

Global Warming Is 300-Year-Old News

By ARTHUR B. ROBINSON
And NOAH E. ROBINSON

Opponents of the use of coal, oil and natural gas—the world's primary energy sources—received what looked to be good news last week. A National Research Council panel of 11 members, after reviewing and evaluating existing experimental data over the last 20 years, concluded that there has probably been a rise in the Earth's surface temperature.

Unfortunately for advocates of the Kyoto treaty, atmospheric temperatures over the same two decades have not risen. The climate model chosen to support the Kyoto plan—a scheme to sharply reduce energy use—predicts that atmospheric temperature should have risen by one degree to two degrees Fahrenheit over those 20 years. Yet satellites and weather balloons have shown no verifiable atmospheric temperature rise.

Indeed, despite the hype, the NRC findings do little to advance the argument that people have caused global warming. The NRC panel's 85-page report, though concluding that surface temperature has risen a little, is full of inconclusive results. The first sentence of the report's concluding remarks reads: "The various kinds of evidence examined by the panel led it to conclude that the observed disparity between the surface and lower- to mid-tropospheric [atmospheric] temperature trends during this particular 20-year period is *probably at least partially real.*" (Italics added.)

The report further says that uncertainties in all of the records—surface, satellite and balloon—are too great to draw conclusions about the relative effects of volcanic eruptions, measurement errors due to localized human activity in urban areas, instrument errors, human release of greenhouse gases and other factors. The report concludes that "major advances" in scientific methods will be necessary before these questions can be resolved.

A Lost Myth

Other findings have also been inconclusive. The Commerce Department announced that U.S. surface temperatures in 1999 were the second-warmest on

record. What the department failed to mention is that it has other surface records in which 1999 falls below 1934, and that NASA ranks 1999 as the 14th-warmest-year of the century. In the global atmosphere, satellites show 12 years warmer than 1999 and 8 cooler, while weather balloons show 15 warmer and 27 cooler.

All this is bad news for the antitechnologists. They desperately needed word of their long-awaited "greenhouse signal,"

Kyoto supporters cheer new findings that the Earth's surface temperature is probably rising. But this trend isn't recent and isn't man-made.

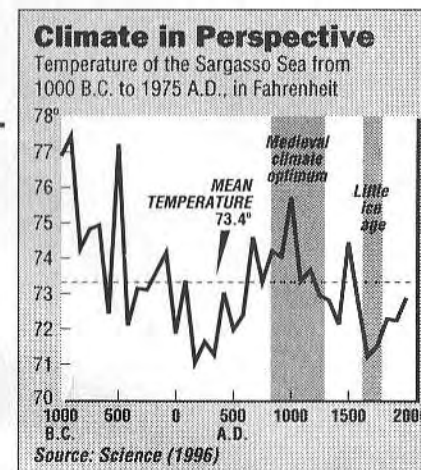
due to arrive with the new millennium. Now, in the absence of more solid proof, opposition to their global plans will continue to grow. Already, more than 17,000 American scientists have signed a petition opposing the Kyoto treaty. Treaty supporters, meanwhile, are increasingly relying on their multimillion-dollar media campaign promoting a perception of human-caused global warming.

That the Earth is warming is, of course, very old news. The current warming trend began about 300 years ago, at the low point of the Little Ice Age. Indeed, receding glaciers and other geographic phenomena caused by this 300-year trend were cited by the NRC committee as support for their belief that the current rise in surface temperatures is probably real.

This rising trend and the fluctuations within it are closely correlated with solar activity. Solar increases during the early 20th century caused a substantial rise in temperatures. This was followed by a cooling cycle. During this latter period, environmentalists spread doomsday scenarios about "global cooling"—a phenomenon, they claimed, caused by hydrocarbon fuels. Over the last 20 years, temperatures leveled, and now may be resuming their

previous rise. The change has allowed the same environmentalists to spread fears of "global warming"—demonizing, of course, hydrocarbon fuels.

The chart nearby places all of this in historical perspective. Derived from isotopic ratios in the skeletons of marine organisms deposited in a region of the Atlantic Ocean, this record shows temperatures during the past three millennia. Clearly seen are the Little Ice Age and the much warmer period about 1000 years ago known as the Medieval Climate Optimum, so named because the climate was unusually benign. Earth tem-



peratures are now near the 3,000-year average and clearly not unusual.

What will temperatures be during the 21st century and beyond? No one knows. Astronomers are not yet able to predict future solar activity. If current trends continue, however, our environment will be much improved.

Already, plant growth and diversity—from the forests and fields of North America to the rain forests of South America—have shown a marked increase. This is the result of carbon dioxide fertilization, a process that occurs when man moves carbon from below-ground deposits of coal, oil and natural gas, and puts it into the atmosphere where it is then used to make more plants and animals.

Some studies indicate that North American forests are growing so fast that they are storing all of the human-released carbon from North America. Animals, because they eat plants, have increased just as rapidly. When this biological miracle stabilizes—one or two centuries in the future—it is estimated that the plant and animal population of the Earth may have doubled. Farm production is also being increased by carbon dioxide fertilization, and will continue to accelerate.

A warmer planet, with milder weather (as experienced during medieval times) and much more wildlife—how could a true environmentalist wish for more? Worries about flooding in this warmer world are unjustifiable. Floods did not occur 1000 years ago. Scientists have shown that it would take thousands of years for the ice caps to melt, if they melted at all. As warmer temperatures increase snow in the polar regions, sea levels might actually decrease.

Technological Wealth

Meanwhile, short-term efforts to improve the environment, such as the plan by California's South Coast Air Quality Management District to require all public vehicles to be powered by electricity, natural gas, or other clean-burning fuels, will use more hydrocarbon fuels rather than less. Electricity—especially now that nuclear power and hydroelectric dams are considered politically incorrect—will continue to be produced primarily by burning hydrocarbons. The energy delivered to an electric car requires more hydrocarbon fuel per mile than does the direct use of hydrocarbon fuel.

Our scientists and engineers have provided the technological wealth that now finances most of our environmental programs. They will continue to do so unless pseudo-environmentalism torpedoes our economic progress along with the hopes and futures of billions of people in the less developed world.

Arthur Robinson and Noah Robinson are chemists at the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine.