

---

## Jeffrey Sachs: The Murdoch Legacy

---

At age 80, Rupert Murdoch will be long gone in coming decades when the planet is grappling with greatly intensified climate change. The recent spike in world food prices and increasing intensity of famines, heat waves and mega-floods has already increased hunger and death in places like the Horn of Africa, far from Murdoch's cares. Yet climate calamities are likely to spread and intensify as the planet continues to warm and the hydrological cycle is increasingly perturbed. The Murdoch name, carried by James and the grandchildren, will live on in global infamy for having used corporate propaganda to disguise the truth from the public until too late.

I mention this because Murdoch's paper, the *Wall Street Journal*, again last week performed its usual disservice by publishing an extremely misleading opinion piece on climate change in the banner location of the paper ([Robert Bryce, «Five Truths About Climate Change,» October 6](#)). That column is not merely an opinion piece among a range of various opinions. It is part of that paper's steady drumbeat of opposition to action on climate change. And the *Journal* teams up in this with Murdoch's other propaganda outlet, Fox News.

The real problem with the *Journal* is this. The *Journal's* business coverage outside of the opinion pages is important and difficult to replicate (and this is still true even as the professional reporters apparently are facing more intrusions from the Murdoch minions). Excellent reporting draws eyes to the Murdoch propaganda and misinformation on the opinion pages.

In this particular column, the writer, Robert Bryce, purports to tell us five truths about climate change

to reach the conclusion that we shouldn't care about carbon emissions. The column is a study in innuendo, half truths, and misdirection.

Here is a summary of Bryce's «five truths.» (1) Global emissions of carbon dioxide have not slowed down despite the cries of environmentalists; (2) «Regardless of whether it's getting hotter or colder -- or both -- we are going to need a lot more energy»; (3) The carbon-dioxide issue is not about the United States anymore; (4) We need more energy efficiency; (5) Climate science is not settled, because no science is settled.

From these «five truths» the author reaches his conclusion: «It's time to move the debate past the dogmatic view that carbon dioxide is evil and toward a world view that accepts the need for energy that is cheap, abundant, and reliable.»

Bryce's illogic is breathtaking. Let's parse the column and its techniques.

First, it is true that global emissions have not slowed, but that fact says nothing about whether it's time to move the debate beyond carbon dioxide. The fact that something hasn't happened (e.g. slowing emissions) is not a valid argument about whether something should happen. In fact because of past failures to slow emissions, we need to care more, not less: we are running out of time to avoid very dangerous concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Second, while it is true that we are going to need a lot more energy, Bryce precedes that point with the clause «Regardless of whether it's getting hotter or colder -- or both,» slyly implying that we don't

---

## Jeffrey Sachs: The Murdoch Legacy

---

actually know what's happening. That is false. The planet is warming according to every scientific measure and study.

Third, Bryce's claim that the issue is not about the US is seriously misleading. The problem indeed is total global emissions. The US is the world's second largest emitter behind China, and among the major economies by far the largest in per capita terms, roughly three to four times China's emissions per person.

Fourth, Bryce's statement that we need more energy efficiency is unexceptionable. Unfortunately, efficiency by itself will not reduce emissions sufficiently to head off grave planetary dangers. For that we need to adopt low-carbon energy sources.

Fifth, Bryce's claim that climate science is not settled is more of a debater's point than a real argument. Bryce notes that a recent experiment calls into question Einstein's relativity theory, so that there must be room for debate about climate science. Well, yes, there are unanswered questions about the universe. The argument that science cannot explain everything is not an argument that science can explain nothing. The evidence on the physics of greenhouse gases goes back well over 100 years.

The article therefore is a mix of truisms, misdirection, and utter non-sequiturs. Its purpose is to dissuade us from action on carbon dioxide. The arguments have no relation to the stated conclusion. Yes: carbon dioxide is rising; we need more energy; the U.S. is not the only problem; we need energy efficiency; and the science is unsettled (in the sense that all science, at some level, is unsettled, even when we know an enormous amount, as with climate change). Yet we still have an urgent reason to care about the rising concentrations of greenhouse gases, because we care about our lives, our children's lives, and the fate of the planet.

Murdoch's News Corporation, the owner of the *Wall Street Journal* and Fox News, is the opposite of a true news corporation. It is news as in Orwell's newspeak. Its major role is to peddle corporate propaganda, frighten politicians, and make lots of money. In those roles it has been successful. Yet the more we learn about Murdoch's methods, the more we discover a lack of rudimentary ethics and a corporate culture that invites even criminality. The U.K. hacking scandal and the repeated lies of Murdoch's associates (and even Scotland Yard) in that scandal have opened a new window on how Murdoch's world really works.

If Murdoch's aims were just about money, we might understand the derangements of a greedy man. But when a billionaire octogenarian's mad pursuit of money and influence takes precedence over the fate of the planet, a special kind of immorality is at play. That immorality will be Murdoch's lasting legacy and the long-term association of the Murdoch name.

[Jeffrey Sachs is author of \*The Price of Civilization\*.](#)

**Follow Jeffrey Sachs on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/JeffDSachs](http://www.twitter.com/JeffDSachs)**