

# The Secret of Global Warming - Posh Anti-Capitalism

By Martin Durkin

Poor Al Gore. Global warming is fast turning into a joke. From the jolly Hockey Stick (remember that one) to the topsy-turvy ice core data (what a howler), from the laughable computer models, to the dodgy temperature records ... not a single scrap of global warming garbage has escaped the blistering, excoriating scrutiny of McIntyre, Lindzen, Christy, Spencer, Singer, Carter & Co. The awkward-squad army of sceptics have kicked and trampled this theory to death, not once, but a hundred times over.

And yet, for all the onslaught of reasoned, scientific argument, the global warming beast refuses to lie down. Like some beleaguered, maniac cyborg from the future, it just goes on and on. We all know the reason. The edifice of global warming is built not on science, but politics.

But what kind of politics? This is the first in a series of blog pieces to explore the green politics behind global warming .....

## A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO POSH ANTI-CAPITALISM

The next time you're forced to attend a dinner party, keep an eye out for the global warmer. Then ask him what he thinks about supermarkets (wicked), 'consumer society' (soulless), world trade (cruel) and government regulation (more needed). Global warmers are, in short, anti-capitalist. But – and here's the really important thing to understand – it's a very specific form of anti-capitalism. We might call it *posh anti-capitalism*.

In the old days, when there was less swearing on TV and kids were scared of policemen, anti-capitalism was coloured Red. The Reds complained that capitalism would cause the 'immiseration' of the workers, and they dreamed of giant socialist factories, out-producing the West.

The tragedy (for the Reds) was that capitalism didn't play ball. Instead of getting poorer, ordinary folk got richer – much, much richer. For the simple reason that capitalist mass production must necessarily go hand in hand with mass consumption. What the new-leftists call 'consumer society'.

But these days, anti-capitalists are coloured Green. They campaign not in the name of the working class, but of 'Earth'. Instead of giant factories, they dream of little handicraft workshops and organic peasant farms. They complain not

that capitalism will impoverish the workers, but, on the contrary, that capitalism has made them too rich. It is the very success of capitalism that seems to upset them.

Green guru James Lovelock says the overconsuming public is like a 'revolting teenager' and says we are 'far too greedy and selfish for our own good.' Green Party politician Caroline Lucas says we must 'move away from endless consumerism and materialism.' Green foodie Colin Tudge, condemns 'the mindless accumulation of wealth for ill-defined purposes.' John Naish, in his book *Enough*, says we should be satisfied with what we have, 'In the Western world we now have everything we could possibly need. There is no 'more'.' To Oliver James, prosperity is a disease - he calls it the 'Affluenza Virus'. It's all too much for celebrity journalist Rosie Boycott, 'Stuff – in all its forms – fills the empty spaces inside, which materialism creates.'

It is more than ironic that the anti-consumption rant comes from people who are, by global standards, rolling in the stuff and from a superior social class. Take a look at Al Gore and Prince Charles, at Jonathon Porritt, the old Etonian friend of Prince Charles, son of Lord Porritt; or the old Etonian Baron Lord Peter Melchett, former head of Greenpeace, or Ecologist editor Zac Goldsmith, another old Etonian, son of the billionaire James Goldsmith, and nephew of yet another old Etonian the Green guru Edward Goldsmith; or 'eco-warrior' Mark Brown, who was acquitted of leading the 'Carnival Against Capitalism', who is a member of the fabulously wealthy Vestey family; or the founder of the Soil Association Lady Eve Balfour, daughter of the Earl of Balfour; or the author of the *Global Warming Survival Handbook*, David de Rothschild, and so on, and on. Charles Secrett, former executive director of Friends of the Earth helpfully explains, 'Among the aristocrats there is a sense of noblesse oblige ... a feeling of stewardship towards the land.'

Brendan O'Neill says in *The Guardian*, 'It is remarkable how many leading environmentalists come from wealthy or aristocratic backgrounds.' And adds, 'There is something irritating - actually, let's not beat around the bush - there is something monumentally infuriating about rich people telling the masses that they should live more meekly.'

It seems that it is not any old consumption that upsets the Greens. It is mass consumption. The Green foodies don't mind expensive organic free-range food, or hand-made cashmere sweaters, or costly Italian floor tiles. They don't rail against posh cheese shops or vintners. The problem is not fine-art auction houses or Persian-rug sellers. The problem is mass production and consumption. Greens John Cavanagh and Jerry Mander deplore the vulgar bargain hunter for whom, 'everyday low prices are the ultimate human

conquest.’ The Green group Earth First went so far as to organise a ‘puke in’ in a shopping mall.

It is not exclusive, expensive delicatessens, but rather the wicked low-cost supermarkets frequented by everyday folk which they find repellent. It is a commonly heard complaint from Greens that things ‘aren’t expensive enough’. The ‘rebels’ down from Eton for the anti-globalisation rallies threw bricks through windows – but not the windows of high-class restaurants. Instead they smashed up and ransacked a working class MacDonaldis when they marched down Piccadilly. It is not the luxurious Heals furniture shop that makes them angry, but the proletarian IKEA, with its affordable sofas and lamps.

The mass production and distribution of food is deplorable to them. In fact the mass production of goods, whatever they may be, renders those goods nasty and soulless. The mass production of houses, the mass consumption of culture ... everything to do with the masses, it seems, every form of economic activity that benefits the many-headed, is held to be vulgar and an offence against the natural order.

Edward Goldsmith decried ‘the mass production of shoddy utilitarian goods in ever greater quantities.’ The debased creatures who buy this stuff constituted a different kind of human - *Homo Sapiens Industrialis*.

In his book *Green Capitalism*, James Heartfield says, ‘greens protest against a certain kind of consumption – mass consumption. By their green consumer choices, environmentalists are demonstrating that they are better than the herd ... Green consumerism does not mean consuming less than the rest. In fact it ends up meaning that you consume more. Your consumer choices are more finickity, less easily satisfied. They say something about you.’

And the same goes for the Green outrage at mass tourism, ‘The ‘conscientious consumers’ love air travel – for themselves. They just hate cheap air travel that everyone else can enjoy. The reason they first got into tourism was to get away from us. Now that we are all following them, ruining their isolated spots in Ibiza and the Dordogne, they need a reason to stop us. Not to put too fine a point on it, concern over CO2 emissions came after the prejudice that mass tourism was a blight. Global warming predictions provide a useful, quasi-scientific justification for anti-working class prejudice.’

He is right. None of this is new. In 1958 the patrician JK Galbraith looked down his nose at this increasing prosperity in his *The Affluent Society*. Ten years later, with even greater disgust, Paul Ehrlich, condemned ‘the affluent society’.

In 1973 E.F Schumacher in his classic Green text *Small is Beautiful*, said the modern consumer 'is propelled by a frenzy of greed and indulges in an orgy of envy'. He complained, 'The cultivation and expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom.' His conclusion was devastating. We must abandon any hope of attaining 'universal prosperity', because, he said, 'universal prosperity ... if attainable at all, is attainable only by cultivating such drives of human nature as greed and envy.'

But to say that mass consumption was 'the antithesis of wisdom' was clearly not enough. The Greens needed some solid reason why economic progress should be rolled back. Conveniently, three years after *Small is Beautiful*, Lowell Ponte published his big scary book, *The Cooling*, which predicted that pollution from our consumer society would blot out the sun and push the earth into an ice age. Mass consumption wasn't just morally depraved, it was now dangerous too. Ponte warned, 'prosperity could mean disaster.' In fact 'the cooling has already killed hundreds of thousands of people.' This was a disaster with a moral message. The masses must tighten their belts, 'Note this word need. It is readily confused with the word want in industrial societies, where the dominant value is consumption rather than conservation.'

The Green anti-consumption rant, though fashionable among the elite, does not go down big with the great unwashed. People who are experiencing wealth for the first time rarely think badly of it. The Greens always moan that the bulk of the population is unmoved by their silly warnings of impending catastrophe. Whether it's global cooling or global warming or genetically modified 'Frankenstein' food, all the *end-of-the-world* stuff fails to grip the imagination of the masses. No surprise. *They know that it's all directed against them.*

The Greens tell us that food should come from peasants rather than industrial farms. Chairs and tables should be produced, not in factories, but lovingly by skilled artisans. But as we all know, such antiquated, handicraft methods inevitably produce far fewer, more expensive goods. Handicraft production was what happened in that Green golden age before capitalist production, when the vast majority of people were grindingly poor – unable to afford such lovingly crafted, hand-made luxuries. These were the good old days, when everyone knew their place in the 'natural order'.

Green anti-capitalism is Snob anti-capitalism. This is not mere name-calling. It goes to the very heart of what 'Green' is about.

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