Sierra Club Slammed for "Clean Car" Opportunism

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
13 April 2010

Editor's note:
A testimony to the failure of the environmental movement to offer an alternative to ecocide is the continued, widespread support of the automobile industry for "clean cars." This pseudo-environmental stance is almost identical to the Obama administration's myopia about continuing industrial pollution at full tilt for the sake of "jobs" and stability for its friends on Wall Street. However, the state of affairs -- driving off the ecological cliff for maximum petrocollapse -- is also the failure of grassroots activism and the pro-bicycle/pro walking movements.

It's not fair to criticize all of them, when some have made honesty and sacrifice part of their daily work to spread the word -- via conferences, magazines, websites, and direct action such as Critical Mass Bike Rides. Yet if there is something more we can do for greater effectiveness to combat car domination and the paving over (or tarmacking) the arable land, we need to get down to it. Advocating that we publicly boycott petroleum and never buy a new car will help. The pace of climate change tells us there's no time to wait for some techno-solution or a better President.

Reading the pro-car cheerleading of Michael Brune, Sierra Club Executive Director, I can't help but be reminded of his predecessor Carl Pope: pied by grassroots environmental activists disappointed about his compromises regarding ancient forests. Who else did the Biotic Baking Brigade pie? Milton Friedman, Bill Gates, and Charles Hurwitz (Maxxam Corp.), getting just and tasty deserts.

I don't know if I've ever seen a more pathetic pseudo-environmental pose: statements by Brune -- "help a more sustainable domestic auto industry thrive" and "fuel economic growth" -- show that ecological ignorance and disassociation from reality are alive and well. The Sierra Club has thus firmly established itself as a dangerous factor in environmental politics, if it hadn't done so lately.

Incrementalism on behalf of a broken system is irresponsible and unacknowledged by the reformist-participant because of the urge to accomplish something, anything. Seizing some middle ground, however, is a disservice to Mother Earth. The Sierra Club thus pretends that human and animal slaughter on the roads from vehicle impacts don't exist, and that minor exhaust reductions at a time of out-of-control global warming are the right approach. Peak oil? The Club evidently never heard of it, or chooses to not understand its basics.

Did the Club get the message from us on their current campaign? Yes, the propagandist originally reaching thousands of members from the Membership Services dept, Ann Mesnikoff heard from a few of us on the Global Warming Crisis Council Listserve. She did not respond, but in a bureaucracy, that's to be expected. After her shock she must have dutifully passed along the strange reactions of non-car-loving activists! - Jan Lundberg

Jan Lundberg Attacks Sierra Club’s Support for “Clean Cars”
by Keith Farnish (Link)

Our good friends The Sierra Club are at it again this time with regards to motor transport. The Sierra Club believe you can have clean cars as demonstrated by this press release, emanating from the new radical Executive Director, Michael Brune (didn t take long for him to become a member of the establishment, did it?):

New Global Warming and Fuel Economy Standards for Autos a Major Win for America

Washington, D.C.—The Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Transportation today finalized important new combined global warming emissions and fuel economy standards for autos for the years 2012-2016. The new standards will bring fuel economy to 35.5 miles per gallon and carbon dioxide emissions will be reduced to 250 grams per mile. The efficiency gains in the autos sold under these standards will save 1.8 billion barrels of oil. This is the first time the Clean Air Act has been used to directly tackle global warming emissions and is also the first significant increase in fuel economy standards since the original 1975 CAFE standards.

Statement of Michael Brune, Sierra Club Executive Director

These standards are a grand slam: billions of dollars in consumer savings at the pump, a huge reduction in oil use, significant cuts in pollution, and they will help a more sustainable domestic auto industry thrive. Sierra Club pushed hard to pass the California law that set the stage for these standards, our members pushed for the Calfornia standards to be adopted in more than a dozen other states across the country, and we defended them all the way to the Supreme Court. The ambitious standards being finalized today were made possible by these years of hard work and we are delighted to see them become the law of the land.

Today s new national standards are the result of state leadership and the leadership of President Obama and his cabinet, including EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood. Driving vehicle standards forward to 35.5 miles per gallon in 2016 is a result of President Obama s work to bring together automakers, state leaders, environmentalists, and labor unions to secure a win for the nation.

The new tailpipe standards, promulgated under the Clean Air Act, demonstrate the Act s power to spur innovation, fuel economic growth, protect our air, make America more energy independent, and fight global warming. Instead of using this and other important tools in the Clean Air Act to accelerate our transition to a clean energy future, some in Congress want to slam on the brakes and actually shift the country into reverse by gutting the Clean Air Act. We cannot allow this happen. It would be bad for the environment, bad for the economy, and bad for America. The only people it would be good for are Big Oil, big polluters, and America s enemies overseas who continue to profit from our dangerous dependence on oil.

Consumer savings? Helping the auto industry thrive? Fuel economic growth?

Not surprisingly, those people who have their hypocrisy detectors switched on, are furious at the double (triple) standards being shown by Sierra Club in this latest industrial-political love-in. Jan Lundberg, editor-in-chief at Culture Change, and expert on the oil industry wrote the following on a climate change forum which deserves to be published with his permission as widely as possible:

The Sierra Club is the quintessential Liberals in Volvos with bumper stickers imagining that reforming the system will fix inconvenient crises. I don t mean to minimize good work, especially by Sierra Club chapters. But nationally the Club would not join our Alliance for a Paving Moratorium all through the 1990s because they thought that their anti-sprawl campaign could somehow be effective when more roads were allowed to be built or widened! And if the Club ever opposed a road project, the solution was to have the roadway plan relocated so as not to damage a sensitive ecosystem quite so much (as if a nearby ecosystem could be sacrificed instead).

What can you expect from a magazine, Sierra, that has had full page ads from Honda and Toyota for decades? That s money in the pockets of nonprofit staffers who probably have cars too (and refrigerators, TVs, computers, etc., all of

which trash the Earth when an overpopulated society is participating in consumerism).

You and I probably waste our time with these inquiries. In my experience the response is polite and gently defensive, as if the good an organization does makes any deficiencies insignificant.

The idea of 200,000,000 cars replaced in this country by slightly more efficient technology is the height of hypocritical idiocy, both on ecological grounds and from a peak oil standpoint. And as for the 1,000,000 animals smashed to death on U.S. roads every day by clunker and Prius alike John Muir would not approve for one minute. David Brower did not either, which is one indication of why he was previously sacked as too aggressive for defending Mother Earth.

Jan