fixes' the problem, the banks lend our money to companies we wouldn't give the time of day to, and the energy companies dig up our back gardens while they frack for gas.

Well, you know what? As a 'consumer' I have decided that governments, banks and fossil fuels also have built-in obsolescence. They have reached the point of collapse and I want to bin the lot. I don't want their 'latest model' either because it always turns out to be more of the same with a different coat of paint. I want to try something new - or rather, something both radical *and* reactionary - radical because the idea would be considered 'impossible', and reactionary because I want to turn back the clock. I want to return to an old way of life that was sustainable and sufficient to our needs. And, I suspect, far more satisfying than the constant hunger of consumerism. Whether climate change will allow me to do that I don't know. My time may run out before the toaster fails.

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