

*Exploring The Nature of Capitalism*

# **Global Capitalism:**

**The Exploited Planet,**

**The Torrent of Garbage**

**and**

**The Warnings**

**[and still we procrastinated!]**

*Bill Geddes*

(<http://www.pilibrary.com>)

Book of the [Capitalism Blog Series](#): [The History and Nature of Capitalism](#)  
(«[HTML Version](#) »«[EPUB Version](#) »«[MOBI Version](#) »«[PDF Version](#) »)

([Download free HTML Reader](#)) («[Blog Site](#) » «[RSS Feed](#) » )

---

\* 'Virtually nothing's been done except endless talk and meetings.  
I don't think we can react fast enough or are clever enough to handle  
what's coming up'

(James Lovelock <sup>1</sup> )

- [Global Capitalism: The Torrent of Garbage](#)
- [End Notes](#)

- [A list of informative sites on environmental issues](#)
- [Post a Comment »](#)

---

## Global Capitalism: The Exploited Planet and The Torrent of Garbage

Bill Geddes  
8<sup>th</sup> July 2011

([«HTML Version](#) » [«EPUB Version](#) » [«MOBI Version](#) » [«PDF Version](#) »)

In my neck of the woods, this summer has been delightful. After 15 years of drought (punctuated by a few heavy rain events), this year has seen a return to mid-1990s weather conditions. My dams are full, the gardens and orchard flourishing. I am tempted to believe that the last 15 years were just a drought after all. Perhaps we will, for the next 15 years, once again enjoy 'normal' weather patterns.

But, this is a *La Niña* season and it has been an extreme one <sup>2</sup>.

To the north, major floods and cyclones have devastated vast regions of Queensland, New South Wales, northern Western Australia and north western Victoria. Elsewhere countries have been ravaged by floods and droughts <sup>3</sup>.

My good summer is due to capricious fortune – and some of my cropping neighbours would question my claim that this has been a 'delightful' summer!

Still, I can surely cling to a stubborn optimism and insist that this is the way it will remain from now on (hopefully, without the disasters visited upon others of course). I can throw away all my 'climate change' placards, books and articles. They belong to a pessimistic past! The doomsayers were wrong!!

This new blog series will address the present impact of capitalism, both on people and on our environments. A search of the internet to find what is currently being written on these topics proved enlightening. There are thousands of sites focussing on the issues. Many of them present very well reasoned, informative, insightful and interesting material <sup>4</sup>.

The overwhelming consensus from these sites is that unregulated capitalism, driven by snowballing consumerism, is

propelling humanity toward a precipice. The ravine is deep and the species may barely survive the plunge <sup>5</sup>. Yet, those involved in capitalist enterprise and in consuming its products and services are accelerating down that dead-end road as though it was an unlimited expressway to utopia.

Are we blind? Do we believe ourselves indestructible? Do we believe that before we get there something or someone will provide us with a bridge over the ravine <sup>6</sup>?

It seems that our ideologies, beliefs and prejudices <sup>7</sup> lead many of us to disbelieve and dismiss the thousands of clearly reasoned, well researched and documented explanations.

Many of those who have arrogated the right to filter and interpret what is presented to us as 'news' and 'informed commentary' <sup>8</sup> urge us to ignore the warning signs – "No Through Road" and "Ravine Ahead".



Perhaps we are suicidal.

Whatever the cause, the consequence is clear. We now live on a grossly over-exploited planet, with a rapidly deteriorating biosphere. We are, to change the metaphor and put it bluntly, defecating in both our own and other communities' and species' nests <sup>9</sup>.

Globalised, deregulated capitalist organisations continue to exploit the planet's resources at an accelerating pace <sup>10</sup>. Well-meaning, often-concerned, Western people (and those who emulate their lifestyles) continue to expand their needs and wants, accumulating increasing quantities of marginally useful goods and consuming ever-more unnecessary goods and services.

Our garbage sites are filled with items we have thrown away: outdated, defective or simply unwanted products and vast quantities of packaging materials and industrial waste of various kinds <sup>11</sup>.

Few of us are immune to charges of profligacy. Recently a refrigerator I purchased seven years ago died (my previous

refrigerator, with the same brand name, had lasted almost thirty years). The cost of fixing this one was about half the cost of a new refrigerator, and the time taken for the repair would result in a real inconvenience to me. So, I bought a new one and had it delivered on the same day. The appliance store which supplied the new fridge took away the old one. They didn't attempt to repair it, they took it to a rubbish dump!

Despite my best endeavours, I find that I generate a remarkable quantity of discarded plastic containers and wrapping materials of various kinds. My weekly shopping seems to provide me with enough garbage to fill my roadside garbage bin each month or two.

As an 11 year old at the start of the 1950s I had a job delivering groceries by bicycle for a neighbourhood grocery shop. Most of the goods sold by that corner store came to it in bulk. The owner would weigh quantities on a set of scales, put items that needed it into paper bags and other re-useable containers (often supplied by the customer), then pack everything into a cardboard box. Empty containers in which the wholesale goods came were usually returned to the place they came from by the person who delivered the goods to the store.

I would put the box of groceries into the front carrier on the shop bike and deliver it. The items would be unpacked onto the customer's kitchen table and I would leave with the box, to be used in the next delivery. Some people would save the brown paper bags when they were empty, neatly folding them along their original creases so they might store more easily.

Very little was thrown away. A favourite way of earning a little extra cash was to go to sports grounds after popular events and collect discarded bottles. They could be returned to shops where we would get threepence for each of them. Nobody thought twice about the premium they paid for this when they bought their soft drinks.

But all that has changed. The corner shop has gone. Everything comes pre-packaged in throw-away containers, some of it from absurdly distant places! My keyboard, shampoo and soap come from Thailand (over 7000 km away), my mouthwash comes from Colombia (more than 14000 km away), my hard disk drives, telephone and many of my electronic items from China, Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia. We are living in profligate times!

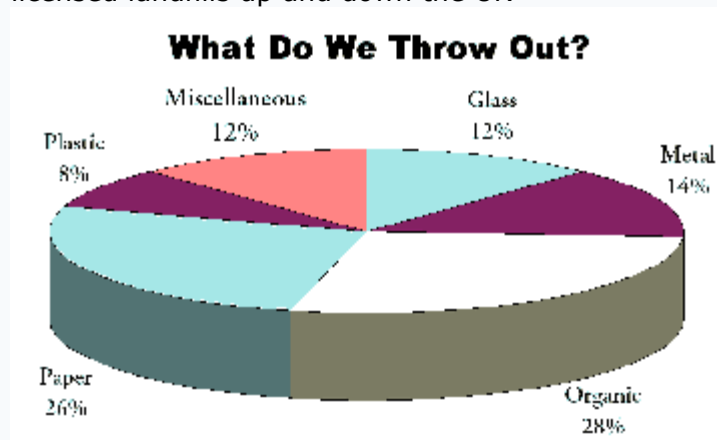
How did we get from the early 1950s to here? How did we become so blasé about generating vast piles of rubbish?

Here are a few descriptions of the burgeoning solid waste problem from sites around the world <sup>12</sup> :

The British scene:

There are two different types of waste in landfills, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) and Industrial Waste. MSW is basically the contents of your dustbin and Industrial Waste is produced by industry.

About 18,000,000 tonnes of MSW is produced each year in the nation's homes and businesses. About 78,000,000 tonnes is Industrial Waste. These figures are only estimates, because only about 40% of waste is weighed before disposal. Today 88% of MSW is buried in the 4,000 licensed landfills up and down the UK



(If we combine the municipal and industrial waste totals in determining the per capita garbage footprint of people in Great Britain <sup>13</sup> , this equates to 1.5 tonnes of garbage per year for every man, woman and child in Great Britain. (1 metric tonne = .984 imperial or long ton) ([Problems Associated with Landfills](#)))

The scene in the USA:

EPA defines solid waste as any garbage or refuse, sludge from a wastewater treatment plant, water supply treatment plant, or air pollution control facility and other discarded material, including solid, liquid, semi-solid, or contained gaseous material resulting from industrial, commercial, mining, and agricultural operations, and from community activities.

Nearly everything we do leaves behind some kind of waste. In fact, in 2006, U.S. residents, businesses, and institutions produced more than 251 million tons of municipal solid waste, which is approximately 4.6 pounds of waste per person per day. In addition, American industrial facilities generate and dispose of approximately 7.6 billion tons of industrial solid waste each year.

[Combining the municipal and industrial waste totals to determine the per capita garbage footprint of people in the USA, this equates to 25 tons of garbage per year for every man, woman and child in the United States.]

Choose from the solid waste types below to learn more:

- **Municipal solid waste** is commonly known as trash or garbage.
- **Industrial waste** is made up of a wide variety of non-hazardous materials that result from the production of goods and products.

(U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

And China <sup>14</sup> :

As more Chinese ride the nation's economic boom, a torrent of garbage is one result. Cities are bursting at the seams, and their officials struggle to cope.

The amount of paper, plastic and other garbage has more than tripled in two decades to about 300 million tons a year, according to Nie Yongfeng, a waste management expert at Beijing's Tsinghua University.

#### **'No place to put it all'**

Americans are still way ahead of China in garbage; a population less than a quarter the size of China's 1.3 billion generated 254 million tons of garbage in 2007, a third of which is recycled or composted, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

But for China, the problem represents a rapid turnabout from a generation ago, when families, then largely rural and poor, used and reused everything.

"Trash was never complicated before, because we didn't have supermarkets, we didn't have fancy packaging and endless things to buy," said Nie. "Now suddenly, the government is panicking about the mountains of garbage

piling up with no place to put it all."

In Zhanglidong, villagers engage in shouting matches with drivers and sometimes try to bodily block their garbage trucks coming from Zhengzhou, 20 miles away.

"Zhengzhou is spotless because their trash is dumped into our village," says Li Qiaohong, who blames it for her 5-year-old son's eczema.

([As Economy Grows, so does China's trash](#), Associated Press, 10/11/2009)

The scene in the Philippines <sup>15</sup> :

Our streets are lined with garbage, our waters flooded, and our creeks clogged with trash, even our mountains are junk – all these are reflections of the need to heed to the serious call for waste management – it is time for each and every one of us to stop living dirty.

And why? The indiscriminate throwing of garbage contaminates our waters, with clogged drains open for insect breeding which brings about diseases like cholera and dengue, targeting most especially, our children. Floods have become a common sight during rainy seasons. Backyard burning, or simply, burning of garbage, releases toxic air pollutants, which leads to respiratory diseases like asthma, bronchitis, lung cancer, even death. To be direct, dirty living equals death....

The National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC), chaired by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), has identified three key trends in the local garbage situation: 1) increase in sheer volume of generated wastes; 2) change in the quality and make-up of waste generated; and 3) waste handling methods.

Everyday, the country has a per capita waste generation of 0.3 to 0.7 kilograms of garbage. In 2003\*, we have generated 27,397 tons of garbage daily, a step backwards compared to the 19,700 tons of garbage we have generated daily in 2000 (\*based on the study conducted by the NSWMC-Secretariat and the Metro Manila Solid Waste Management Project of the Asian Development Bank in 2003). That is tantamount to ten million tons of garbage generated in 2003.

Of the ten million tons of generated garbage in 2003, 2.5

million came from Metro Manila. This is a strong evidence of the forecast which indicated that by 2010, in comparison to the 2000 data, waste generation shall have increased by 47%.

([Managing Solid Waste in the Philippines](#) January 23, 2007)

and

LUPANG PANGAKO, PAYATAS, QUEZON CITY — Orlando Wong lives in the shadow of the huge dumpsite here, and there are times that he and his family can't eat because of the stink of the place. But Wong, 42, is surprisingly optimistic about his future and that of the country. "The Philippines," he says, "is going to walk the path of growth and development."

([Romel Lalata and Cecile C.A. Balgos](#) April 27th, 2004)

Everywhere, human beings are generating more and more waste. We might talk about recycling. We might even indulge in a limited attempt at it (I have a special roadside bin provided by the local council in which various kinds of 'recyclable' materials are placed), but the amount of waste dumped into landfills grows each year.

No matter how much recycling we indulge in, the simple fact is that corporations extracting resources to feed the industries we demand, are entering a boom period <sup>16</sup>. The future, for them, is record profits and rapid expansion! Recycling is barely a blip on their rose-tinted horizons.

We could continue examining descriptions of the solid waste difficulties being experienced around the world, but we all understand the problem:

- Capitalism requires us to continue to consume at an ever-expanding rate <sup>17</sup>.
  - If we don't:
    - our economies will falter,
    - people will lose their jobs,
    - our futures will be bleak.
  - If we do:
    - our economies will be 'healthy'



- we will have full employment,
- and our futures ...

And, Garbage is the least of our problems!

In the early 21st century pastoral, agricultural and horticultural regions of the world are facing serious agricultural chemical pollution, water-logging, salinity, over-grazing, deforestation, land erosion, desertification, increasingly erratic climatic conditions, ...

In future posts we will explore a few of these and other problems created by capitalism's need to ensure snowballing material consumption <sup>18</sup>.

---

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Originator of [Gaia theory](#), inventor of the [electron capture detector](#) (1957) (which made possible the detection of CFCs and other atmospheric nano-pollutants) and of the microwave oven.

<sup>2</sup> As an *Earth Institute* article explains:

Recent extreme weather events as far as Australia and Africa are being fuelled by a climate phenomenon known as La Niña—or “the girl” in Spanish. La Niña has also played a minor role in the recent cold weather in the Northeast U.S.

The term La Niña refers to a period of cooler-than-average sea-surface temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific Ocean that occurs as part of natural climate variability. This situation is roughly the opposite of what happens during El Niño (“the boy”) events, when surface waters in this region are warmer than normal. Because the Pacific is the largest ocean on the planet, any significant changes in average conditions there can have consequences for temperature, rainfall and vegetation in distant places....

Climate scientists have found La Niña's fingerprints on a number of extreme weather events such as the devastating flood that occurred in Pakistan in 2010, as well as flooding in West Africa, South Africa and most

recently in Queensland, Australia, where an area equal to the combined size of France and Germany was underwater. La Niña is also to blame for Cyclone Yasi, one of the strongest to hit Australia, which came ashore on Feb. 2.

([Climate Phenomenon La Niña to Blame for Global Extreme Weather Events](#), *The Earth Institute*, Columbia University, Feb 7, 2011)

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Krugman (*New York Times*, February 6, 2011) [Droughts, Floods and Food](#) for a discussion of the worldwide consequences of these events.

A word of caution on Krugman's position: Krugman believes in the virtues of free trade and globalization, however, he wants to mitigate the effects of the consequences. So, he writes as a person concerned for mitigating effects, while still supporting the fundamental causative policies. Rather like a Climate Change Denier who, while believing that climate change isn't happening, sees the consequences and wants to mitigate their impacts in people's lives.

<sup>4</sup> Here is a list of the first sixteen sites I identified dealing with environmental issues, not in any order of excellence. There are many others as good or better (many of them listed in the sites below):

#### [A List of excellent, informative sites](#)

- [Climate Change News Digest](#) (provides constantly updated links to the latest news on climate change)
- [Climate Progress](#) (see the 'Links' list for a good selection of alternative sites)
- [Desmogblog](#) (see its 'Links to websites and blogs we read' for an excellent list of sites)
- [Dot Earth](#) (see the 'BlogRoll' for a wide ranging selection of alternative sites)
- [Guardian Environment Network](#) (provides an excellent list of its own in a column titled 'Our content partners')
- [Grist](#)
- [NASA Global Climate Change Site](#)
- [National Science Foundation](#)
- [National Snow and Ice Data Center](#)

- [Pew Environment Group](#)
- [Physorg](#)
- [RealClimate](#) (see the columns 'Other Opinions' and 'Science Links' for excellent lists of alternative sites)
- [Science and Development Network](#)
- [Smartplanet](#)
- [World Ocean Circulation Experiment Global Data Resource](#)
- [Yale Environment 360](#) (see the 'Of Interest' list for another selection of sites)

Of course, there are some sites I find difficult to understand, and some which seem deliberately designed to mislead and misinform. See [Articgate: Now THAT's cherrypicking](#) for an example of some of the nonsense that masquerades as serious commentary on the internet.

(I am not denigrating internet commentary! There is plenty of nonsense published and peddled on radio and television and in both the academic and general hard-copy press. Unfortunately, despite the assertion in the Book of Proverbs that 'a chattering fool comes to ruin' (*Proverbs* 10:8), they very often prosper through their appeal to likeminded, often ideologically driven, souls.)

<sup>5</sup> Every day sees new studies, books and articles warning the world that the future will be catastrophic for humanity if we continue on the present course. See the [US National Science Foundation](#) press releases 11-039 and 10-191 for measured assessments of the possibility of natural disaster on a global scale within our lifetimes:

- [Drought may threaten much of globe within decades: Dryness likely to increase substantially across Eurasia, Africa, Australia](#)  
("The United States and many other heavily populated countries face a growing threat of severe and prolonged drought in coming decades, according to results of a new study by *National Center for Atmospheric Research* (NCAR) scientist Aiguo Dai");
- [Ancient Catastrophic Drought Leads to Question: How Severe Can Climate Change Become?](#)  
("Worse than anything we've seen in written history, according to results of a study appearing this week in the journal *Science*.")

Also (a few which appeared as I was writing this),

- [Mega-drought threat to US Southwest](#)  
(Quirin Schiermeier, *Nature News*, 23 February 2011)
- [Half of world's population could face climate-driven food crisis in second half of the century](#)  
(*Climate Progress* February 24th, 2011)
- [\\$1 trillion global water market forecast for 2020; global freshwater demand expected to exceed supply by 40 percent by 2030](#)  
(*Canadian Water Network* ([www.cwn-rce.ca](http://www.cwn-rce.ca)) Reuters 27 Feb 2011)  
"...Within a single generation, recent studies show, water demand in many countries will exceed supply by an estimated 40%, with one-third of humanity having half the water required for life's basics. In flood-prone places, meanwhile, catastrophic flood events normally expected once a century - similar to those recently witnessed in Pakistan and Australia - can now be expected every 20 years instead."

James Lovelock, asked whether humanity will survive global warming, put it like this:

I'm an optimistic pessimist. I think it's wrong to assume we'll survive 2 °C of warming: there are already too many people on Earth. At 4 °C we could not survive with even one-tenth of our current population. The reason is [we would not find enough food](#), unless we synthesised it. Because of this, the cull during this century is going to be huge, up to 90 per cent. The number of people remaining at the end of the century will probably be a billion or less. It has happened before: between the ice ages there were bottlenecks when there were only 2000 people left [\*\*]. It's happening again.

I don't think humans react fast enough or are clever enough to handle what's coming up. Kyoto was 11 years ago. Virtually nothing's been done except endless talk and meetings.

I don't think we can react fast enough or are clever enough to handle what's coming up  
(Gaia Vince (2009) *New Scientist*, issue [2692](#) page 30-31 [One Last Chance to Save Mankind](#))

[\*\* see [Population Bottleneck](#) for more on this.]

Yet, despite all the warnings, we continue to procrastinate!

Unfortunately, having lived through the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I am compelled, despite my inherent and stubborn optimism, to concur with James Lovelock, 'Virtually nothing's been done except endless talk and meetings. I don't think we can react fast enough or are clever enough to handle what's coming up'.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps that 'Unseen Hand' so beloved by economists (see 'Led by an Invisible Hand' in [History and Nature of Capitalism](#) for the origin of this belief) – or a magical bridge from the future like that which materialised in one of the movies in the *Back to the Future* series.

Here's a 'business as usual' assessment of the future:

Fred Palmer, senior vice president of government relations for *Peabody Energy* (the [self-proclaimed] world's largest private-sector coal company) put the future of world energy procurement starkly in his assessment of the importance of coal production and use:

Palmer dismissed the idea that the world might ever experience "peak coal" – the point at which maximum global coal production rate is reached. "The Dakotas, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas all have large, large amounts of lignite [brown coal]," he said. "Or in western China and Mongolia you have lower-ranked coals. So I don't think there's a peak coal problem.

I think Xinjiang province in the west of China, where they say there's a trillion tonnes of resources, will be the new Middle East. Anyone who has the notion that we're going to move away from fossil fuels just isn't paying attention."

([China's coal reserves 'will make it new Middle East', says energy chief](#), Leo Hickman, [guardian.co.uk](#), Tuesday 8 March 2011 11.39 GMT)

As Palmer of *Peabody Energy* and many others have been telling us for the past 30 years or more, there is no need to be concerned. They are now focused on producing a "low-carbon coal future".

Ever since I've got here in 2001, under our CEO Greg Boyce, we've always said that we need to drive technology for continual emissions improvements leading to near-zero emissions and that includes carbon. So the worldwide concern over carbon, given the large use of coal, and the inevitable growth of coal - and the numbers are staggering - leaves us very anxious to be a key player in driving technology to develop a carbon answer and meet those concerns, even when we use more coal.

Our approach is consistent with what the federal government is doing at the Department of Energy and their research programmes and also [what's happening in] China. People don't understand that China in 10 years will have an absolute state-of-the-art coal-based electric generating system that's cleaner and more efficient than any other country on earth, including the US. China, together with the US, is the leading testbed for carbon technology, for example, for retrofitting or building new plants going forward.

Peabody, with Chinese partners, is involved in GreenGen which is an integrated gasification, combined cycle project in Tianjin, China, that will be the first zero-emissions coal plant, which will use the CO<sub>2</sub> stream for enhanced oil recovery. So China and the US are both aggressively pursuing low-carbon coal technologies even as the world consumes more coal every day and will continue for as far out as you can see.

(Fred Palmer interview: 'We're 100% coal. More coal. Everywhere' [Guardian.co.uk/Environment/Blog](http://Guardian.co.uk/Environment/Blog) 8<sup>th</sup> March 2011 )

We will develop the necessary technologies to ensure a rose-tinted future for humanity. Just be patient – they'll come! And they really will be 'clean' and 'green'.

However, as Richard Heinberg has explained:

Coal is the most polluting of the fossil fuels, and if we burn more of it there is little hope of averting catastrophic climate change.

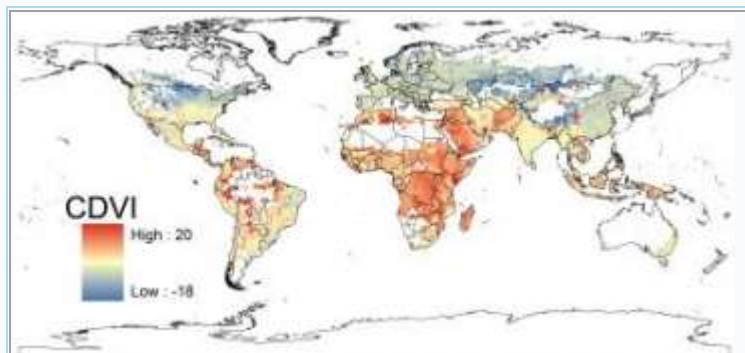
But is carbon capture and storage (CCS) a solution? The technology exists only in the sense that its

components have been demonstrated on a small scale. Deploying it broadly would require the development of an infrastructure that would require trillions of dollars of investment and decades of work.

According to Vaclav Smil of the University of Manitoba, in a recent letter to Nature, we would need to handle a volume of CO<sub>2</sub> twice as large as the world's crude oil flows just to sequester one quarter of carbon dioxide emitted in 2005 by large stationary sources.

CCS is essentially a "delay and fail" strategy by the coal industry. By selling the idea of "clean coal," the industry delays an energy transition away from fossil fuels, while setting itself up for an eventual failure of the entire CCS project. By the time that the failure is clear and obvious, there will be no alternative: the coal plants will have been built, the money invested. We'll burn more coal, and to hell with the climate. (Richard Heinberg, [Post Carbon Institute's Energy Bulletin](#) Sep 30 2008)

But wait, good news has just appeared ([3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011](#)) in the form of an article reporting the results of research into the impact of climate change on human populations. It appears that the Invisible Hand really is on the side of the major polluters!



**Caption:** Local vulnerability of human populations to climate change based on ecological and demographic models. The regions in red are expected to be most negatively impacted by climate change. White regions correspond to human density values of zero in the global population database.

**Credit:** Jason Samson

Jason Samson, a PhD candidate in McGill University's Department of Natural Resource Sciences, and fellow

researchers claim that:

Strongly negative impacts of climate change are predicted in Central America, central South America, the Arabian Peninsula, Southeast Asia and much of Africa. Importantly, the regions of greatest vulnerability are generally distant from the high-latitude regions where the magnitude of climate change will be greatest.

Furthermore, populations contributing the most to greenhouse gas emissions on a per capita basis are unlikely to experience the worst impacts of climate change, satisfying the conditions for a moral hazard in climate change policies.

(Samson *et al* [Geographic disparities and moral hazards in the predicted impacts of climate change on human populations](#) *Global Ecology and Biogeography* published online: 17 FEB 2011)

So there really is no reason for alarm!!

<sup>7</sup> Electoral expediency seems to trump all else for our politicians!

<sup>8</sup> See Joseph Huff-Hannon and Andy Bichlbaum ([guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), Wednesday 16 February 2011), [How big business subverts democracy](#) for ways in which major corporations and their lobbyists attempt to mould and manipulate public opinion.

Surely, Chris Mooney can't be right:

A [decision to defund the IPCC](#) [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change], rather than attack or criticize it, doesn't bespeak a strategy of doubt-mongering. It signals extreme certainty that one is right, that we don't even need to consider (skeptically or otherwise) any more new results from climate scientists ....

The logic now appears to be: "There was this thing called the IPCC whose findings were dubious and repeatedly called into question. Then came "Climategate," which validated our suspicions, proving that the IPCC (and all the science it produced) was utterly corrupt. Thus, there is nothing to global warming but a cesspool of politicized science, and it can all be dismissed. No need even to spend taxpayer dollars studying it any longer."



([The Denialists Progress: From Doubt-Mongering to Certainty](#), DESMOGLBLOG.COM, 21 February 2011)

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Litvin (1998) has given a graphic description of some of the consequences of capitalist 'development' for the poor of the world:

"THE centralisation of population in great cities exercises of itself an unfavourable influence," wrote [Friedrich Engels in 1844](#). "All putrefying vegetable and animal substances give off gases decidedly injurious to health, and if these gases have no free way of escape, they inevitably poison the atmosphere ... [The poor] are obliged to throw all offal and garbage, all dirty water, often all disgusting drainage and excrement into the streets, being without other means of disposing of them; they are thus compelled to infect the region of their own dwelling."

Much of Engels's writing seems irrelevant today, but his description of working-class life in 19th-century London paints an uncannily accurate picture of slum life in developing countries at the end of the 20th century.

In the Klong Toey district of Bangkok, the stench from the rotting rubbish and fetid water that collect between the shacks is overpowering.

In the north of Mexico city, near Santa Fe, hovels cling to the sides of a steep valley which most days is choked with smog, and streams of untreated sewage run down to the river below.

In the Moroccan town of Marrakesh, the smell of rotting cattle flesh surrounds tanneries for miles around.

Conventional wisdom has it that concern for the environment is a luxury only the rich world can afford; that only people whose basic needs for food and shelter have been met (as well as, perhaps, some not-so-basic ones for things like cars and televisions) can start worrying about the health of the planet...

That is why, when rich-world environmentalists campaign against pollution in poor countries, they are often accused of naivety. Such countries, the critics say, have more pressing concerns, such as getting their people out of poverty.

But the environmental problems that developing countries should worry about are different from those that western pundits have fashionable arguments over. They are not about potential problems in the next century, but about indisputable harm being caused today by, above all, contaminated water and polluted air.

(Daniel Litvin (1998) *Development and the Environment: Dirt Poor* )

Perhaps less obvious, but no less environmentally problematic, are the consequences of the 'waste' disposal practices of the economically advantaged of the world.

<sup>10</sup> Type 'resources boom' into your internet search engine to get a deluge of optimistic forecasting on exploitation of resources over the next 20 years. For a gleeful description of the coming boom times see Adrian Day in *The Resource Investor*:

...what most investors have not quite grasped is the sheer enormity of these drivers. Sometimes with enormous trends or developments, it can take a while for most people to catch on, and our understanding tends to lag the reality; how many, for example, 15 years ago thought email would become so dominant a means of communications? Prices of most resources will go higher and for longer than most investors currently imagine.

(Adrian Day 11/15/2010 *The Resources Boom: It's Only Beginning*)

The activities of the *American Petroleum Institute*, aimed at limiting regulation of resource exploitation, are similar to those of major resource corporations and organisations around the world. Here's a *Bloomberg* report on its campaign to limit industry regulation:

The *American Petroleum Institute*, the largest oil and gas industry trade group, will start backing political candidates this year as the U.S. considers repealing \$46 billion in subsidies and imposing pollution rules.

The group, whose members include *Exxon Mobil Corp.* and *Chevron Corp.*, would make donations separately from industry executives and employees, who gave \$27.6 million mostly to Republican candidates for

Congress last year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics in Washington. API has paid for advertising on policy issues and to lobby on legislation.

"This is adding one more tool to our toolkit," said Martin Durbin, API's executive vice president for government affairs, in an interview. "At the end of the day, our mission is trying to influence the policy debate."...

Former Republican and Democratic aides in Congress and from the White House lobby for the group. They include David Castagnetti, an ex-chief of staff to Senate Finance Committee Chairman [Max Baucus](#), a Montana Democrat, and Bruce Mehlman, a Commerce Department official under [George W. Bush](#).

(Jim Snyder, [Oil Group Starts Political Giving as Congress Weighs Repeal of Tax Breaks](#), *Bloomberg*, Feb 24, 2011)

<sup>11</sup> See [Garbage being brought by dump trucks to be dropped off at Vancouver's Delta BC landfill](#) for a YouTube video of 'Open Day' at a landfill!

<sup>12</sup> See:

- [The Rotten Truth](#) for a selective history of America's relationship with garbage
- the Wikipedia entry [History of Waste Management](#) for a more general examination;
- [Timeline of Waste Management](#) for a western European focussed historical timeline;
- [History of Waste and Recycling](#) for another Euro-focussed examination of the issue;
- [A history of waste management](#) (2006) for a UNEP visual timeline of historical waste management.

<sup>13</sup> Although many people would dispute the inclusion of industrial waste in the per capita footprint, such a presumption is a consequence of an artificial separation of 'the economy' from 'daily life' (see [The Economy: a New Environment](#) for the distillation of 'The Economy' as a separate environment in Western thought and practice).

<sup>14</sup> See World Bank (2005) Working Paper 9, [Waste Management in China](#) for an exploration of China's burgeoning waste disposal problems:

No country has ever experienced as large or as fast an increase in solid waste quantities that China is now facing.

In 2004 China surpassed the United States as the world's largest waste generator, and by 2030 China's annual solid waste quantities will increase by another 150% - growing from about 190,000,000 tons in 2004 to over 480,000,000 tons in 2030.

The social, financial, and environmental impacts of this growing waste stream are significant.

...even with aggressive waste diversion activities China's future waste disposal needs are enormous. For example China's cities will need to develop an additional 1400 landfills over the next 20 years.

See also: [Garbage and recycling in China](#) for a range of information on Chinese approaches to the problem of waste.

<sup>15</sup> See [Solid Waste Management in Manila](#) for discussion of the crisis in the Philippines

<sup>16</sup> See this Wikiprogress Assessment: [Resource extraction and consumption](#):

The lack of management of natural resources leads not only to environmental problems such as land degradation, soil erosion and pollution, but it can also create serious social and economic tensions. An example of this is known as the "resource curse" where countries rich in natural resources have seen conflict, corruption and persisting high levels of poverty due to the scramble for the country's wealth. Of the 3.5 billion people who live in countries rich in oil, gas and minerals, many of them live in poverty due to poor governance and the gains not being invested in local people and communities.

See [Global resource use - Worldwide Patterns of Resource Extraction](#), prepared for the World Resources Forum (Davos, Switzerland, 2011) for an assessment of the state of worldwide resource extraction in 2011:

Economic and thus human development have always been closely linked to the control and production of materials. Due to continued growth of the global

economy, the demand for natural resources, such as fossil fuels, metals and minerals, and biomass from agriculture (crops), forestry, fishery, etc, provided by Planet Earth is rapidly increasing, and they are being exploited without metres and bounds, resulting in serious environmental damages through the extraction process itself, but also due to the ever longer transport distances between extraction, processing and final consumption.

For a range of videos on resource extraction and consumption, see this [Google selection](#).

<sup>17</sup> Keep an eye out for the results of the [26th International Conference on Solid Waste Technology and Management](#) being hosted by the U.S. Environment Protection Agency in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 27-30 2011. It should result in a number of interesting papers on the problems of waste management around the world.

<sup>18</sup> See [What Drives Western People to Commoditise their World?](#) for a discussion of some of the drivers of consumption (and its corollary, 'production') in capitalist communities. Of course, the enormous power of modern product and service advertising, alone, will result in constantly escalating consumption.