

Bringers of Death

When we discuss the worst atrocities committed by humans, we usually include *Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot*, and the rather less cited *Churchill*. We do so because of the enormous amount of suffering these men caused to others and then we multiply their suffering by the sheer number of victims. This illustrious group usually come out top of the Genocide Premier League (GPL). It is difficult to identify who is in top spot of the GPL due to the inaccuracy of available figures, but whoever it is now, they are about to be pushed back into second place. When it comes to the looming climate and biodiversity crises, it has been estimated that by 2030 alone, 100 million human beings may perish, 90% of them in the global south (727). It gets worse, *Dr James Lovelock, Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS)*, and one of the planet's most eminent climate scientists, argues that the multiple crisis hitting our species may leave only 500 million alive by the end of the century. He is supported by *Professor Kevin Anderson*, director of the *Tyndall Centre for Climate Change*. Other climate scientists, like *Johan Rockström* from the *Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research*, concur that Earth might only be able to support half a billion people should we hit 4°C of warming (728). For anyone harbouring thoughts of the temperature being halted at 1.5°C, the former director of the *United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, *Robert Watson*, argues that 3°C is the absolute minimum we are heading for (729). Of course, what we do, or don't do, in the next few years will affect how hot it gets, how quickly, how many people die, and how many species go extinct. The concern is, that for now, it is still largely business as usual and carbon dioxide levels are still rising, not falling. Some will claim that these deaths cannot be attributed to any one person, country or corporation. In the following pages, an argument will be made that there are people and corporations, and indeed countries, that must be held accountable, if we are not to make a mockery of even the limited justice system we currently have. We will begin as Reagan begins to put the Chicago Boys' policies into practice.

As Ronnie settled into his presidency, a research paper was published in the journal *Science*. The paper, which came out on 28th August 1981, stated that the planet had already warmed by 0.4 °C and that the cause was increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The scientists from the *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)* believed that in the 21st Century, we would start to see drought-prone regions emerge in North America and central Asia as well as the erosion of the West Antarctic ice sheet, and with it, rising sea levels. They further predicted that the Arctic Sea ice would melt, and the Northwest Passage would open up. Reagan, of course, took this on board and started reducing the U.S.'s emissions. If only the last sentence had been true, the topic of this book might be something completely different. Alas, what actually happened was that the *Department of Energy* removed their funding from the scientists, led by *James Hanson*, and throughout the 1980s, the government continued to alter his findings to suit their narrative. It seems the fossil fuel industry was not very happy with *James Hanson's* message. Finally, towards the end of Reagan's eight-year stint as the most powerful man on Earth, *Hanson* testified to congress, and this time when his findings were once again censored, he asked *Senator Al Gore* to question him about the changes the *Office of Management and Budget* had made to his testimony. The year was 1988 and this was the moment that global warming really entered public consciousness in a meaningful way (729). If the fossil fuel corporations had acted on his testimony, the world today could have been a very different place. Sadly, they had no intention of changing their

business models or leaving their assets in the ground. In fact, they had known all about the greenhouse effect and its link to their product for a very long time.

Way back in the 1850s, the British physicist *John Tyndall* had shown that CO₂ could increase temperatures as infrared radiation from the sun was absorbed by CO₂ molecules and this extra energy caused the molecules to speed up which in turn increased the temperature. Decades later in 1896, the Swedish scientist *Svante Arrhenius* estimated how much the temperature would rise given a doubling of CO₂ from burning fossil fuels. For this, the ancestor of Swedish climate activist, *Greta Thunberg*, was awarded the *Nobel Prize for Chemistry* in 1903. These warnings, like many others, were ignored and coal continues to power our economies in 2021.

Back in 1966, the industry itself was certainly aware of the dire consequences its product was having once emitted into the atmosphere. Writing in the trade publication, *Mining Congress Journal*, the then president of *Bituminous Coal Research Inc.*, stated quite clearly:

"There is evidence that the amount of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere is increasing rapidly as a result of the combustion of fossil fuels. If the future rate of increase continues as it is at the present, it has been predicted that, because the CO₂ envelope reduces radiation, the temperature of the Earth's atmosphere will increase and that vast changes in the climates of the Earth will result. Such changes in temperature will cause melting of the polar icecaps, which, in turn would result in the inundation of many coastal cities including New York and London".

The coal industry was in a position to stop billions of deaths, but it chose to ignore the warning and the article only came to light in 2019, when an engineer at the *University of Tennessee* found it in a box of old journals marked for disposal. The largest coal company on the planet, *Peabody Energy*, also knew that its product was polluting the air. In the same journal, they said that pollution standards to protect health had a place and that the situation was urgent (730). *Peabody* went on to fund more than two dozen groups that raised doubts about the legitimacy of climate change data before declaring bankruptcy in 2016 (730).

A year earlier, the President of the United States had been made aware of the problem. The President's *Science Advisory Committee* had requested *Roger Revelle* at the *Scripps Institution of Oceanography* to report to them on the impact of carbon dioxide caused warming. This was still four years before *Neil Armstrong* landed on the moon so the impacts weren't fully understood yet, but what *Revelle* was sure of was that sea levels would rise and:

"By the year 2000 there will be about 25% more CO₂ in our atmosphere than at present [and] this will modify the heat balance of the atmosphere to such an extent that marked changes in climate ... could occur."

While *Revelle's* prediction was fifteen years early, it wouldn't have mattered as America's ongoing war for capitalism in Vietnam was the focus of then President *Lyndon Baines Johnson*, but he did mention it in congress later that year, saying:

"This generation has altered the composition of the atmosphere on a global scale through ... a steady increase in carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels."

After Johnson was replaced by Nixon, the later introduced the *Environmental Protection Agency*, but the CO2 issue was not at the forefront of Tricky Dicky's agenda. It was, however, studied by an elite group of scientists later in the decade. The advisory group, known as the *Jasons*, were asked by the *Department of Energy*, to look at the research being done by the department around CO2. They agreed to look and focussed their attention on CO2 and climate. In 1977, they reported back that a doubling of CO2 from 270 PPM would raise global temperatures by 2.4°C. More troublingly, their climate models predicted an increase at the poles of between 10°C -12°C should the amount of carbon dioxide double (733). The oil giant *Exxon* was also carrying out its own independent research in 1977 and their findings synced nicely with the *Jasons*. Their senior scientist, *James Black*, said:

"In the first place, there is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels."

A year later, *Mr. Black* informed *Exxon's* management committee that a doubling of CO2 would increase temperatures by 2°C to 3°C and that we had a time frame of five to ten years before difficult decisions around energy strategies would become critically important (734). This looks convincingly like *Exxon* knew what it needed to do in 1978, but they, like the coal industry, decided to mislead the public in order to continue making dividend payments to their investors.

In the public domain, the *Jasons*, while revered widely, were largely made up of physicists, so the government asked a prominent climate scientist at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (MIT) to look into the *Jason's* report. *Jule Charney*, the most admired meteorologist in America, put together an expert team, including *James Hansen*, and their findings echoed those of the *Jasons*. There would be warming if CO2 levels continued to rise but the sensitivity of the Earth's systems were unknown, meaning just how much warming and how fast was difficult to gauge. They stated that with a doubling of CO2, the most likely temperature rise would be 3°C and any CO2 increase beyond that would increase the temperature further. Politicians, transfixed on their next election cycle were hardly excited by this prediction and when told of the fact that CO2 might double in the next fifty years, they would tell the scientists to come back in forty-nine years. The problem with this was that one of the *MIT* findings was that the oceans had been absorbing most of the heat and that by the time we noticed large atmospheric changes, it would likely be too late to do anything about it. Coming back in forty-nine years wasn't an option. The White House had already asked the *National Academy of Sciences* to look into the situation before the *MIT* results were published. This time, they turned, oddly, to an economist mostly known for his work on *Game Theory*, not climate science. *Thomas Schelling* agreed with the previous findings that temperatures would rise but that how much and how fast were not known. In April 1980,

the team wrote a simple letter, and in it, the strategist argued Earth could experience completely new climatic conditions by 2050, or it could look much the same. His advice to the White House was to fund more research but not do anything now as we would be able to mitigate and adapt at a later state. He argued that the price of fossil fuels would rise in the future and consumption would decrease as a result. In essence, he was suggesting that the free markets would solve the problem for us. The group's findings were that:

“the near-term emphasis should be on research, with as low a political profile as possible,” and that “We believe that we can learn faster than the problem can develop (733).”

This was not the position of the oil industry itself. At a 1980 meeting of the *American Petroleum Institute* (API), representatives from nearly every major U.S. and multinational oil and gas company, including *Exxon, Mobil, Amoco, Phillips, Texaco, Shell, Sunoco, Sohio* as well as *Standard Oil of California* and *Gulf Oil*, concluded that by 2005, there would likely be 1°C of warming and by 2038 that would rise to 2.5°C and by 2065, the temperature would rise by 5°C and cause “*globally catastrophic effects.*” Their findings were not made public (735).

In the early 1980s, both *Democrats* and *Republicans* realised that action was needed immediately before the temperature changes were physically noticeable. Speaking to industry executives in 1981, *President Reagan's* acting chairman of the president's *Council for Environmental Quality*, said:

“There can be no more important or conservative concern than the protection of the globe itself (729).”

Action to prevent global warming in the early 80s had bipartisan support but as Reagan got comfortable in the White House, this support waned and while scientists and environmentalists lobbied hard behind the scenes, the United States of America decided that the future of life on Earth was worth a roll of the dice.

Another of the world's largest oil companies, *Shell*, had been commissioning research into the greenhouse effect since 1981. In a study in 1986, they found that the doubling of CO₂ in the atmosphere may happen far earlier than others were predicting. *Shell's* scientists were in private conceding that the doubling may happen by 2030 and that temperatures would rise accordingly by 1.5°C to 3.5°C. In the report, published in May 1988, they even went as far as analysing their own contribution to this doubling and stated that their oil, gas and coal products were responsible for 4% of the carbon emissions in 1984. *Shell's* experts warned that:

“If this warming occurs then it could create significant changes in sea level, ocean currents, precipitation patterns, regional temperature and weather. These changes could be larger than any that have occurred over the last 12,000 years. Such relatively fast and dramatic changes would impact on the human environment, future living standards and food supplies, and could have major social, economic and political consequences (735).”

Again, *Shell*, not only refused to act on their own findings, but they, along with the coal industry, oil industry, and *Exxon* went on to fund misleading research in order to maximise their profits. In the same summer of 1988, the United States was experiencing extreme heat and drought like conditions in the Midwest that were ruining crops. Politicians were beginning to wonder whether CO2 emissions were already affecting the climate. This was to be *James Hansen's* time to shine. He testified that:

“The global warming is now large enough that we can ascribe with a high degree of confidence a cause and effect relationship to the greenhouse effect.”

He stated that there had been a half degree Celsius warming since 1980, compared to the 1950-1980 average and that the chance of this warming being naturally caused was just 1% (733). The American media reported the hearings widely and the timing could not have been better with a change of leadership in the White House on the immediate horizon. In a 1988 campaign speech, *George H. W. Bush* spoke of the urgency to enact far reaching climate policies. The wannabe successor to *Ronald Reagan* had a nice play on words to excite his supporters in the primaries:

“Those who think we are powerless to do anything about the greenhouse effect forget about the White House effect. As president, I intend to do something about it (734).”

In 1989, the IPCC had its very first meeting and *President Bush* sent his secretary of state, *James Baker* along. Later in the year research initiatives were proposed in Congress and it looked like, America was finally about to take the climate threat seriously. Of course, we all know that that was not what happened. The United States did not take the crisis seriously, and neither did any other government. Since *James Hansen's* seminal testimony, we have emitted more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than all prior human history. The fossil fuel industry helped to make sure of that.

This wasn't the first time that an industry lied to its customers about the dangers their products posed. In 1964, the *U.S. Surgeon General, Luther Terry*, concluded what many already knew, that smoking cigarettes caused lung cancer. The industry had few choices. They could have made their product safer, they could have changed their business model or they could have lied to their customers in order to get them to continue to purchase their murderous product. Like any good capitalists, they decided to lie, and in the process, continue killing their customers. They hired a group of public relations companies who created a huge misinformation campaign that raised doubts about the surgeon general's findings. In the early 1990s, the fossil fuel industry found itself in a similar position. It was now widely believed that burning oil, gas and coal was causing the Earth to warm and the consequences would be far greater than the threat of tobacco smoke. The industry followed the strategy of the tobacco companies and hired the very same strategic public relations companies. They then spent hundreds of millions of dollars funding right-wing think tanks that hired scientists with PhDs and attacked the facts around climate change. As with tobacco, the scientists didn't need to prove anything. All they had to do was plant a seed of doubt in the mind of the average citizen who was too busy to pay close attention and the industry could continue

pumping oil out of the ground and profiting from the slow methodical mass murder their product was knowingly causing.

In 1990, Dr. Brian Flannery, on Exxon's payroll, but representing the *International Petroleum Industries' Environmental Conservation Association*, attempted to derail the IPCC's first report that stated global carbon emissions must be reduced by 60-80%. He argued that too much scientific uncertainty existed, but his attempt failed, and the report moved forward (738). Remember, this is the same company whose chief scientist had warned them they had only until 1988 at the latest to address the critical situation. In 1991, *Western Fuels Association* began disseminating information to journalists and university libraries. Their materials repositioned global warming as theory, not fact, and espoused the positive benefits of increased carbon dioxide. In 1992, Exxon formerly joined the *American Legislative Exchange Council* (ALEC) who lobbied at the state and federal level to weaken any action. Three years later, a *Mobil* climate expert warned the *Global Climate Coalition* (GCC) that the human burning of fossil fuels and the link to warming was well established and cannot be denied. The members of the GCC included *BP*, *Chevron*, *Exxon*, *Mobil* and *Shell*. Maybe *Exxon's* CEO, *Lee Raymond*, was drilling for new oil in the Arctic throughout 1995 because in 1996, he told the *Economic Club of Detroit* that, "Currently, the scientific evidence is inconclusive as to whether human activities are having a significant effect on the global climate (738)." Between 2003 and 2007, *Drexel University* emeritus professor, *Bob Brulle*, found that *ExxonMobil* paid \$7.2 million to ninety-one institutions, including the *Cato Institute* and *George C Marshall Institute*. *API* donated just under \$4 million to the same institutions between 2008-2010. The one thing these institutions had in common was that they either downplayed the risks of climate change or denied them outright. *Mr. Brulle* further found that between 2003-2010, organisations that promoted climate misinformation received \$900 million in corporate funding (738). Just in case, you are sceptical of these links, maybe a *Cato Institute* insider will help assure you of the nefarious work these companies and think tanks carried out. *Jerry Taylor* worked for the "think-tank" for twenty-three years, appearing on TV and radio and promising the public that the science was not certain. He comments:

"For 25 years, climate sceptics like me made it a core matter of ideological identity that if you believe in climate change, then you are by definition a socialist. That is what climate sceptics have done."

Is it therefore surprising that only 22% of *Republicans* believe that climate change is caused by humans (738). The founders of neoliberalism, the *Mont Pellerin Society* (MPS) have strong links to these right wing "think-tanks" that include the *Hoover Institute*, the *Heritage Foundation*, the *American Enterprise Institute* and the *Heartland Institute*. *Koch Industries*, which is run by MPS member, *Charles Koch*, have "donated" \$100 million to fifty-four groups connected to MPS members. The MPS groups have been responsible for the spreading of climate change denial for decades and in 2013 the non-profit organisation *Overland* wrote:

"Neoliberalism is a coherent political movement embodied in the institutional history of the global network of think tanks: the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, the Institute of Economic

Affairs, the Institute of Public Affairs (the key Australian node of the network) and their dedicated spin-off counter-science think tanks. All can be traced back to the Mont Pelerin Society, the central think tank of the neoliberal counter-revolution, founded in 1947 by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman (740)."

It appears that those who continue to support neoliberalism are supporting the certain deaths of hundreds of millions of human beings and perhaps billions.

It isn't enough to sway public opinion, politicians too, must be "swayed". Political spending by the energy industry has risen ten-fold since 1990 and accounts for \$140 million a year. It cannot shock anyone that taxpayers still subsidise the industry by \$20 billion annually. It is impossible to exaggerate the nonsensical situation we are in. We are currently paying hundreds of billions of dollars a year to the very same companies who have intentionally lied to us in order to keep us buying their products. These products are largely responsible for the sixth extinction and kill millions of people every year. Imagine we were still subsidising tobacco, so it was cheap to smoke even when we knew of the damage it was causing. Would anyone stand for that? The fossil fuel companies are now rubbing their hands with glee as the Arctic ice retreats summer after summer. They can see the day, not far off, when they can begin drilling for oil in the northernmost regions of planet Earth, where there will no longer be any ice because of the impact of these companies' products.

We can see why "think-tanks" and political parties still support the industry, but why the media? Between 1988 and 2002, 53% of stories on climate change gave equal time to the scientific consensus as they did to the climate deniers and a further 35% gave space to deniers in a less than equal way (733). The science was long ago settled. When that happens, no time is usually afforded those who disbelieve scientific certainty. *Flat Earthers* are not invited on TV to debate whether it was actually possible for *Monique* the hen to sail around the world. It is understandable that many of these free market loving media owners join in with misinforming the public as those who believe in the neoliberal ideology are more likely to deny that climate change is happening. If believing the science means we need more regulation, not less, it makes sense for these people to simply disbelieve the reality. This has been termed *motivated-disbelief*. The fossil fuel industry continues to take responsibility for the damage its products are causing in public, but it simultaneously funds "think-tanks" that create doubt and confusion. Since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015, the largest five publicly traded oil and gas companies have invested more than \$1 billion of shareholder funds on misleading climate related branding and lobbying. *ExxonMobil*, *Royal Dutch Shell*, *Chevron*, *BP*, and *Total* are all limited liability companies, and their employees will expect to walk away from the mess they have knowingly created by simply filing for bankruptcy when the time is right, like *Peabody* (735). But we should not forget the bosses of these companies knew the consequences and then wilfully misled the public to keep the profits churning. If they are not guilty of crimes against humanity, then who is?



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