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# GLOBAL SPIN

*The Corporate Assault  
on Environmentalism*

Sharon Beder



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may actually be falling” and “the ozone layer is getting thicker, not thinner, over temperate latitudes”.<sup>16</sup> This argument is irrelevant, since the concern is over ozone depletion occurring close to the Earth’s poles. A related criticism is that there has been no measured increase in UV radiation detected in cities in the US as a result of ozone depletion. However there is evidence of increases in UV radiation at ground level in Australia (in the Southern hemisphere, where ozone depletion was first observed).<sup>17</sup>

Since around 1993 several publications have come out suggesting that ozone depletion is a scam or a hoax, or at least grossly exaggerated. Most of these are based on the claims of a handful of scientists, perhaps the most quoted of whom is Fred Singer, executive director of a think-tank called the Science and Environmental Policy Project (SEPP). This project was originally set up in 1990 with the help of the Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy (funded by the Rev Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church) which provided it with free office space. (SEPP is no longer affiliated with Moon, and receives its funding from various foundations.)<sup>18</sup>

SEPP argues that global warming, ozone depletion and acid rain are not real but rather are scare tactics used by environmentalists. Singer speaks and writes prolifically on these subjects, and is popular amongst anti-environment groups.<sup>19</sup> Two of the leading Australian conservative think-tanks sponsored him to tour Australia, putting his views on global warming. He has worked for companies such as Exxon, Shell, and Arco.<sup>20</sup> According to the Environmental Research Foundation:

For years, Singer was a professor at the University of Virginia where he was funded by energy companies to pump out glossy pamphlets pooh-pooing climate change. Singer hasn’t published original research on climate change in twenty years and is now an ‘independent’ consultant, who spends his time writing letters to the editor, and testifying before Congress, claiming that ozone-depletion and global warming aren’t real problems.<sup>21</sup>

Another scientist widely quoted in the ‘ozone depletion is a hoax’ literature is Rogelio Maduro, who has a geology degree. He is an associate editor of 21st Century Science and Technology which, according to the journal *Science*, is published “by supporters of Lyndon LaRouche”. Maduro has written a book with writer Ralf Schauerhammer entitled *The Holes in the Ozone Scare: The Scientific Evidence that the Sky Isn’t Falling*, published by 21st Century. In it they argue that most chlorine in the stratosphere comes from natural sources such seawater and volcanoes. Atmospheric scientists, however, point out that the chlorine from these sources is washed out of the air by rain long before it reaches the stratosphere, whereas CFCs are not soluble in water.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing on these few scientific ‘experts’, who prefer to publish their dissenting views in think-tank and right-wing publications rather than in peer-reviewed scientific journals, conservative and business magazines and radio talk-back hosts such as Rush Limbaugh have been spreading the idea that ozone depletion is not really a problem and that no action needs to be taken. *Business Week* quoted Fred

Singer and Ronald Bailey in an article entitled *What’s Flying out the Ozone Hole? Billions of Dollars*, in which it argued that “the propaganda of the Chicken Littles has prevailed over science—and the cost of needlessly replacing cooling equipment will be staggering”. Another *Business Week* article a year later quoted Fred Singer as saying that the CFC phaseout was “based mainly on panicky reactions to press releases. . .” The articles were written by Paul Craig Roberts, the chairman of a Washington think-tank and a Distinguished Fellow of the Cato Institute.<sup>23</sup>

This surge of backlash publications has also reached the mainstream press. The *Washington Post* reported that “the problem appears to be heading toward solution before [researchers] can find any solid evidence that serious harm was or is being done.”<sup>24</sup> This isn’t the first time that the media has serviced those seeking to discredit ozone depletion theories. In the 1970s, when the connection between fluorocarbons from aerosol spray cans and ozone depletion were first made:

The aerosol industry launched a PR campaign that emphasized ‘knowledge gaps’ instead of gaps in the Earth’s atmospheric shield. Industry press releases formed the basis for articles in numerous newspapers and magazines that questioned the ozone depletion ‘theory’, enabling aerosol spray manufacturers to buy additional time before their product was banned. In this case, industry profits were deemed more important than the prevention of skin cancer.<sup>25</sup>

This time, think-tanks and their scholars have provided the Republicans in Congress with the rhetoric to oppose a more general CFC phaseout. The Republicans have sought to retract US agreement to the terms of the Montreal Protocol, the international convention aimed at phasing out CFCs worldwide. And a bill was introduced to repeal the provisions of the Clean Air Act relating to production and use of CFCs.<sup>26</sup> *New Scientist* reported in September 1995:

America’s Republicans thumbed their noses at the vast majority of the world’s scientists last week by claiming there is no proof that CFCs are destroying the ozone layer. Without proof, they argued, there is no good reason why the US should rush to bar the manufacture of CFCs by the end of the year.<sup>27</sup>

The appropriately named Republican John Doolittle told the House of Representatives Science Committee that ozone depletion was debatable, based on pseudo-science and that “we’re not giving Mother Nature enough credit for being able to replenish the ozone layer.” He dismissed peer-review as “mumbo jumbo”.<sup>28</sup> Also writing in *New Scientist*, Jeff Hecht argued that:

What the Republicans are doing is playing lawyers’ games with science. They demand that theories that they consider inconvenient be proved beyond any doubt—some thing that is impossible in science. . . The theory is so widely accepted that its originators received a Nobel prize for chemistry. Yet the Republicans don’t like it because it implies the need to regulate industrial production of the harmful chemicals that damage the ozone layer. . . If they could find a few scientists who were 100 per cent convinced that CFCs depleted ozone, they seemed ready to abandon the Montreal Protocol.<sup>29</sup>