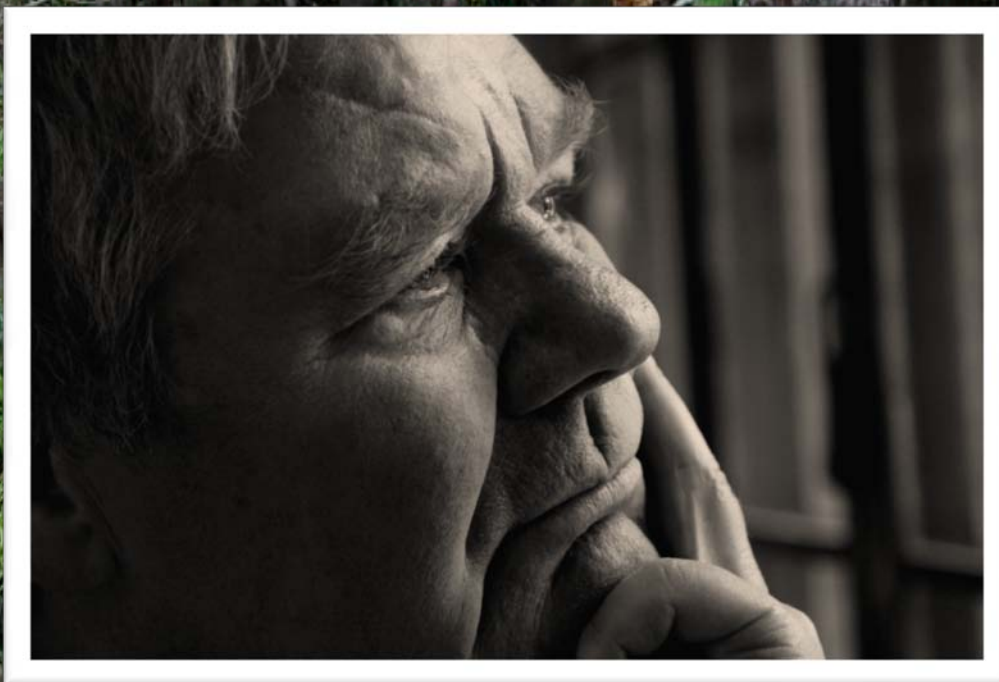


COOL IT! AND LET'S THINK FOR OURSELVES

by Dr. Mike Norton-Griffiths



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COOL IT! AND LET'S THINK FOR OURSELVES

In September last year, the World Meteorological Organisation hosted some 1,500 climate scientists at the much unheralded and poorly reported World Climate Conference 3 in Geneva, Switzerland. WCC3, an important precursor to “Copenhagen”, was called primarily to discuss, and advise on, the relative importance of shorter term climate cycles versus longer term trends. It succeeded in showing both the true depth of the divergence of views among the world’s top climate scientists, and how uncertain are predictions about global warming.

We are not often told that global temperatures have not only levelled off over the last decade but have actually decreased, and it is generally necessary to visit the specialised climate science web sites to discover these not-uninteresting snippets of information. Yet Mojib Latif, of the Leibniz Institute of Maritime Sciences at the University of Kiel, Germany – itself a major contributor to the IPCC, maintained in a quite stunning presentation that shorter term, decadal trends in the North Atlantic Oscillation and the Atlantic Meridional Oscillation were major contributors both to the warming trends observed over the last few decades and to the contemporary cooling trends which started in 2000 and which are now predicted to continue for the next 10 to 15 years.

In other words, shorter term cycles in the NAO and AMO are strong enough to overwhelm any longer term trends in global warming. Similarly, while it is now anecdotally incontrovertible that the loss of Arctic ice over the last few decades is due primarily to long-term warming trends, Vicky Pope

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of the UK Meteorological Office, another major contributor to the IPCC, warned that much of this loss was a product of shorter term cycles, especially in the current decades.

In another major reversal of what is widely assumed to represent the status quo, the consensus among these 1,500 climate scientists was that regional (i.e. sub-global) models of future warming trends were simply too unreliable to be useful for devising policy. While global models do have a certain robustness, there is currently no way of determining whether the characteristics of warming trends in India, for example, might be substantially different to those in Africa or in south America. Indeed, it is simply not possible to say anything specific at the continental or sub-continental scale, let alone at a country scale – because of natural variability and shorter term cycles.

Most of us have, perhaps mercifully, forgotten all the previous environmental scares we have been subjected to, and how certain their advocates were of the absolute rightness (and justness) of their cause. I still remember well “snowball earth”, when it was absolutely and completely clear that a new ice age was upon us. The “cause” was the release, through human activity, of aerosols and particulates into the atmosphere which would reflect the sun’s rays back into space. Even an 800% increase in carbon dioxide could not avert the pending disaster, which would include by the year 2000 world famine and chaos.

The papers, books and especially the political statements from this era bear a chilling resemblance to the current debate on global warming. Of more than passing interest, some of today’s strongest supporters of global warming were once equally seduced by global cooling.

The Population Bomb, a product of the ‘60s, advanced equally dire predictions. A minimum of ten million people would starve to death each year

throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s, but this would be a mere bagatelle compared with the massive, worldwide starvation by the end of the century -- of this there was absolutely no doubt at all.

Policy provisions were simply outrageous: throughout the developed world there were to be taxes on children, “responsibility prizes” for couples for each five years of childless marriage and for men who had vasectomies, and compulsory vasectomies for those refusing to comply. Policies towards developing countries were ruthless: all humanitarian aid was to be halted to countries experiencing food shortages, and all men in India with three or more children were to be forcibly sterilised (why only India one wonders, did China not exist in the ‘60s?).

We can but be extremely relieved that these fatuous predictions proved to be false and that, like today, the world’s politicians eschewed such nonsense. In 1865, the esteemed British economist Stanley Jones predicted the collapse of British industry from the ever rising cost of mining coal at deeper and deeper levels. Furthermore, he opined, “... it is useless to think of substituting any other kind of fuel for coal ...”. As with snowball earth, this has eerie similarities to the Club of Rome’s report Limits to Growth some 100 years later, tho’ the Club of Rome did unfortunately have access to the new conceits (and deceits) of computer models and simulations.

So where does this leave us chaps on the Clapham omnibus? What exactly are we to believe and should we be afraid?

A sense of history should help calm our nerves for to date no prediction of global disaster, from the four horsemen to the Second Coming, and everything in between, has proved to be anything other than sophistry. The simple reason is that no one has ever been able to predict with any accuracy either the pace or the direction of technological change. We will not solve any of the problems predicted for 2050 with today’s technology, but with tomorrow’s – and we have absolutely no idea what that technology will be.

I am not a global warming “denier”, but any objective reading of the literature reveals genuine and deep divergence of views

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and opinions among the entire *corpus civitas* of global warming, whether they be climate scientists, economists, environmentalists or politicians. Yet the media machine will have it that these literally thousands of individuals are in complete agreement. If so, then this is indeed proof positive of the Infinite Improbability Drive which, among other interesting characteristics, ensures that anything with an infinite improbability of occurrence will immediately manifest itself.

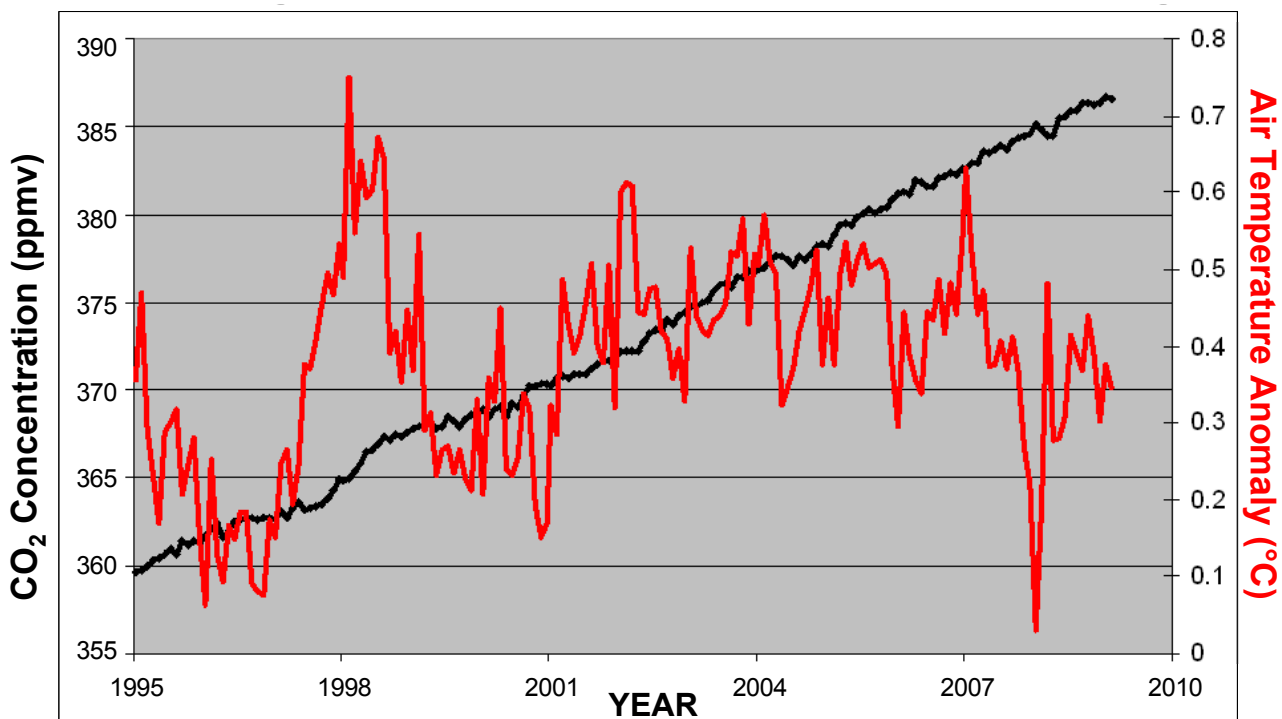
Finally, we are all aware of the close connection between economic prosperity and good governance. Yet “global warming” is providing a ready excuse for inaction and prevarication at national and international levels, especially among countries with poor records of governance. Their mantra resonates endlessly around the climate forums of the world – this drought, famine, flood, loss of forests, whatever is not our fault, it’s yours, and you must compensate us. Meanwhile, we’ll continue to do nothing.

Clearly, it is now time for us all to use the grey matter between our ears and to think for ourselves! ●

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Atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ and global temperatures (1995-2009)



Credit: Willie Soon, Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Climate Change, Washington DC June 2009: <http://www.heartland.org/events/WashingtonDC09/proceedings.html>



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