

Hacked climate emails used to attack scientists

By Chris Talbot
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The theft and publication of emails from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) of the University of East Anglia in England, containing communications between top scientists, has been used to boost the reactionary campaign backed by major oil producers and corporate lobbyists to deny the existence of global warming.

In the run up to the Copenhagen summit, the anti-climate change lobby has seized on sentences taken out of context from private communications between Professor Phil Jones, head of the Climate Research Unit (CRU), and other scientists to attack them and undermine their work.

Saudi Arabia's climate negotiator Mohammad Al-Sabban claimed that the content of the emails would derail discussion at Copenhagen on limiting greenhouse gas emissions. "It appears from the details of the scandal that there is no relationship whatsoever between human activities and climate change," he told the BBC.

Leading anti-climate change campaigner Patrick J. Michaels of the right-wing Washington Cato Institute, alleged that the emails showed scientists were preventing him publishing in journals: "This is what everyone feared. It has become increasingly difficult for anyone who does not view global warming as an end-of-the-world issue to publish papers. This isn't questionable practice, this is unethical."

In Britain, the right-wing *Daily Express*, under the headline "Climate Change 'Fraud'," publicized the views of Australian mining engineer Professor Ian Plimer. He asserted that scientists are supporting claims of climate change simply to get more research funding: "The climate comrades are trying to keep the gravy train going. Governments are also keen on putting their hands as deep as possible into our pockets."

The response of the climate change deniers was predictable. But they have been assisted in their task by liberal sections of the media. Journalists who normally pose as defenders of science concerned about the impact of global warming have also attacked the UEA scientists. They have behaved as though Jones and his colleagues have a case to answer.

None of the accusations against the scientists have stood up to examination after two weeks of probing. Yet as a result of media "concern", Professor Jones has been forced to temporarily step down as director of the CRU while the University of East Anglia carries out an investigation into the scientists' work, chaired by a former civil servant. The United Nations has also stepped in, with Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), saying he will investigate the matter.

The *Guardian* opined that "we have all been reminded that the frontiers of technical knowledge are not in fact advanced by automatons, but by fallible human beings... Any suggestion that scientists are being less than frank will shred their credibility."

The credibility of the scientists is being shredded, not by their own actions, but by the media. The storm that has engulfed Professor Jones is as much the responsibility of the respectable broadsheets and papers of record as it is of the tabloids. The media have responded in a cowardly and hypocritical way to an assault from corporate interests, in order to discredit scientists and science itself.

self-pity. “I have seldom felt so alone,” he wrote in his regular *Guardian* blog. “However good the detailed explanations may be, most people aren’t going to follow or understand them... I feel desperately sorry for him [Phil Jones]: he must be walking through hell. But there is no helping it; he has to go, and the longer he leaves it, the worse it will get. He has a few days left in which to make an honourable exit.”

Monbiot criticized the university’s handling of the affair as “a total trainwreck... As far as I can tell, it sat like a rabbit in the headlights, waiting for disaster to strike.”

The *Washington Post* columnist George Will wrote of climate change, “Never in peacetime history has the government-media-academic complex been in such sustained propagandistic lockstep about any subject.”

He accused the UEA scientists of “intellectual arrogance”, having “messiah complexes”, and of considering it “virtuous to embroider facts, exaggerate certitudes, suppress inconvenient data, and manipulate the peer-review process to suppress scholarly dissent”.

A somewhat more measured response came from the authoritative science journal *Nature*, which points out firstly that the emails were stolen. This is an important point because publication of the emails was not the result of some concerned whistleblower. It was a major criminal operation. (See *Nature*’s report here.)

It stated, “Nothing in the emails undermines the scientific case that global warming is real—or that human activities are almost certainly the cause. The case is supported by multiple, robust lines of evidence, including several that are completely independent of the climate reconstructions that are debated in the emails.”

“A fair reading of the emails,” the *Nature* article continued, “reveals nothing to support the denialists’ conspiracy theories.”

In one of the most highly publicized excerpts from thousands of stolen emails, the UEA scientists suggest that two papers should be kept out of the Fourth Assessment Report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This has been taken as evidence of a “smoking gun” proving climate change to be a fraud. In fact, *Nature* pointed out, both papers were referenced and discussed in the Assessment Report in 2007. Neither the UEA scientists, nor the IPCC suppressed anything.

Nature has itself come under attack from the climate change deniers, who have demanded that the journal investigate articles it has published from the UEA scientists. The journal’s editorial rejects this call in a principled fashion: “It is *Nature*’s policy to investigate such matters if there are substantive reasons for concern, but nothing we have seen so far in the e-mails qualifies.”

It has rapidly become apparent that the theft of the emails was a highly organized operation. “It’s a carefully made selection of emails and documents that’s not random.” Professor Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, vice-chairman of the IPCC told the UK-based *Independent*, “This is 13 years of data, and it’s not a job of amateurs.”

The hackers had access to the email system for at least a month. On October 12, Paul Hudson, a BBC regional weather presenter, received a number of emails including the stolen documents. On November 17 some 4,000 documents were uploaded to a climate website from a computer in Turkey. On November 19 a link was posted from a computer in Saudi Arabia to a zip file of the documents on a Russian computer.

Professor Ypersele suggested that the FSB, the Russian secret service, might be behind the operation. They were posted on a server in the Siberian city of Tomsk, which belongs to an internet security business called Tomcity. The FSB in the city has a record of congratulating students on successful hacks of sites that are regarded as hostile to Russian interests. They are thought to employ hackers in concerted attacks on Russia’s neighbors.

Whoever was ultimately responsible for stealing the UEA emails, the operation served the interests of major capitalist enterprise—whether in Russia, Saudi Arabia, Europe or America. It reveals the lengths to which the representatives of the capitalist class are prepared to go in the attempt to preserve their profits at the expense of the vast majority of the planet's population.

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