For the past decade a small group of physicists, funded partly by oil and coal companies, has been denying that the earth is being warmed by humans burning oil, coal and gasoline. In the face of overwhelming evidence, they have insisted that global warming may not be happening at all.

For evidence they have relied chiefly on satellite measurements of the temperature of the lower atmosphere, measurements that have revealed a pattern of cooling, not warming, during the past 20 years.

In 1998 Dr. Frank Wentz of Remote Sensing Systems in Santa Rosa, California, reported that those satellite measurements contain a systematic error. Everyone involved had neglected to correct for the fact that the satellites were slowly falling to earth, at about one kilometer per year. With the systematic bias corrected, the data no longer indicate that the atmosphere is cooling.

Now that the main scientific evidence against global warming has disappeared, it will be interesting to see what arguments the energy corporations come up with in 1999 to continue to evade legal liability for global warming.[1]

There is much to evade: 1998 was by far the warmest year recorded during the past 600 years (by thermometers, tree rings and ice cores) - nearly one degree Fahrenheit warmer than the second-warmest year, which was 1997. The extreme warmth of 1998 was accompanied by the following signs of "climate chaos" (as reported by the British NEW SCIENTIST magazine): record-setting forest fires in Florida, Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, and southern Europe; bush fires in northern Australia; floods and accompanying mudslides in California and coastal Peru and Ecuador (where 50,000 were left homeless); major flooding in east Africa; Hurricane Mitch, which killed more than 20,000 people in Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador and devastated the economies of central America; drought in New Guinea; intense drought and famine in southern Sudan; drought in central America that left the Panama Canal too shallow for many ships to pass through; failed coffee crops in Indonesia and in Ethiopia; failed sugar and rice crops in Thailand; failed cocoa and rubber crops in Malaysia; cotton crop failure in Uganda; and warm ocean currents that reduced the Peruvian fish catch by 45%.[2]

The NEW SCIENTIST reports that "human disease is emerging as one of the most sensitive, and distressing, indicators, of climate change." (See REHW #466, #467, #528.) As temperatures rise, mosquitoes that carry disease are moving into new territory. Dengue fever -- also called "break bone fever" because it is so painful -- is spreading throughout the Americas and has reached Texas. In Kenya, the worst floods in years unleashed an epidemic of water-borne cholera; and in Kenya's capital city, Nairobi (headquarters of the United Nations Environment Program), mosquitoes are now transmitting malaria to humans.

We favor the idea, floated early last year, to stop naming hurricanes after individual humans and start naming them after oil companies. We favor the idea, floated early last year, to stop naming hurricanes after individual humans and start naming them after oil companies.

The RAW POWER OF THE CORPORATION

During 1998, Americans were treated to a demonstration of the raw power of the corporation. Corporations prefer never to flex their political muscle in public, but sometimes it can't be helped.

During 1998, some 30 million pages of secret tobacco-industry documents became public, revealing the following:

** According to an internal memo dated 1987, R.J. Reynolds designed a fatter cigarette, intending to addict new customers as young as age 13.

** Another internal document revealed that Philip Morris investigated the smoking habits of children as young as 12, hoping to addict as many of them as possible.

** Brown and Williamson, owned by the British American Tobacco Company, once considered a plan to produce cigarettes with a "cola-like taste."

** NEW SCIENTIST uncovered a plan by Philip Morris to hire scientists as consultants to start a new scientific society to provide a forum favorable to the tobacco industry's views. (The Tobacco Institute was already functioning in that capacity, but its name clearly linked it to the industry it served; evidently the tobacco corporations felt the need for a new scientific society with a more independent appearance.)

** The St. Paul PIONEER PRESS revealed that the Tobacco Institute had paid scientists to submit letters and articles to journals, to cast doubt on studies linking second-hand smoke to disease. Scientists willing to participate received $2000 to $5000 per letter and $10,000 per article. The articles and letters were edited by tobacco industry lawyers prior to publication.

** It was shown conclusively during 1998 that, for years, the tobacco companies have routinely manipulated the nicotine levels in tobacco leaves to give smokers a bigger "hit."

** It was also revealed that numerous tobacco corporation executives had lied openly and repeatedly to the media, the public, and while testifying under oath to Congress. None of them was impeached or even asked to apologize.

On the contrary: during 1998, the tobacco companies summoned the attorneys general of 26 states to meet with them, negotiated with them for five months in total secrecy (all public health specialists were excluded from the negotiations), announced a deal on November 14, 1998, and on that date gave the attorneys general of all the states one week to take it or leave it.[4] The tobacco companies promised to pay $206 billion to the states over a 25 year period. Within the required 7 days, the states all sniveled into line and took Big Tobacco's money.

Let's see what a payment of $206 billion might mean for the big 4 tobacco companies, RJR Nabisco, Philip Morris, Lorillard, and British American Tobacco (owner of Brown and Williamson Tobacco). Together the four firms presently enjoy combined sales of roughly $38 billion per year.[5] Here is a "worst case" from the viewpoint of the tobacco corporations. Suppose they have 25 bad years and their earnings grow at just 5% above the rate of inflation (which, historically, has been 3.1% per year[6]). Over the next 25 years, they would earn a total of $3085 billion, of which they will donate $206 billion, or 6.6%, to the states. Naturally the states will be worried that they won't get their money (Maryland alone stands to get $4 billion), so they will be reluctant to interfere with the business practices of the tobacco companies during the 25-year period.

Of course the tobacco companies intend to increase their earnings substantially faster than 5% above the rate of inflation. For example, after the $206 billion settlement became public, Philip Morris said it expected next year's earnings to exceed this year's by 9.5%. Wall Street analysts have announced their consensus that Big Tobacco is a good investment: buy and hold, they say. Big Tobacco is a good investment because tobacco corporations have a carefully-thought-out plan to addict several billion people in the Third World during the next 25 years. That's where the states' $206 billion will come from.
The BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL estimates that tobacco today is killing four million people each year, half in the rich nations and half in the Third World. (In the U.S. today, 33% of all deaths of people between the ages of 35 and 69 are attributable to tobacco.[7]) By the year 2030, tobacco is expected to be killing 10 million people each year, 70% of them in the Third World. As time goes on, the killing fields will expand substantially. In China alone, 100 million young men alive today will die at the hands of a tobacco company, according to the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL.[8]

So 7% of sales -- or perhaps far less, if Third World business develops as planned -- is the total penalty the tobacco corporations will pay for intentionally addicting hundreds of millions of children and young adults to a product that kills nearly 50% of everyone who uses it as directed.

In sum: with abundant evidence of criminal conduct and criminal intentions on the public record for all to see, the combined power of half the attorneys general of these United States could not bring Big Tobacco to justice. Instead, Big Tobacco bought them off, all of them.

Now THAT is a convincing demonstration of raw corporate power.

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LIFE IS SWEET

A study published in 1998 revealed that men who eat candy in moderation live longer than those who don't.[9] Candy is defined as sugar confections or chocolate. Subjects of the study were 7841 men who entered Harvard University between 1916 and 1950 and who responded to a health survey in 1988.

Those who ate candy differed in several respects from those who didn't. Those who didn't eat candy were older, leaner, and more likely to smoke tobacco compared to those who did. Those who didn't eat candy ate more red meat, ate fewer vegetables or green salad, and were more likely to take vitamin or mineral supplements, compared to those who ate candy.

After adjusting for age and cigarette smoking, those who ate candy lived an average of nearly a year (0.92 years) longer than those who didn't.

However, those who ate candy in moderation lived even longer than those who ate a lot of it. ("A lot" was defined as "three or more times each week.") Moderation in all things...

Authors of the study speculate that it may be chocolate that is providing life-prolonging benefits to candy eaters. Previous studies have shown that chocolate reduces the danger of heart attack. (See REHW 527.) They compare chocolate to red wine, which is also believed to reduce heart disease, when used in moderation.[10]

Chocolate is also known to act as an antioxidant (taiing up "free radical" oxygen molecules).[11] Antioxidants are believed to reduce the dangers of both heart disease and cancer.

--Peter Montague (National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981/AFL-CIO)

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