

WITH BENNY PEISER, Author & Director of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, UK



Europe's Green Energy policies have promoted inefficient wind and solar power, imposed carbon taxes and emissions trading systems across that continent which have caused soaring energy prices, economic decline and plunged millions of families into fuel poverty. **Dr. Benny Peiser** is the founder and editor of the world's leading climate policy network and one of Europe's most influential climate policy analysts recently outlined story during his recent visit to Canada. Dr. Peiser was interviewed after his speech to the Friends of Science/Frontier Centre luncheon in Calgary, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

**Frontier Centre: Why did you set up a Global Warming Policy Foundation?**

**Benny Peiser:** Well, it was important because there was simply no debate whatsoever in Britain. At the time when we started in 2009 all parties were completely in agreement. Almost all sections of the media were in complete agreement. We thought this is unhealthy. We thought there needed to be a very vigorous debate and that is the main goal of our organization.

**FC: So why has Europe and Britain so strongly embraced the idea of man-made climate change?**

**BP:** It's not just Britain. It's all over Europe. The climate change fear has become a collective obsession for a number of reasons. The media hyped it up for obvious reasons, scientists hyped it up and it captured the imagination of vast sections of the society but no one was willing to scrutinize the very basic assumptions of the scare. We thought we had to do both: a) Look very carefully at the claims and the predictions, not so much on the science but more on the kind of claims like what's going to happen in the future and in particular on the economic costs of the policies that were being promoted and introduced.

**FC: You mentioned that the policy involves the largest wealth transfer between the poor and the rich in history during your talk. Can you just expand on that?**

**BP:** We are talking about a wealth transfer in the order of about 600 billion euros in the last eight years. Subsidies paid to green investors mainly land owners and very wealthy families who put up large solar panels on their farms or roofs. These 600 billion euros are being paid by ordinary families and small, medium sized businesses to the most privileged members of European society. That is the biggest wealth transfer in modern Europe for a very, very, long time if not ever.

**FC: You highlighted the irony of the U.S., which has no climate change policy, lowering its greenhouse gas emissions while Europe raises its emission with its own very interventionist policy.**

**BP:** Well it is obviously a little bit of geological luck that America discovered all these huge reserves in shale gas and as a result it wasn't government policy. In fact government perhaps would've been more reluctant than the

private sector to exploit the shale reserves but as a direct result of finding this hugely abundant form of natural gas it made gas cheap so that it could compete with coal. There is a strong move in the U.S. from coal-fired power plants to gas-fired power plants. That in itself is mainly responsible for the significant drop in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the U.S. Europe, on the other hand, so far has opposed shale gas extraction and is going for coal. Therefore the opposite result.

**FC: It has been said that 'green is the new red'. In fact one of your countrymen has written a book about the watermelons. There seems to be also a correlation between this kind of movement and the obsession with planning. As a social scientist, has this been part of your observation?**

**BP:** Well, it would be much easier for everyone if it just were a case of the Left taking on this issue. Unfortunately in Europe almost every party of all political persuasions is advocating central planning and has turned green. It's not a left-right issue at all in Europe. It's completely and utterly embraced by all parties and the right is just as keen on central planning as the left.

**FC: Just a follow up on that. One of the many things that struck folks from your presentation today was this analogy to religion. You talked about crucifixes and shale gas. It has connotations of Norman Cohn's "The Pursuit of the Millennium". Could you elaborate a little on this?**

**BP:** Well obviously there is a lot of similarity between the global warming hysteria including its Salvationist arm of the scare. On one hand, you have one the fear that we face doomsday. On the other hand, the Salvationist solution proposed is to build wind farms. So it has very many similarities to a millennial movement which throughout history including secular movements like communism where the fear is hyped up and a Salvationist and Utopian solution is being proposed. In almost all of these cases it is the elite driving the fear and proposing the solution and it is the elite that benefits from these solutions. The only people in Europe really benefitting to a huge extent are green investors. We're talking less than the 1%. To talk in the Occupy Wall Street terminology it is less than 1% of the population who is making huge amounts of money on the back of this scare.

**FC: The climate models are not working and there is this awkward silence out there about that. They're predicting 2 degrees warming and it's not happening. CO<sub>2</sub> is rising, but we have very cold weather. Do you think the media will eventually acknowledge that the facts just don't fit the theory?**

**BP:** The media in Britain is split. I mean, I don't think any other country has such a vigorous media than Britain. The media is extremely split. You have the centre-right media, some of the national papers, the Murdoch publications, that are much more skeptical and that make the point you were asking about the discrepancies between the models and the predictions and reality. Then you have the center left media including the BBC who have always been very reluctant to report anything that contradicts the Green narrative. So you have it very split but the fact that you have very significant sections of the media who are very critical has made all the difference. That has swayed MP's, a lot of MP's, that something needs to be done about the costs.

**FC: We have politicians in Canada that are still pushing carbon taxes and even cap and trade but your story from Europe is one where the results have not been encouraging. What's happened with Cap and Trade and Carbon Taxes in Europe?**

**BP:** Well, it has essentially collapsed. The whole emissions trading scheme has completely collapsed to the extent that the members of parliament the European parliament are no longer willing to rescue it. An important event happened only four weeks ago – that it was like a wake-up call that Europe is no longer willing to support, no matter the cost, Europe's dying flag ship climate policy to of Europe that is the emission trading scheme. This has completely and utterly failed. So the message today to the Canadian audience, whoever wants to listen, is you have to look at what's happening in Europe and not repeat the same mistakes. Be more careful, don't rush into things, wait and see and take some lessons from Europe's failure, the utter failure of European climate policy.

**FC: We have a few provinces, British Columbia in particular, that have a Carbon Tax. It's politically correct and many politicians seem to be embracing it. Are you a skeptic on the idea of a Carbon Tax?**

**BP:** No, not as a matter of principle. In fact we are publishing a report soon on a carbon tax written by Ross McKittrick. If you wanted to really tackle the issue of global warming seriously you would actually link the tax to temperature and you would say: look if there is a real issue with global warming the tax goes up and if there is no issue there is no tax. So both sides of the argument should in principle be happy with this idea. Obviously no government would ever introduce a tax where the temperature rather than the treasurer has the handle on that tax but this policy would certainly challenge the green lobby to show that their policy approaches make little sense and that you actually have a cost-effective solution to tackle global warming. In short, I'm not against a Carbon Tax as a matter of principle but it has to be adopted in ways that make economic sense and that actually addresses the issue. Alright you want to address global warming? Then the tax has to be a) linked to the problem and secondly if there's no problem there's no

tax and the second is it has to be done internationally. It's no good to go it alone. What's happening in Europe and in Britain in particular with our emissions essentially is that we have essentially exported manufacturing to China. They are doing all the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. We are then importing the products ready-made but have essentially exported the emissions. We have outsourced the emissions by outsourcing manufacturing. It has no effect on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions which is just putting the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions somewhere else.

**FC: You mentioned today that 30,000 extra people now die every year because of these policies in England.**

**BP:** Not because of the policies. They die because their homes in England aren't heated properly. That happened before these green energy policies were introduced but these policies are making it worse. It makes the fuel poverty problem much worse. So more and more families, I said around 7 million families are already struggling with huge rises in energy prices which makes it harder for them to heat properly during cold winters. That's where the winter deaths come in.

**FC: Canada's federal government continues to work with the warmist narrative that CO<sub>2</sub> is a problem and we need to reduce our emissions. We call it a knife to the gun fight strategy where you simply can't do that well if the discussion revolves around a false narrative. Do you have any other approach to suggest to the government?**

**BP:** The key approach that the GWPF has adopted in Britain is to say: look this is not about the science. The science is secondary. It's mainly about climate policies and the costs of these policies you introduce. In short, they have to make sense. So if you want to tackle global warming, the first thing is you have to have an international agreement. If you don't have an international agreement your unilateral policies will have no effect on emissions or CO<sub>2</sub> or climate change whatsoever. So don't adopt any unilateral targets that hurt you unilaterally. If you want to have policies that are environmentally friendly, do things that are beneficial to people. Not something that is hurting people. So that is a different approach. We are not saying: look don't do it because the science is dodgy, because no policy maker today - with very, very few exceptions - would go for that argument. It takes a very, very eccentric politician to say: 'look, I'm not listening to the science advisor and the scientific community because i know better. I know that the science is dodgy, therefore I will change policy. That's not a good enough basis for a rational policy maker to take that view. You have to have very logical and economically sound arguments why you adopt certain policies and why you reject certain policies - irrespective of what the state of science is. After all, it might take another ten or twenty years before we know much better how solid the science is. For all I know, it could go either way. I'm not saying the skeptics are right and the conventional wisdom is wrong. Who am i to make that decision? It's possible that either of them is wrong but we are not at a point in my view where this is obvious and manifest.

**FC: You talked today about belief systems and used the term 'religious cult' with parallels around socialism. Could you elaborate on that?**

**BP:** Well the parallel with socialism is fairly straightforward. It's like government knows best, government will sort this out, government will plan ahead and they will pick winners. It's the idea that government planning and government plans and government targets are solutions to a highly complex problem and these central planning ideas have a poor track record and I don't see any reason why in this case they will be better than the fiascos they have caused in the past. So that's where the similarity to the old socialist, central planning comes in. In terms of a religious belief system, it is the unwillingness to debate; it's like a dogma which you cannot challenge. In an open society there should not be dogmas let alone in science or economics or policy making. The fact that they are unwilling to engage in an open debate is an indication that they want to close the whole issue off from scrutiny and that is a typical sign of a closed mind and a religious sign of faith or a belief system.

**FC: You touched on the damage to the scientific process. Just a couple words on that.**

**BP:** Well, in my view the scientific community made a terrible mistake by taking a strong and one-sided view on a

highly complex and contentious scientific issue that is far from settled. I'm not saying I know what the right answer is but I'm pretty sure that this debate is far from over. There are far too many open questions. Some questions might be settled but they are irrelevant to the overall question regarding the next 100 years. Particularly to the issue of whether or not climate change will cause any significant disaster. For all I know, a little bit of global warming will do a lot of benefit, can do a lot of good. A little bit of warming throughout history has been beneficial to society. It is the level and extent of future warming - I think that is where there is no agreement whatsoever. Even if you accept the very basic physics it's far from clear what that will mean in the long-term.

**FC: Do you ever see Europe pulling out of the self-imposed dive on this?**

**BP:** Europe seems likely to roll back some of the unilateral policies. Policy makers are now indicating that they are considering slowing down the green decarbonization agenda. But if Europe were to continue on the unilateral path, then I don't think they will have much of a chance in the international race of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**FC: Thanks very much.**