

Global warming zealots blamed for deadly diesel fiasco

By Steven Glover, The Daily Mail, 25 September 2015

Amid all the reporting of Volkswagen's rigging of emission tests on its diesel cars, one inconvenient truth has been overlooked by the BBC and many media organisations. It is that we very largely owe the prevalence of these death-traps to the pernicious tyranny of the Green lobby.

That they are death traps can scarcely be denied. They spew out vastly more nitrogen oxide and nitrogen dioxide than petrol cars, both of which gases are potentially damaging, and 22 times more particulates — the minute particles that penetrate lungs, brains and hearts.

According to Martin Williams, professor of air quality research at King's College London, diesel cars account for

The pernicious tyranny of the Green lobby

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Diesels are also mostly responsible for alarming increases in air pollution in our major cities, a particularly serious worry for the hundreds of thousands of people who suffer from asthma.

In a well-ordered society, you might expect the government to have discouraged the proliferation of diesel vehicles. In fact, egged on or bullied by the Greens and climate-change zealots, politicians over the past 20 years have been doing the precise opposite. It seems hard to believe, I know, but it's true.

Twenty years ago, diesel cars constituted a tiny minority. But following the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, most Western countries, including Britain, were legally obliged to reduce carbon dioxide emissions — alleged by some to cause climate change — by 8 per cent over the following 15 years.

Following the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997...

Diesel cars produce slightly less — but only slightly — carbon dioxide than petrol ones. In 2001 the Labour government introduced a new tax regime whereby cars were taxed according to how much carbon dioxide they produce, a development that enormously favoured diesel over petrol. (Duty at the pump has been the same for petrol and diesel since 2000.)

Gordon Brown, then Chancellor, also introduced tax incentives to encourage company car buyers to plump for diesels. Across the EU, car manufacturers were encouraged to develop diesel models.

As a consequence, about half of new cars in Britain are now diesels. In some European countries such as France and Italy, where there have been similar inducements, the proportion is even higher.

When recently buying a new car, I was attracted to a diesel partly because its annual tax was only £40, in comparison to £150 for the petrol version, otherwise identical. Happily, my wife, who had read about the polluting effects of diesels, overruled me. Even I had been almost gulled by Green lobbyists and the blandishments of politicians into doing something that I would have regretted.

You may say ministers didn't realise that diesels discharge dangerous emissions — but you would be wrong. A 1993 report published by the Department of the Environment was fully aware of the potentially lethal effects of diesel cars.

Killing people today rather than saving lives tomorrow???

A senior civil servant, who worked for the Department of Transport at the time, is quoted in yesterday's Guardian newspaper as saying: 'We did not sleepwalk into this. To be totally reductionist [ie, in the simplest terms], you are talking about killing people today rather than saving lives tomorrow.'

In other words, if this mandarin is to be believed, it was thought preferable in Whitehall to accept the inevitable deaths of many thousands of people as a result of promoting diesels in return for the hoped-for long-term gain of saving an unknown number of lives at some time in the future as a consequence of reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

Isn't this mad? And immoral? In the first place, Britain accounts for only 2 per cent of all global man-made carbon dioxide emissions, so a small reduction in that amount is hardly likely to avert the catastrophe which climate-change zealots believe is around the corner. And, in the second place, it's by no means clear that any such Armageddon lies in store for mankind.

Treat the more hysterical claims of the Green lobby with caution

I am neither a climate-change zealot nor what is invidiously termed a 'denier'. But the fact that there has been no recorded increase in global temperature over the past 17 years — a period during which carbon emissions have soared because of the rapid economic growth of countries such as China and India — suggests to me that we should treat the more hysterical claims of the Green lobby with caution.

But this is not an area of rational debate. If it were, politicians would not have given in to the bullying of the extremists who persuaded them to put the theoretical effects of climate change before the actual and proven damaging effects of pumping out nitrogen oxide and dioxide, and carcinogenic particulates.

Volkswagen supervisory board member Wolfgang Porsche (left), Acting Chairman of the Board of Volkswagen Berthold Huber, and VW Board Member Stephan Weil give statements at the Volkswagen headquarters after announcing that CEO Martin Winterkorn is stepping down as chairman of the board after a crisis meeting

It's true, of course, that over the past decade or so car manufacturers have succeeded in reducing these nasty gases emitted by diesels, but they have not eliminated them. That is why Volkswagen found itself cooking the evidence, and trying to hoodwink the American authorities into believing that its cars discharge a lot less nitrogen oxide than they actually do.

Indeed, it is one of the ironies of this story that America — which, to the outrage of the climate-change lobby, did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol because of a certain scepticism about man-made climate change — is far sterner about vehicle pollution than any European country, including our own.

Haven't they got it the right way round? A baby being pushed by her mother in a buggy, a cyclist and even an ordinary pedestrian walking along the pavement of a busy street are being exposed to unnecessary risks as a result of the completely foreseen dangers of diesel vehicles.

You have been misled by weak-minded politicians

And if you are the blameless owner of a diesel car, which is liable to cause damage to other innocent people, you are justified in feeling that you have been misled by weak-minded politicians, who have, in turn, surrendered their good sense to a raucous and unreasoning mob.

The pity is that mainstream media such as the all-powerful BBC are themselves cowed and meekly quiescent, so that a highly intelligent and well-informed climate-change sceptic such as the former Tory Chancellor Nigel Lawson is virtually excluded from the airwaves

This mob have got their priorities in a serious twist. Surely responsible environmentalists should have concentrated on the here and now, and opposed the explosion in the number of diesel cars. But many in the Green movement have their eyes fixed on a threat over the horizon which may or may not exist, and care far less about present dangers.

That is also why most of them champion exorbitant wind farms, which are lethal to birds and scar the countryside, and why they induce pliable politicians to replace coal-burning power stations with far less efficient wood-burning ones. Vast forests are felled, and huge quantities of wood transported halfway across the world at a considerable cost to the environment.

Their deafness to different points of view

In their deafness to different points of view — in fact, in their rank intolerance of opposing voices — these people often remind me of religious fundamentalists. They shout down, or seek to censor, those who don't agree with them.

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Volkswagen, a devious and untrustworthy conglomerate

Volkswagen has emerged from this story as a devious and untrustworthy conglomerate. But the biggest lesson of this debacle is that successive British governments have sacrificed the interests of ordinary citizens as they have caved in to the demands of a dangerous bunch of zealots.