

Willie Soon and Lord Christopher Monckton: Divestment? Schmivestment! Coal, Oil and Gas Are the Best Guarantors of Life, Liberty and Happiness

The totalitarian campaign to bully academic and other institutions into selling their shares in coal, oil, and gas companies owes nothing to science and all to the historical fact that these firms were once the biggest donors to libertarian parties.

Let us do the science anyway, and let us do it objectively. Dispassion is a prerequisite to forming a view on whether “divestment” is justifiable – and on whether it will make any difference to anything except the artificial consciences of a narrow political faction.

Science, intrinsically agnostic on socio-political movements, is the only medicine available to counter the psychological application of fear factors by the campaigners against fossil fuels.

Coal, oil and natural gas are not our only sources of hydrocarbon fuel. Scientists can now produce oil in the lab⁹²³ abiogenically by mimicking natural conditions in the Earth’s mantle, invalidating the argument that “fossil” fuels (they are not in fact fossils-based⁹²⁴) will run out unless we restrict their use. Likewise, mining scarce minerals such as uranium, gold, and silver from sea water⁹²⁵ and volcanic-zone reservoirs⁹²⁶ becomes more profitable as science improves the extraction techniques. This is why the economist Julian Simon was fond of proposing that the ultimate limit to resource exploitation is not matter but mind. We think, therefore we can.

Now that science has put paid to the scarcity scare, divestment campaigners turn to the pseudo-scientific argument that our enrichment of the atmosphere by emitting CO₂ from burning coal, oil, and gas may be dangerous. Recently, for instance, a scientific paper baselessly predicted the total melting of the Antarctic ice sheet.⁹²⁷ The timing of this and other profitable fictions coincides with the December 2015 UN climate conference in Paris, France.

Carbon dioxide in the air was once at 20 times today’s concentration. Today, more than a quarter of a millennium after the industrial revolution, to the nearest tenth of 1 percent there is no CO₂ in the air at all. How proportionate was it, then, for the authors of this latest pseudo-science scare to publicize their paper by saying: “It is time to stop using the sky as a waste dump”? Plants and trees do not see CO₂ as “waste.”

923 Kolesnikov et al. (2009) *Nature Geoscience*, vol. 2, 566-570.

924 See especially Thomas Gold (1998) “The Deep Hot Biosphere: The Myth of Fossil Fuels”.

925 Carboni et al. (2013) *Chemical Science*, vol. 4, 2396-2402.

926 Simmons et al. (2015) *Geothermics*, in press, doi: 10.1016/j.geothermics.2015.07.009.

927 Winkelmann et al. (2015) *Science Advances*, in press, doi:10.1126/sciadv.1500589 (online September 11).

With water and photosynthesis, it is their food. Paradoxically, the *soi-disant* “greens” are now campaigning against the one substance that greens the planet faster than anything else – in fact, the total biomass of trees and plants worldwide has been rising by around 3 percent per decade for 30 years – thanks to the CO₂ we are returning to the atmosphere from which it originally came.

The Antarctic ice-melt scare paper is not a proper scientific work. The authors left out many known geological, tectonic and other physical forces in their cartoon-like “simulations” – the computer modelers’ substitute for real science. Not the least of the factors they somehow omitted was the failure of the Antarctic to warm at all throughout the satellite era. For this reason, since 1979 the small warming that has occurred has not been global.

For good measure, they overstated the rate of global warming; overstated its effect on the ice; failed to account properly for the vast amounts of energy required to bring about a phase-change from water’s solid to its liquid state; ignored the newly-discovered geothermal heating sources beneath the Antarctic⁹²⁸ and Greenland⁹²⁹ Ice Sheets; and did not take account of the known stabilizing feedbacks that preserve the West Antarctic Ice sheet⁹³⁰: Gomez et al. (2010) concluded that “local sea-level [falls] following rapid ground-line migration will contribute a stabilizing influence on marine ice sheets.”

The “Antarctic is melting” paper is prejudiced to promote social-political alarmism rather than to provide a dispassionate examination of the relevant scientific questions or issues. The bias is all the more discomfiting when it is also well-known from geological and cryospheric studies that the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are both known to have been relatively stable⁹³¹ under the vagaries and extremes of weather and climatic conditions over the past 1-2 million years. This has led some scientists to conclude recently that “the northern ice sheet dome, which today contains 85% of the total ice sheet volume, has remained within 100 km of its present margin for at least 1 million years, and possibly going back as far as 2.4 million years. The ice sheet has therefore survived both interglacials and ‘superglacials’ [i.e., very warm climate intervals unlike what is occasionally being used now to denote man-made warming in the near future] that were both warmer and longer than the present. This may give us some hope for the future.”

928 Lough et al. (2013) *Nature Geoscience*, vol. 6, 1031-1035; Schroeder et al. (2014) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 111, 9070-9072.

929 Petrunin et al. (2013) *Nature Geoscience*, vol. 6, 746-750.

930 Gomez et al. (2010) *Nature Geoscience*, vol. 3, 850-853.

931 Bierman et al. (2014) *Science*, vol. 344, 402-405; Funder et al. (2014) *Geophysical Research Abstracts*, vol. 16, EGU2014-10721; Winnick & Caves (2015) *Geology*, vol. 43, 879-882.

Similarly, the latest reconsideration of the old question of ice sheets in the mid-Pliocene warm period 3 million years ago has led to a new conclusion⁹³² that the East Antarctic Ice Sheet “is substantially less sensitive to radiative forcing than previously inferred ... and that dramatic deglaciation of the EAIS under modern pCO₂ is not supported by the geologic record.”

This highly speculative paper, like so many others predicting doom, is not science.

One more serious scientific question⁹³³ to answer is on how local and global sea level can vary by 65 to 300 feet naturally during very warm greenhouse or hothouse Earth climatic conditions in which little or no ice are available to melt or refreeze to begin with.

So, who is “treating the sky as a waste dump”? Who is not holding dear the prospects of future generations? And who would hide the problems of pollution of our air, water and land by deliberately ignoring efforts to mitigate its negative or harmful effects?

The claim that returning CO₂ to the air from which it once came must cause only harm is one of the important assumptions underpinning demands for “divestment.” It is, however, erroneous.

The climate will not be adversely affected by the use of fossil fuels. The measured scientific fact is that global temperatures as measured by NOAA’s satellites confirms a lack of warming for approaching 19 years, though atmospheric CO₂ concentration rose by a tenth. During the same period, one-third of all manmade influences on the climate since 1750 rose. But there has been no warming in response. Even on the surface thermometer records, the rate of warming in the quarter-century since 1990 has been only half of what the UN’s climate panel had then predicted on the basis of what it called “substantial confidence” that the computer models on which it relied had captured all essential features of the climate. Plainly, something has gone very wrong.

Another recent study has also confirmed that the current global warming hiatus can best be explained by the counteracting effects of large winter cooling over Eurasia, ruling out several other recent popular explanations such as storage of “excess” heat in the deep ocean. These authors conclude that the observed winter cooling over Eurasia is “essentially from atmospheric internal variability [rather than any

932 Winnick & Caves (2015) *Geology*, vol. 43, 879-882.

933 MacLeod et al. (2013) *Geology*, vol. 41, 1083-1086; Haq (2014) *Global and Planetary Change*, vol. 113, 44-58; Wendler and Wendler (2015) *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, in press, doi:10.1016/j.palaeo.2015.08.029; Wendler et al. (2015) *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, in press, doi:10.1016/j.palaeo.2015.08.013.

rising atmospheric carbon dioxide effects].”⁹³⁴ Several other recent scientific publications⁹³⁵ also explain that the so-called sensitivity of the climate to rising atmospheric carbon dioxide has been significantly over-estimated by publications summarized in recent reports by the UN’s climate panel.

Ocean “acidification” is another serious untruth. Environmental activists, including the UN’s climate panel, invented this public deception,⁹³⁶ which is now blindly rubber-stamped by the “divestment” movement. Scientific analysis shows that the biology and chemistry of the ocean have never been controlled by the concentration of CO₂ in the air. The reverse is true: growth of oceanic life has long been limited by CO₂ starvation caused by the control of carbonate and bicarbonate biogeochemical cycling. Growth of lobsters and crabs and other sea life in laboratory experiments is enhanced,⁹³⁷ rather than destroyed, if the partial pressure of CO₂ in the air and hence in the ocean rises.

For the past 50 million years the ocean has been pronouncedly alkaline and, because it is self-buffering, must remain that way. The pH of the ocean – a measure of its acid-base balance – is around 8.0. Neutral is 7.0 on the pH scale. Rainwater, at 5.4, is pronouncedly acid. But does it “acidify” the ocean on which almost three-quarters of all precipitation falls, and into which much of the remainder is poured via the world’s rivers? And what steps would the “divestment” campaigners propose to take to prevent water from the ocean abyss from rising to the surface? It is up to ten times more acidic than the water at the surface.

The purveyors of doom also predict loss of biodiversity and even the extinction of certain terrestrial bird and mammal species. Once again, several serious scientific examinations of the issues⁹³⁸ provide us with more reliable and more positive news than the divestors.

The central truth is that any attempt to stop the combustion of fossil fuels will cause far more harm and lead to more deaths than the panic-mongers predict would arise from “global warming.” The activists know that many of the catastrophes they predict are exaggerated if not downright fraudulent. Yet they still profit by circulating these lurid predictions, based on models that have been proven false.

934 Li et al. (2015) *Geophysical Research Letters*, in press, doi:10.1002/2015GL065327 (online September 12).

935 Lewis (2015) *Climate Dynamics*, in press, doi:10.1007/s00382-015-2653-7; Mauritsen and Stevens (2015) *Nature Geoscience*, vol. 8, 346-351; Monckton et al. (2015) *Science Bulletin*, vol. 60, 122-135; Monckton et al. (2015) *Science Bulletin*, vol. 60, 1378-1390; Stevens (2015) *Journal of Climate*, vol. 28, 4794-4819.

936 Please see the discussion and explanation in this talk on “Acid Oceans, Osteoporosis of the Sea, and the CO₂ Monster”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYbidJBHafk>

937 Ries et al. (2009) *Geology*, vol. 37, 1131-1134.

938 Botkin et al. (2007) *Bioscience*, vol. 57, 227-236; Loehle and Eschenbach (2012) *Diversity and Distributions*, vol. 18, 84-91.

UNEP predicted in 2005 that there would be 50 million climate refugees by 2010.⁹³⁹ When this prediction failed, revisionists insisted in 2011 that the same prediction will now come true by 2020. What will these false prophets do in another five years? Likewise, predictions of Arctic summers to be ice-free by 2013 – no, 2014 – no, make that 2015 – er, um ... The ice is still there.

True to form, giant fast-growing Arctic mosquitoes⁹⁴⁰ and potential resurrection of 30,000 years old giant viruses from melting Siberian permafrost⁹⁴¹ are now two favorite threats from the alarmist paradise.

The authors of the paper predicting the total disappearance of the Antarctic ice sheet write that with “unrestrained future CO₂ emission, the amount of sea-level rise from Antarctica could exceed tens of meters over the next 1000 years and could ultimately lead to the loss of the entire ice sheet.” This baseless, childish fear-mongering is all the more intolerable given the fact that tide-gauge measurements of sea level changes around coastal regions of the world show sea level as rising no more than 4 to 8 inches a century.⁹⁴² Most empirical models of global sea-level change contain serious miscalculations because isostasy⁹⁴³ (the rebounding of the land masses once covered in ice during the last Ice Age) varies from place to place, making a true record of sea-level change difficult.

Life needs no apology. The use of coal, oil, and natural gas is necessary. It is particularly necessary for more than a billion people who have no electricity. Coal-fired electricity is the cheapest in the world by a large margin. It is reliable, it is efficient, it is clean, and there is enough coal to last for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Why do we say coal is “clean?” Simply because of advanced modern methods. Using fluidized-bed combustion or pelletized coal burned at very high temperatures in boilers is so efficient that the only unwanted heat loss comes by conduction through the furnace walls. This emits far less soot than in earlier generations, and what little is emitted is trapped by various processes such as fly-ash scrubbing before it reaches the outside air. The ash, instead of polluting the atmosphere, is instead turned into the world’s most efficiently-insulating house bricks.

939 “Five or More Failed Experiments in Measuring Global Sea Level Change. Willie Soon, Ph.D.,” *DDP Meetings*, YouTube, August 1, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gmW9GEUYvA>

940 Culler et al. (2015) *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, vol. 282, doi:10.1098/rspb.2015.1549. For known antidotes, consider Reiter (2000) *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, vol. 6, 1-11; Reiter (2008) *Malaria Journal*, vol. 7 (suppl. 1), S3, doi:10.1186/1475-2875-7-S1-S3; Gething et al. (2010) *Nature*, vol. 465, 342-345.

941 Legendre et al. (2015) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, in press, doi:10.1073/pnas.1510795112.

942 Morner (2013) *Energy & Environment*, vol. 24, 509-536; Beenstock et al. (2015) *Environmental and Ecological Statistics*, vol. 22, 179-206.

943 Morner (2015) *International Journal of Geosciences*, vol. 6, 577-592.

The divestment movement, therefore, is a false, pseudo-scientific ideology. Fortunately, it will make no difference whatsoever to those who produce or rely upon coal, oil, and gas. If over-politicized universities refuse to hold shares in profitable hydrocarbon enterprises, others will buy those shares and profit instead. But the integrity of science suffers when the discipline is wedged into political mottos and rally cries. Fossil fuel divestment is an affront to the scientific method and the quest for truth.

Willie Soon, an astrophysicist and geoscientist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, is an authority on the relationship between solar phenomena and global climate. In 2003, after his published papers on climate history of the last 1000 years, he was given an award by the Smithsonian Institution in "official recognition of work performance reflecting a high standard of accomplishment." Dr. Soon earned his Ph.D. in aerospace engineering from the University of Southern California. All views expressed are his own.

Lord Christopher Monckton, Third Viscount Monckton of Brenchley, is chief policy advisor to the Science and Public Policy Institute. Mr. Monckton was Special Advisor to Margaret Thatcher as U.K. Prime Minister from 1982 to 1986, during which time he was among the first to advise that global warming should be investigated. Like Mrs. Thatcher, he later changed his mind about the risks.