

Book review

Merchants of Doubt, How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming. by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway. Bloomsbury. (ISBN1608193942). Online versions available at http://ebookey.org/Merchants-of-Doubt-How-a-Handful-of-Scientists-Obscured-the-Truth-on-Issues-from-Tobacco-Smoke-to-Global-Warming_711105.html Kindle version at <http://www.amazon.com/Merchants-Doubt-Scientists-Obscured-ebook/dp/B003RRXXO8> June 2010. 355 pages. Hardback US\$27, AU\$29.99, GB£9.74, NZ\$34.99, Kindle US\$10.94

Air Con. The seriously inconvenient truth about global warming, by Ian Wishart. Howling at the Moon Publishing, North Shore New Zealand. (ISBN 9780958240147). Online versions available at <http://www.investigatemagazine.com/newshop/contents/en-us/d21.html#p96> 2009. 285 pages. NZ\$39.99, discounted price NZ\$9.99, AU\$7.76; Kindle US\$9.99 NZ\$14.99, AU\$11.64.

These two books have one thing in common – they both deal with Global Warming. In most other respects they are at opposite ends of a spectrum. *Merchants of doubt* is concerned with the running of campaigns to discredit scientific knowledge and is a champion of global warming science. It is written by two academics – Oreskes is a science historian at the University of California and Conway is the historian at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory at Pasadena. *Air Con* is written by Ian Wishart, a well-known New Zealand investigative journalist, who admits that he is attacking the 'unsettled' science of global warming. Both books rely heavily on the internet. *Merchants* on the documents available as a result of the tobacco litigation in the USA in the 1990s and *Air Con* on internet search engines.

The former has 1047 endnotes, the latter 432 footnotes, both containing full references. Both books also contain indexes. The content of both books is briefly explained in their respective subtitles.

In *Merchants of Doubt* it is the story of the 'tobacco strategy' which was inaugurated in may 1979

'to develop an extensive body of scientifically, well-grounded data useful in defending the [tobacco] industry against attacks...the goal was to fight science with science'

and to defend the tobacco industry against numerous lawsuits for personal injury as a result of smoking. It was not necessary to do research to 'disprove' the link but merely to emphasize that it was 'not proven', that in science there are always uncertainties. Thus the 'merchants of doubt' were inaugurated and took on several names: Deniers, Skeptics, Contrarians and so on. The introduction describes the crucifixion of Ben Santer (1966, the lead author of Chapter 8 of the IPCC Second Assessment Report) by Seitz (1966) in the *Wall Street Journal*. Chapter 1 describes the strategy of the tobacco industry that successfully fought off the link to cancer from the 1950s to 2006. The next chapter describes how the same strategies were used to promote president Reagan's Star Wars programme (SDI or Strategic Defense Initiative) and to counter Carl Sagan's suggestion that it could result in a nuclear winter. At the same time there was the ongoing debate about acid rain and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) that resulted in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). By 1980 President Carter began negotiating with Canada about transboundary air pollution but then Reagan came to power with the intent of reducing federal regulation and helping private enterprise. His White House was skeptical of the acid rain problem and some of the merchants of doubt had a field day, described in Chapter 3. It was not until

1990 that George Bush managed to produce legislation that controlled acid rain. Next came the problem of the 'ozone hole' linked to supersonic transport and CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons). Thus two large American industries (aircraft and motor) were in the firing line between 1970 and 1990 and they reacted with some help from the 'merchants'. They used volcanic eruptions and global warming after 1975 to suggest the 'hole' was simply part of the natural environment (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 looks at the problems surrounding second hand smoke and the rearguard action of the tobacco industry. 'The denial of Global warming' is the heading of Chapter 6 and recounts the claims and counter claims about it in the 1990s and early 2000s. At the same time there was a strong political input (in America) from the George Bush White House. The result was that by 1997

'scientifically, global warming was an established fact. Politically [in America], global warming was dead'.

Chapter 7 returns to Rachel Carson and DDT that due to the increase in mosquito resistance resulted in an increase in deaths through malaria. It then discusses 'denial' as a political strategy linked to

'the network of right-wing foundations, the corporations that fund them, and the journalists who echo their claims...A recent academic study found that of the 56 "environmentally skeptical" books published in the 1990s, 92percent [51books] were linked to these right-wing foundations (only 13 were published in the 1980s, and 100 percent were linked to the foundations). (Jacques et al 2008).

In the Conclusion to the book the authors reiterate their basic theme that the 'merchants of doubt' with the help of right wing think tanks sow enough seeds of controversy to negate peer reviewed scientific work. So who are the

'merchants of doubt'? Throughout the book several names continuously crop up: Frederick Seitz (a solid state physicist), Robert Jastrow (Astrophysicist), William Nierenberg (nuclear physicist), Fred Singer (Rocket physicist). They were all physicists who grew and blossomed during and after the Second World War; they were all hawkish and conservative and reached high levels in both the academic and political worlds of America. They were instrumental in the setting up of various think tanks such as the Tobacco Institute, George C. Marshall Institute, the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine, The Heartland Institute, to which funds were given by various industries and private donors, ostensibly with few strings attached. But as one of our own blog sites (Hot Topic at hot-topic.co.nz/) pointed out on 24 January 2012 The Heartland Institute funded our own New Zealand Climate Science coalition to the tune of NZ\$32K in 2007 and similarly on 20 February 2012 over AUS\$46K was paid into the Australian Climate Science Coalition in 2010.

The subtitle of *Air Con* is *the seriously inconvenient truth about global warming*. It is of course a parody on Al Gore's *An Inconvenient truth* (Guggenheim, D., 2006). The book was written in 2009 and from the outset Wishart makes it clear that he is a global warming skeptic, against the global warming industry, particularly the Copenhagen Conference (2009) as well as the imposition of carbon taxes and emissions cuts. As an investigative journalist he depends almost completely on the internet, Wikipedia and Science Daily (an American science news website, www.sciencedaily.com/). As far as this reviewer knows peer review is almost non-existent in each case. In Chapter 1 it is argued that the science of global warming is not settled but many of the examples are from journalists and newspapers whose sources are not revealed. In Chapter 2Wishart asks if the greenhouse effect is such a bad thing but shows his hand when he claims that

‘At the centre of this debate is the claim that CO₂ emissions are causing a greenhouse effect.’

He then continues to give a potted version of carbon dioxide science. This leads him into Chapter 3 where he concentrates on CO₂ levels since the Palaeozoic but ignores everything else – such as oceans, mountain building, wind systems and the composition of the atmosphere. The following chapter discusses whether the ‘evidence’ supports a future ice age or heat age based on news bites gleaned from the press since 1895. He touches on orbital changes, ENSO, the Larsen Ice shelf, the Northwest Passage and ignores time scales completely. A seven page Chapter 5 describes the “snowball earth” and “slush ball earth” of the Cambrian and the “spa-pool earth” of the Cretaceous before moving in to the Medieval Warm Period and Little Ice Age in Chapter 6. He reiterates that they are the result of natural cycles but seems to be unaware of Singer and Avery (2008) that makes a much better case. In the next chapter he mixes his time frames yet again. Although he talks about long and short term he is actually concentrating on the latter and spends most of the chapter ridiculing ‘believers’ and debunking global warming due to CO₂ although he admits at the beginning of the chapter that

‘If the sun is getting grunter long term, earth will probably heat up, long term.’

He quotes a lot of global warming skeptics including Lord Monckton. But he shows his ignorance (or cherry picked his downloads) when he says the ‘the year without a summer’ in the early 1800s [actually 1816] was due to low solar activity rather than the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815. His attitude is best summed up by the following quote near the end of the chapter:

‘What has become apparent to me, writing this book, is that the debate between both sides has become corrupted. The websites of the global

warming critics tend to be heavily science-based...whilst the websites of global warming believers, and their cheerleaders in the media, are almost dumbed down.’

In chapter 8 he considers urban heat islands that he explains simplistically but then misinterprets lots of data including Central England Temperatures, Stefan-Boltzman’s lambda and the acknowledged input errors into climate models by NASA around 2008-2009. But he ignores satellite-measured temperatures. He has a go at the polar bear extinction myth in Chapter 9 and computer models in chapter 10. Here he tries to show that the Little Ice Age was a purely regional phenomena using *New Scientist* articles written in 2006 and 2007 and then concludes that cloud modeling is not very good. In chapter 11 he discusses the Australian bush fires of 2009 because it was very topical at the time. He makes something of the article by Arblaster (2009) and the refutation by Karoly (2009 in *Realclimate*) who said arson was to blame not anthropogenic global warming but he clearly didn’t read the latter completely. *Realclimate* is a website set up by Michael Mann of ‘hockey stick’ and ‘Climate Research Unit hacking’ fame (if that is the right word). He uses Chapter 12 to criticize James Hansen of NASA and its GISS model. He again quotes what suits him and doesn’t differentiate between weather forecast models and climate research models. Sea level change is dealt with in chapter 14 and a resume of what has gone before (7 icons of global warming) is the subject of Chapter 15. Here he describes investigative journalism and the need to ‘follow the money’ where he suggests that there is now a global warming industry. It is a pity that *Merchants of Doubt* hadn’t been published when he wrote this chapter because Oreskes and Conway did that as well with the opposite result. There follow five chapters where he becomes a conspiracy theorist, obsessed with the idea that

‘The reality of “climate change” is intricately entwined with the collapse of

the world financial markets and the growing push for a de-facto world government’

The Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Enron collapse in 2002 are linked by Ken Ring (2005) in chapter 16. George Sotos, the financier, is the villain in Chapter 17 while in the next chapter he describes how environmental politics has been captured by the hard left; the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU) is funded by ‘alarmists’; and the wild greens want the world for themselves by advocating voluntary human extinction because “Man is earth’s cancer”. The last two chapters continue in this vein and end up by telling the reader that ‘they’ are getting at us through our children with compulsory environmental classes and emotional blackmail; carbon taxes are going to cost us NZ\$560 per annum each; we can’t trust Wikipedia because its climate change page is “controlled by a die hard global warming believer”. By this time I was getting quite exasperated by the tone and the rhetoric and the last straw was the following with which I will end this review as it speaks for itself:

‘Some will attempt to cherry-pick their evidence to oppose this book...for the most part when looking at studies ... I wasn’t interested in opinions, just the facts.’

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Additional short comment added 2 May 2012:

The stealth of “doubters” seems to be working as far as the general public is concerned. On 1 May 2012 the British *Telegraph* newspaper quoted James Hansen as saying, before a public lecture in Edinburgh, that:

“public skepticism about the threat of man-made climate change has increased despite the growing scientific consensus... He blamed sceptics...for employing ‘tremendous resources’ to undermine the scientific evidence.”

This is exactly the theme of the Oreskes/Conway book. The news item can be found at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/climatechange/9192494/Climate-scientists-are-losing-the-public-debate-on-global-warming.html>