

protection. Consumers and society have been distracted from measures, such as more consumption of fruits and vegetables, proven to reduce cancer (chapter 1).

- The effects of “gender-bending” chemicals, endocrine disruptors, on humans have not been established by science, but scientific evidence refuting the idea has been under-reported by the media (chapter 2).
- Dietary nitrates (caused by agricultural fertiliser runoff) pose no threat to human health. They do not cause “blue baby syndrome” (which is prevented by following simple hygiene rules), cancer or other health effects (chapter 3).
- Expenditures to prevent low doses of radiation are unnecessary and a wasteful use of society’s resources, especially since natural radiation levels are far higher and cause no human health problems (chapter 4).
- Fears over dioxin poisoning are now totally unjustified, and no unequivocal epidemiological evidence exists to link dioxin to cancer, reproductive or immune effects (chapter 5).
- Vector-borne diseases are extremely complex; and global warming alone is unlikely to cause these diseases to spread to new regions or to exacerbate malaria in endemic regions. Eliminating malaria altogether is a far more important priority.
- Overall human mortality from heat waves caused by global warming is not likely to increase. In fact, cold weather causes far more deaths than hot weather. The effects of warmer temperatures are generally beneficial in the medium term and for most of the world (chapter 7).
- The precautionary principle reflects a general “chemophobia” in society, but is not a reliable guide for decision-makers. In fact, the precautionary principle may increase, not reduce, risks because it does not sufficiently direct scarce resources to the most serious risks (chapter 8).”

I feel that pressure groups have had a beneficial result on environmental protection by focusing attention on true environmental problems. As a result, industry and governments have “cleaned up their act” as governments passed regulations governing emissions. But, in this process, we often have gone too far in certain instances in regulating industrial practices to the detriment of society as the cost of these controls far exceed health or environmental benefits.

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**M. Mihkel Mathiesen, *Global Warming in a Politically Correct Climate: How Truth Became Controversial*, iUniverse Star, New York, NY, USA, 2004, 202 pp., US\$ 17.95, paperback, ISBN: 0-595-29797-8.**

Writing this book review is difficult for two reasons: (1) I want to quote far too extensively from the writer’s work and (2) I agree with him so thoroughly that I find it difficult to be objective. That is fine if one accepts the author’s contention that the press feels it is all right to omit arguments opposite to their point of view.

I will begin with a rather long quote from the chapter entitled “The Choreography of Catastrophe”:

“Since the early 1970s, we have been treated to one impending environmental disaster after another. One by one, threatening scenarios were surprisingly brought to the attention of the unsuspecting public. Throughout these three decades, there were never two or more simultaneous calamities. The organized limelight was trained on one issue at a time.

In retrospect, all except the first of these environmental campaigns seem to have followed a nearly identical pattern, as though they had been scripted and choreographed.

First, there is a dramatic press release from an environmental interest group, a bureaucracy such as the EPA or NASA, or a public statement by a high-profile politician to the effect that a new discovery indicates the likelihood of an environmental catastrophe.

The discovery is rarely new; it tends to have the quality of a dusted off shelf item deemed ready to be unloaded on the public. The ‘discovery’ comprises at least one clearly recognizable grain of truth, and the disaster scenario provided hypothetically links a human activity with the predicted undesirable outcome, which threatens humans, nature, or the whole planet. The culprit is always something to do with economic growth and increased human well-being, which ends up translated—for the sake of simplicity and misguided emotional content—to industry profiting by polluting. Typically, the scientifically tenuous hypothesis is described in very simple terms, which helps gain greater credibility with media, politicians, and the public.

The second step includes political activity and intense media reporting, characterized not by balance and critical analysis, but rather by elimination of any language in the conditional tense present in the original press release, which serves to enhance the emotional response and intensify political action. The political action results in the commissioning of expensive, objective studies and/or proposed legislation.

A period of political debate follows, along with press reports, on further research results on issues related to the grain of truth of the issue, while facts not consistent with the disaster scenario remain studiously ignored.

The third step comprises the enactment of legislation before the commissioned study results are available. When the results finally are ready for publication, they are largely

ignored for lack of newsworthiness. The debate is over; the issue is dead.

Not long after the death of one issue, a new one is born.”

As evidence of the foregoing, the author first cites the DDT ban of 1972. The price of environmental salvation of certain birds whose eggs were supposed to be thinned by DDT was and has never been measured against DDT's proven prowess in killing disease-carrying mosquitoes. How many lives would have been saved with DDT's use is uncertain. No one seems to care as long as the environment is protected.

More recently, the West Nile virus has invaded the US and Canada. Numerous deaths have occurred from infection through mosquito bites. However, many government entities are reluctant to control the spread of mosquitoes through the application of insecticides such as malathion. Again, environmental correctness wins out over public health.

The DDT ban was only one of the successions of environmental crusades, occurring one after the other. These crusades were orchestrated by environmental groups and the complying non-critical media. Involved were campaigns to address emissions of SO<sub>x</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub>, production of ozone by chlorofluorocarbons, use of asbestos, and more recently emissions of mercury. One after the other, environmental groups have pushed their agendas. The author of this book notes that the more publicity the environmental groups get, the better it is for them and for their fund-raising campaigns.

Mathiesen spends much time discussing carbon dioxide and its potential control. Global warming, due to increasing carbon dioxide concentrations, is not, he contends, proven. Control of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, he notes, will have a potentially serious impact on production in industrialized countries, even at proposed control levels, which he says are totally inadequate to affect meteorology.

As I said earlier, I agree with the author's point of view. He has discussed and debunked many of the environmental myths and shown how politicians and the media have led us “down the garden path.”

The book is an “easy read”, well-written, and reasonably well-documented. I strongly recommend its purchase.

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