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Exclusive: Mont Pelerin Society Revealed As Home To Leading Pushers Of Climate Science Denial

THERE'S a popular talking point coming from climate change denialists that all people who accept the science and the need to act on it are somehow blinded by faith.

In Australia, climate science contrarian columnists can barely touch their keyboards without typing out the words "global warming faith" or explaining how human-caused global warming is some sort of "new religion".

This "climate religion" narrative often goes hand-in-hand with another favourite denialist talking point where climate scientists are only doing what they do because there's a dollar in it.

Presumably the laws of physics, the melting ice sheets, the increasing risk of bushfires, the hottest decades on record and the acidifying oceans are also waiting for their cash.

Maurice Newman, the man hand-picked by Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott to be the government's top business advisor, loves both of these debating points.

Newman has described climate scientists as being a "global warming priesthood" and belonging to a new "religion". In a second opinion column in two weeks in *The Australian* [1], Newman repeats his cynicism over the IPCC and climate scientists, describing them as a "cartel" that "will deny all contrary evidence". Newman even repeats the myth that in

the 1970s scientists were certain the world was heading for global cooling, when in fact, as this study shows [2], a healthy majority of scientific papers were predicting the opposite.

Yet Newman has a deep belief system of his own, having long been associated with a form of “classic liberalism” – a particular world view which advocates small government and low regulation of the activities of businesses.

Not only that, but he is a member of a global society of influential business people, academics and think tank associates known as the Mont Pelerin Society [3] who share the same broad ideology.

The Mont Pelerin Society

The Mont Pelerin Society was established in 1947 by free market economist and philosopher Friedrich von Hayek.

Maurice Newman, a Mont Pelerin member since 1976, has long been an admirer of the work of Hayek and fellow free market economist Milton Friedman, a past president of the Mont Pelerin Society.

Newman was responsible for bringing Friedman to Australia in the mid-1970s, at a time when Newman was helping to set up the Centre for Independent Studies – a Sydney-based free market think tank.

Mont Pelerin’s website explains that while all members don’t agree on everything, “they see danger in the expansion of government, not least in state welfare, in the power of trade unions and business monopoly, and in the continuing threat and reality of inflation.”

The Society, which holds a meeting annually in different parts of the world, also explains how its members see their society “as an effort to interpret in modern terms the fundamental principles of economic society as expressed by those classical economists, political scientists, and philosophers who have inspired many in Europe, America and throughout the Western World.”

To become a member, individuals have to be nominated by a current member and then seek endorsement by the membership committee before being endorsed.

DeSmogBlog has obtained a full list of the society’s members that includes senior representatives of many of the world’s foremost “free market” think tanks actively pushing back on proposed policy solutions to tackle climate change.

The list, from 2010, includes almost 500 people from 52 countries, with the bulk of members coming from the United States and the United Kingdom. The 70-page list includes private contact details. DeSmogBlog has decided to publish only extracts with contact details redacted.

Among the notable members is Charles Koch (list excerpt here [4]), the US oil billionaire who has been a Mont Pelerin Society member since 1970.

Charles and his brother David have used their charitable foundations to funnel tens of millions of dollars into free market think tanks which fight environmental protection and deny the dangers of human-caused climate change.

In Australia, Mont Pelerin Society members include John Roskam (list excerpt here [5]), executive director of the Institute of Public Affairs; Greg Lindsay (list excerpt here [6]), executive director of the Centre for Independent Studies; and mining magnate Ron Manns, executive director of the pro-mining think tank the Manns Economic Education Foundation.

All three organisations have actively pushed climate science scepticism and denial or heavily understated the risks of continuing to burn record amounts of fossil fuels.

Lindsay is a former president of the Mont Pelerin Society. In his 2008 “Presidential Address,” published in a Mont Pelerin newsletter, Lindsay claimed that climate change research had become an “industry” which lacked integrity.

His conspiracy theory was that scientists “have a vested interest in supporting the theory, so that the funding drip becomes a torrent.”

Lindsay also used the popular denial talking point that people who accepted the science of climate change were blinded by belief.

He said: “As many critics have pointed out, their belief in the theory, in too many instances, borders on the superstitious and mystical. The fact that so many minds are closed to any doubt strongly suggests that we are dealing with a new species of the kind of religious dogma which the Enlightenment developed to counter.”

The argument put by Lindsay back in 2008 is identical to that put by Tony Abbott’s chief business advisor Maurice Newman in recent columns, the latest only a few weeks ago [7].

Mont Pelerin in the United States

The US cohort of Mont Pelerin members includes many senior staff associated with "free market" think tanks that have manufactured doubt about the science of human-caused climate change or the need to act quickly.

Alongside Charles Koch, DeSmogBlog’s document shows that Mont Pelerin Society members include senior staff, directors and associates from groups his family foundations have helped to fund [8]. These include the Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation [9], the Acton Institute, the Reason Foundation [10] and the American Enterprise Institute.

Other members include Wall Street Journal editor and columnist Mary O'Grady and John O'Sullivan, a columnist with the conservative National Review.

The UK and Mont Pelerin

Members of UK free market think tanks including The Adam Smith Institute, CIVITAS and the Institute of Economic Affairs have also gained membership with the Mont Pelerin Society.

Long-standing climate science sceptic Julian Morris [11] is also listed as a member.

Another UK member is Linda Whetstone, the daughter of Antony Fisher who founded the influential UK neo-liberal think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs.

Antony Fisher established the Atlas Economic Research Foundation [12] – a vast network of about 400 think tanks around the world that share the ideals of limiting the power of government. Alejandro Chafuen, the current president of Atlas, is also listed as a 2010 Mont Pelerin Society member.

Global network

The Mont Pelerin Society got its name from the location of the very first meeting in Switzerland, and members continue to have ample chance to network in their annual meetings.

In recent years, members have travelled to the Galapagos Islands, Prague (former Czech president Vaclav Klaus is a member), New York, Morocco, Tokyo, Sydney, Buenos Aires and Stockholm.

The opportunity for this powerful and influential group to share ideas is obvious.

In 2010, when members held a meeting in Australia, Perth-based mining magnate and member Ron Manners extended an invitation to those making the long trip down under.

A 2010 Mont Pelerin Society newsletter obtained by DeSmogBlog explained how Manners, whose think tank has hosted climate science denier Christopher Monckton, had organised a “fascinating tour” of mining and energy sites including a day tour of the remote Pilbara region described as the “ground zero” of the mining boom.

It should come as no surprise that the Mont Pelerin Society has more than its fair share of climate science deniers within its ranks.

Research has shown [13] that belief in free market ideology is a predictor of the rejection of climate change science. This link was also revealed in Merchants of Doubt, a book by science historians Erik Conway and Naomi Oreskes.

About four out of every five climate denial books ever published [14], according to one study, have links to conservative and free market think tanks either through the authors or the publishers.

When it comes to efforts to block meaningful policy to tackle climate change, it seems free market groups and societies extolling their version of “freedom” are in fact a "ground zero" for climate science denial.