

Greenhouse dilemma

Sir—The background to the "greenhouse effect" is well-known. Carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels, deforestation and cement manufacture causes global temperature to increase by about 3°C each time the proportion of the gas in the atmosphere doubles. At the current rate of manmade CO₂ production, the proportion will have doubled in about 230 years. At the end of the last ice age, the global temperature increased naturally by only about 6°C with a corresponding sea-level rise of about 100 metres from melting ice in the following 2,000 years or so. By analogy, this implies a sea-level rise due to the greenhouse effect of at least 12 metres in the next 230 years with a further 38 metres still to come, even if the rate of CO₂ increase remains constant and there is no further rise thereafter. However, there is a close link between atmospheric CO₂ increase and population size.

It seems inevitable, therefore, that the greenhouse effect will induce sea-level rises high enough to drown many if not most major cities of the world and much of their agricultural hinterlands within the lifetime of the sea defences presently designed at massive cost to protect them. Alternatively, the population size might be contained and then reduced to decrease manmade CO₂ production. This would destroy the pensions and insurance structures of the developed world and family provision for the elderly of developing nations.

We appear to face a dilemma. Social structures will not allow us to reduce the population. Current technology and economics will not provide a workable alternative to the consequent continuing generation of CO₂ with its associated sea-level rise and massive incursions. If we accept the greenhouse calculations, should we not be embracing their conclusions more urgently in the planning of relevant engineering and financial structures? On the other hand, if we choose to disbelieve the warnings, why are we paying dearly for them with public money?

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