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[The Real Climate Censorship](#)

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It's happening, it's systematic, and it is precisely the opposite story to the one the papers are telling.

By George Monbiot. Published in the Guardian, 10th April 2007.

The drafting of reports by the world's pre-eminent group of climate scientists is an odd process. For many months scientists contributing to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tussle over the evidence. Nothing gets published unless it achieves consensus. This means that the panel's reports are extremely conservative – even timid. It also means that they are as trustworthy as a scientific document can be.

Then, when all is settled among the scientists, the politicians sweep in and seek to excise from the summaries anything which threatens their interests. While the US government has traditionally been the scientists' chief opponent, this time the assault was led by Saudi Arabia, supported by China and Russia(1,2).

The scientists fight back, but they always have to make some concessions. The report released on Friday, for example, was shorn of the warning that "North America is expected to experience locally severe economic damage, plus substantial ecosystem, social and cultural disruption from climate change related events"(3). David Wasdell, an accredited reviewer for the panel, claims that the summary of the science the IPCC published in February was purged of most of its references to "positive feedbacks": climate change accelerating itself (4).

This is the opposite of the story endlessly repeated in the right-wing press: that the IPCC, in collusion with governments, is conspiring to exaggerate the science. No one explains why governments should seek to amplify their own failures. In the wacky world of the climate conspiracists, no explanations are required. The world's most conservative scientific body has somehow been transformed into a cabal of screaming demagogues.

This is just one aspect of a story which is endlessly told the wrong way around. In the Sunday Telegraph, the Daily Mail, in columns by Dominic Lawson, Tom Utley and Janet Daley the allegation is constantly repeated that climate scientists and environmentalists are trying to "shut down debate". Those who say that manmade global warming is not taking place, they claim, are being censored.

Something is missing from their accusations: a single valid example. The closest any of them have been able to get is two letters sent – by the Royal Society and by the US senators Jay Rockefeller and Olympia Snowe – to that delicate flower ExxonMobil, asking that it cease funding lobbyists who deliberately distort climate science(5,6). These correspondents had no power to enforce their wishes. They were merely urging Exxon to change its practices. If everyone who urges is a censor, then the comment pages of the newspapers must be closed in the name of free speech.

In an interview four weeks ago, Martin Durkin, who made Channel 4's film *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, claimed that he was subject to "invisible censorship"(7). He appears to have forgotten that he had just been given 90 minutes of prime time television to expound his theory that climate change is a great green conspiracy. So what did this censorship amount to? Complaints about one of his programmes had been upheld by the Independent Television Commission. It found that "the views of the four complainants, as made clear to the interviewer, had been distorted by selective editing" and that they had been "misled as to the content and purpose of the programmes when they agreed to take part."(8) This, apparently, makes him a martyr.

If you want to know what real censorship looks like, let me show you what has been happening on the other side of the fence. Scientists whose research demonstrates that climate change is taking place have been repeatedly threatened and silenced and their findings edited or suppressed.

The Union of Concerned Scientists found that 58% of the 279 climate scientists working at federal agencies in the US who responded to

its survey reported that they had experienced one of the following constraints. 1. “Pressure to eliminate the words ‘climate change,’ ‘global warming,’ or other similar terms” from their communications. 2. Editing of scientific reports by their superiors which “changed the meaning of scientific findings”. 3. Statements by officials at their agencies which misrepresented their findings. 4. “The disappearance or unusual delay of websites, reports, or other science-based materials relating to climate”. 5. “New or unusual administrative requirements that impair climate-related work”. 6. “Situations in which scientists have actively objected to, resigned from, or removed themselves from a project because of pressure to change scientific findings.” They reported 435 incidents of political interference over the past five years(9).

In 2003, the White House gutted the climate change section of a report by the Environmental Protection Agency(10). It deleted references to studies showing that global warming is caused by manmade emissions. It added a reference to a study partly funded by the American Petroleum Institute, which suggested that temperatures are not rising. Eventually the agency decided to drop the section altogether.

After Thomas Knutson at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) published a paper in 2004 linking rising emissions with more intense tropical cyclones, he was blocked by his superiors from speaking to the media. He agreed to one request to appear on MSNBC, but a public affairs officer at NOAA rang the station to tell the programme that Knutson was “too tired” to conduct the interview. The official explained to him that the “White House said no”. All media inquiries were to be routed instead to a scientist who believed there was no connection between global warming and hurricanes(11).

Last year the top climate scientist at NASA, James Hansen, reported that his bosses were trying to censor his lectures, papers and web postings. He was told by public relations officials at the agency that there would be “dire consequences” if he continued to call for rapid reductions in greenhouse gases(12).

Last month, the Alaskan branch of the US Fish and Wildlife Service told its scientists that anyone travelling to the Arctic must understand “the administration’s position on climate change, polar bears, and sea ice and will not be speaking on or responding to these issues.”(13)

At hearings in the US Congress three weeks ago, Philip Cooney, a former aide to White House who was previously working at the American Petroleum Institute, admitted he had made hundreds of changes to government reports about climate change on behalf of the Bush administration(14). Though he is not a scientist, he had struck out evidence that glaciers were retreating and inserted phrases suggesting that there was serious scientific doubt about global warming(15).

The guardians of free speech in Britain aren’t above attempting a little suppression, either. The Guardian and I have now received several letters from the climate sceptic Viscount Monckton, threatening us with libel proceedings after I challenged his claims about climate science(16,17,18,19). On two of these occasions he has demanded that articles are removed from the internet. Monckton is the man who wrote to Senators Rockefeller and Snowe, claiming that their letter to ExxonMobil offends the corporation’s “right of free speech”(20).

After Martin Durkin’s film was broadcast, one of the scientists it featured, Professor Carl Wunsch, complained that his views on climate change had been misrepresented. Wunsch says he has now received a legal letter from Durkin’s production company, Wag TV, threatening to sue him for defamation unless he agrees to make a public statement that he was neither misrepresented nor misled(21).

Would it be terribly impolite to suggest that when those who deny that climate change is happening complain of censorship, a certain amount of projection is taking place?

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