Ocean Temperature Record and Other Clues: What Is Your Response?

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
19 August 2009

In this report we look at recent news on global warming, the positioning of denialists (the bad cop) and the more insidious "limited-measure-ists" (the good cop), and lastly the direct action approach. The news on global climate change does not get better, but patterns are emerging right now that may help us cut through the obstacles to acting forthrightly.

Climate-change denialism, or just the denial of human-caused global warming, is on the rise or becoming more prominent precisely because the evidence for irrefutable human impacts is more and more obvious. And the implications are that we must change our lifestyles, and corporate greed will have to take a back seat to humanity's greater interests. For some of us either implication is intolerable, so two approaches are employed: bad cop and good cop.

The implications for serious social change gets the PR from fossil-fuel industry-funded scientists spinning furiously. Culture Change has critiqued the oil-rigged Lundberg Survey "study" on climate legislation. The threat to Big Oil is that petroleum consumption may be cut back. They also don't want to see the consumer lifestyle limited for the sake of climate protection by "those who would impose draconian policies on today’s population in the name of saving the planet." (A Surfeit of Cycles, by Bill Schaffer, allied with S. Fred Singer)

As bad as this activity is, it's easy to spot. It's easily refuted, such as by William Catton in his essay on Culture Change "The Problem of Denial"
on August 6, 2009.

Now consider something more challenging:

We cannot build our way out of the dilemma. The peaking of global oil extraction that has finally been acknowledged as recent history, especially for the cheap, conventional oil the modern world was built on, means there is no chance to do it over. The question of energy is not just a matter of better technology, but that energy is finite in the former accessible, handy form. We are fed the idea that we must always have as much as we've been accustomed to. How this can happen especially with the vain hope for more economic growth isn't discussed by national leaders or corporate media. The major environmental groups are side-stepping it too, mainly by failing to have any inkling of petrocollapse.

Instead, with the funded environmentalist sector's cheerleading, a renewable-energy "answer" -- a.k.a. the green jobs energy economy -- is the Holy Grail. If it could be realized and be sustainable, this would be delightful. Too bad that there are holes in the fabric, or the emperor has no clothes, but still the energy Holy Grail is the attempted consensus. Something these boosters have in common with the out and out die-hard nuclear/fossil fools, is that technology is the answer. Along with American ingenuity, and the Hope from having our first Black President -- and a very articulate, nice one -- we must prevail as history has seemingly ordained. So goes the general attitude.

Consider the 2009 National Geographic magazine's "Collector's Edition" of "Fueling a Revolution: ENERGY"

"Energy for tomorrow may be a potent weapon in the battle to convert climate change skeptics... The hopeful news is that it's not too late to change Earth's fate, if we employ large-scale efforts like solar and wind power and take small steps like installing energy-efficient lightbulbs."

This is the party line, and it's not for the kind of change we need now -- to slash energy use and reject the corporate state and its products. Rather, the subtle message is to limit our response to the climate crisis so as to preserve the interests

of the status quo.

The limited-measure-ists can be sincere and misguided, or in other cases carefully calculating. Their strategy is undermined every time the climate models and conservative predictions are outstripped by shocking acceleration of climate change, yet the "don't rock the (sinking) boat" and giving in to the the good cop has appeal. For how long, if the planetary torture just worsens? The following news excerpts should guide us:

Ocean Temperatures Are Highest on Record

By Cornelia Dean

August 14, 2009

New York Times

Average temperatures of waters at the oceans' surface in July were the highest ever recorded, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said. The agency said the average sea surface temperature was 1.06 degrees higher than the 20th-century average of 61.5 degrees. Though July was unusually cool in some areas, like the eastern United States, analysts at the NOAA Climate Data Center said the combined global land and ocean surface temperature was 1.03 degrees higher than the 20th-century average of 60.4 degrees, the fifth warmest since worldwide record keeping began in 1880. The agency also said that, on average, Arctic sea ice covered 3.4 million square miles in July, 12.7 percent below the 1979-2000 average and the third lowest on record, after 2007 and 2006. (total report; it's short - ed)

World Will Warm Faster Than Predicted in Next Five Years, Study Warns

New estimate based on the forthcoming upturn in solar activity and El NiZo southern oscillation cycles is expected to silence global warming sceptics

by Duncan Clark

July 27, 2009

The Guardian/UK

The world faces a new period of record-breaking temperatures as the sun's activity increases, leading the planet to heat up significantly faster than scientists had predicted over the next five years, according to a new study.

The hottest year on record was 1998, and the relatively cool years since have led to some global-warming sceptics claiming that temperatures have levelled off or started to decline. However, the new research firmly rejects that argument.

The work is the first to assess the combined impact on global temperature of four factors: human influences such as CO2 and aerosol emissions; heating from the sun; volcanic activity; and the El Niño southern oscillation, the phenomenon by which the Pacific Ocean flips between warmer and cooler states every few years.

It shows that the relative stability in global temperatures observed in the last seven years is explained primarily by the

decline in incoming sunlight associated with the downward phase of the 11-year solar cycle, together with a lack of strong El Niño events. These trends have masked the warming caused by CO2 and other greenhouse gases.

As solar activity picks up again in the coming years, the new research suggests, temperatures will shoot up at 150% of the rate predicted by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The research, to be published in a forthcoming edition of Geophysical Research Letters, was carried out by Judith Lean of the US Naval Research Laboratory and David Rind of Nasa's Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

Antarctic glacier 'thinning fast' by David Shukman,
Science and environment correspondent, BBC News

Vast expanses of Arctic ice melt in summer heat

By CHARLES J. HANLEY

August 6, 2009

Associated Press

TUKTOYAKTUK, Northwest Territories The Arctic Ocean has given up tens of thousands more square miles (square kilometers) of ice on Sunday in a relentless summer of melt, with scientists watching through satellite eyes for a possible record low polar ice cap.

From the barren Arctic shore of this village in Canada's far northwest, 1,500 miles (2,414 kilometers) north of Seattle, veteran observer Eddie Gruben has seen the summer ice retreating more each decade as the world has warmed. By this weekend the ice edge lay some 80 miles (128 kilometers) at sea.

"Forty years ago, it was 40 miles (64 kilometers) out," said Gruben, 89, patriarch of a local contracting business.

Global average temperatures rose 1 degree Fahrenheit (0.6 degree Celsius) in the past century, but Arctic temperatures rose twice as much or even faster, almost certainly in good part because of man-made greenhouse gases, researchers say.

In late July the mercury soared to almost 86 degrees Fahrenheit (30 degrees Celsius) in this settlement of 900 Inuvialuit, the name for western Arctic Eskimos.

Antarctic glacier 'thinning fast'

By David Shukman

BBC News

One of the largest glaciers in Antarctica is thinning four times faster than it was 10 years ago, according to research seen by the BBC.

A study of satellite measurements of Pine Island glacier in west Antarctica reveals the surface of the ice is now dropping at a rate of up to 16m a year.

Since 1994, the glacier has lowered by as much as 90m, which has serious implications for sea-level rise.

The work by British scientists appears in Geophysical Research Letters.

The "official word"

The Washington Post is on board the climate change bandwagon with the "it's already here" message. This acknowledgment is supposedly enough to lay down the response to the problem. Another form of limited-measure-ism is to downplay the climate change news or refuse to look at the more alarming new data. The IPCC has failed to include positive feedback loops as well as the sea-level rise potential for quick ice-sheet and ice-cap failures. The following report, while thorough sounding, seems to try hard to downplay the crisis by using calming, bureaucratic descriptions and scientific over-restraint:

Report on Warming Offers New Details

Estimates Specify Effects on Different Regions of U.S.

The report predicts global warming could cause sea levels to rise three feet, which could flood Key West, Fla.

By David A. Fahrenthold

Washington Post Staff Writer

June 17, 2009

Man-made climate change is already lifting temperatures, increasing rainfall, and raising sea levels around the United States and its effects are on track to get much worse in the coming century, according to a report released this afternoon by federal scientists. www.globalchange.gov

The report, "Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States," covers much of the same ground as previous analyses from U.S. and United Nations science panels. It finds that greenhouse-gas emissions are "primarily" responsible for global warming and that rapid action is needed to avert catastrophic shifts in water, heat and natural life.

In the report’s scope at 196 pages, the attempt is made to present the fullest picture yet of the threats to the United States and their timing.

"In our back yards, climate change is happening, and it's happening now," Jane Lubchenco, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said at a news conference June 16, in support of a House of Representatives climate bill. She continued: "It's not too late to act. Decisions made now will determine whether we get big changes or small ones." (Since when is little change still an option? -ed)

Finally, there is the avenue of direct action, and it's now being taken. Top climate scientist at NASA, James Hansen, advocates it, and he even got arrested himself at a coal facility a few months ago.

Climate Disobedience: Is a New 'Seattle' in the Making?

by Mark Engler

August 12, 2009

TomDispatch.com

In the early morning of October 8, 2007, a small group of British Greenpeace activists slipped inside a hulking smokestack that towers more than 600 feet above a coal-fired power plant in Kent, England. While other activists cut electricity on the plant's grounds, they prepared to climb the interior of the structure to its top, rappel down its outside, and paint in block letters a demand that Prime Minister Gordon Brown put an end to plants like the Kingsnorth facility, which releases nearly 20,000 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each day.

The activists, most of them in their thirties and forties, expected the climb to the top of the smokestack would take less than three hours. Instead, scaling a narrow metal ladder inside took nine. "It was the most physically exhausting thing I have ever done," 35-year-old Ben Stewart activist...
said later. "It was like climbing through a huge radiator -- the hottest, dirtiest place you could imagine."

In the end, the fatigued, soot-covered climbers were only able to paint the word "Gordon" on the chimney before, facing dizzying heights, police helicopters, and a high court injunction, they were compelled to abandon the attempt and submit to arrest. (Trailer: Nick Broomfield's Kingsnorth documentary) They could hardly have known then that their botched attempt at signage would help transform British debate about fossil-fuel power plants -- and that it would send tremors through an emerging global movement determined to use direct action to combat the depredations of climate change.

The case took on historic weight only after the Kingsnorth Six went to court, where they presented to a jury what is known in the United

States as a "necessity" defense. This defense applies to situations in which a person violates a law to prevent a greater, imminent harm from occurring: for example, when someone breaks down a door to put out a fire in a burning building.

Further Reading:

Swimming off Maine for an hour and a half:
"World's ocean temps are warmest on record" Associated Press, Aug. 20, 2009:

msnbc.msn.com

Global Warming Crisis Council listserve (most of above reports and citations)

A Call to Action: The Necessity Defense - Culture Change

Pledge for Climate Protection - Culture Change

Subcribe at
https://lists.riseup.net/www/subscribe/gwcc

or send a blank email to gwcc-subscribe "at" lists.riseup "dot" net

The denialist literature

‘GLOBAL WARMING: MAN-MADE OR NATURAL?’ by S.Fred Singer

EXCERPT:

“…. The widely touted “consensus” of 2,500 scientists on the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an illusion: Most of the panellists have no scientific qualifications, and many of the others object to some part of the IPCC’s report. The Associated Press reported recently that only 52 climate scientists contributed to the report’s “Summary for Policymakers.”

‘A SURFEIT OF CYCLES’ by Bill Schaffer
p>

This article is published under Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. See the Fair Use Notice for more information.