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Two British committees, one Dutch committee and a US Senate committee have investigated Climategate — the disclosure from emails that scientists at the Climate Research Unit (CRU) of East Anglia University sought to withhold data from and sabotage research publications of other scientists questioning the conventional wisdom on global warming.

The first three committees gave CRU scientists and collaborators — including Phil Jones, Michael Mann, Keith Briffa and Kevin Trenberth — a slap on the wrist without calling them outright frauds. The Minority Staff Report of the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, however, has accused the scientists of (a) obstructing release of damaging data and information, (b) manipulating data to reach preconceived conclusions, (c) colluding to pressure journal editors who published work questioning the climate science 'consensus', and (d) assuming activist roles to influence the political process.

Critics have lambasted the supposedly-independent inquiry by Sir Muir Russell because he himself is a climate change crusader. He interviewed the CRU scientists but not the climate sceptics whom the scientists were targeting. This has been called "a trial with judge, jury, reporters, spectators and defendant, but no plaintiff. The plaintiff is locked outside the courtroom sitting in the hall hollering and hoping the jury hears some of what he has to say."

At the end of it all, two things are clear. First, it is fantasy for crusaders to claim that catastrophic global warming is established science: the emails reveal doubts and caveats even among true believers in CRU. Second, the International Panel on Climate Change must disavow its claim made first in 2001 — based on the 'hockey stick' graph of Michael Mann using historical tree-ring data — that the world is warmer today than ever before.

Tree-ring data after 1961 indicate cooling, but actual temperatures show warming. So, Jones resorted to the 'trick' of splicing tree-ring data up to 1961 with actual temperatures after 1961, thus manufacturing a steadily-rising temperature trend in the 20th century. The splicing was dishonest and an insult to science. Yet, the independent inquiry did not condemn it, showing how easily crusader-inquirers forgive transgressions that promote their private agenda.

The IPCC needs to revert to the earlier scientific consensus — maintained from its first report in 1990 to 2001 — that the medieval warm period of 800-1,300 AD — well before fossil fuels were extracted — was warmer than it is today.

This is inconvenient for climate crusaders who blame fossil fuels for all warming. But it will provide citizens with basic information they need before deciding whether to spend trillions on combating a problem that may or may not be real.

To throw light on these two issues, it is worth citing some of the emails.

Phil Jones (regarding queries from climate sceptic S McIntyre). "I had some emails with him a few years ago when he wanted to get all the station temperature data we use here in CRU. I hid behind the fact that some of the data had been received from individuals and not directly from Met Services through the Global Telecommunications Service (GTS) or through GCOS."

Phil Jones to Michael Mann. "And don't leave stuff lying around on ftp [file transfer protocol] sites — you never know who is trawling them. The two MMs have been after the CRU station data for years. If they ever hear there is a Freedom of Information Act now in the UK, I think I'll delete the file rather than send it to anyone."

KEITH Briffa. "I know there is pressure to present a nice tidy story as regards apparent unprecedented warming in a thousand years or more in the proxy data, but in reality, the situation is not quite so simple. We don't have a lot of proxies that come right up to date and those that do (at least a significant number of tree proxies) show some unexpected changes in response that do not match the recent warming..."

Phil Jones. "The scientific community would come down on me in no uncertain terms if I said the world had cooled from 1998. OK, it has, but it is only seven years of data and it isn't statistically significant."

On February 13 this year, Phil Jones told BBC that "there has been no statistically significant warming over the last 15 years."

Kevin Trenberth, UCAR, October 12, 2009, "We can't account for the lack of warming at the moment and it is a travesty that we can't ."

Professor Mojib Latif, an IPCC member , recently said, "For the time being, global warming has paused, and there may well be some cooling." Breaking with climate-change orthodoxy, he said North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) cycles were probably responsible for some of the strong global warming seen in the past three decades. The NAO was now moving into a colder phase (New Scientist, September 2009).

The National Research Council appointed by US Congress concluded that "the substantial uncertainties in the quantitative assessment of large-scale surface temperature changes prior to about AD 1600 lower our confidence in this (hockey stick) conclusion compared to the high level of confidence we place in the Little Ice Age cooling and 20th century warming. Even less confidence can be placed in the original conclusions by Mann et al(1999) that the 1990s are likely the warmest decade, and 1998 the warmest year, in at least a millennium."

Climategate fortifies my own convictions as a critical agnostic on global warming. We know so little about the weather that we cannot predict it five days ahead, let alone one century ahead. This also means we know too little to rule out guesstimates — like the six IPCC scenarios — about a possible catastrophe.

The case for combating global warming rests not on established proof of warming but on insuring against a catastrophe that may not happen. If the public decides to spend a trillion dollars on such speculative insurance, so be it. I doubt if this will happen once people learn that catastrophic global warming is a guesstimate , not proven science.

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