

Our leaders are in carbon-cloud cuckoo land

By Christopher Booker

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For a perfect example of what is meant by "gesture politics" - an empty pledge given solely for effect, which the politician has no hope of honouring - one could not do better than this week's commitment by the G8 leaders on how they want us to fight climate change.

Sitting on their cloud-wreathed Japanese mountain top, they solemnly agreed that, to halt global warming, their countries would aim by 2050 to halve their emissions of carbon dioxide.



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A tiny indication of the fact that they didn't really have a clue what they were talking about was a slip by Japan's prime minister, Yasuo Fukuda, when he had to be corrected for announcing that the CO2 cut would be measured from "1990 levels".

Even when he amended this to "present-day levels", he was merely spouting empty words into the oriental air.

Three things make this aspiration by the leaders of the world's "eight richest countries" not just vainglorious grandstanding, but positively dangerous.

The first is that, as well as having no idea how they could achieve such an absurdly ambitious target, they may inflict immeasurable damage on their economies just by trying

to do so.

One after another, it is becoming clear that all the costly measures so far proposed to cut carbon emissions are pie-in-the-sky.

The drive for "renewable" sources of energy, such as building thousands of wind turbines, is turning out to be little more than self-deception (the combined output of all the 2,000 wind turbines so far built in Britain is less than that of a single, medium-sized, gas-fired power station).

Even the environmentalists have realised that biofuels are a farce, needing more CO₂ to produce than they save. The EU's much-vaunted "emissions trading scheme", so far costing us all an estimated £40 billion, has not resulted in any reductions of CO₂ emissions whatever.

If the G8's leaders genuinely wanted to cut carbon emissions by 50 per cent over the next 40 years, this would mean taking steps they haven't even begun to contemplate. It would require such a drastic cut in our energy use and standard of living that their peoples would have risen up in mass revolt long before the target was reached.

And nothing better shows up the unreality of all this - as President Bush tried to point out in the summit's only flash of honesty - than the fact that China (not represented at the G8, although it now has the world's fourth largest economy) is already putting out more CO₂ than anyone else.

As it builds two new coal-fired power stations a week, China has no more intention than India of joining the Western economic suicide club.

The second reason why this infatuation with cutting carbon emissions is beginning to look extraordinarily reckless is that the whole scientific theory on which it is based now appears distinctly questionable.

The orthodox global-warming thesis, accepted by pretty well every politician in the Western world, but not by a growing number of scientists, is that, as CO₂ levels in the atmosphere continue to rise, so too should global temperatures. Unless we can drastically reduce those CO₂ levels, the world is thus threatened with catastrophe.

In the past year or two, however, evidence has been piling up to suggest that there may be a fundamental flaw in this theory. Even though atmospheric CO₂ has continued to rise to levels not seen since the distant geological past, temperatures have not been following suit.

After 2000 the global temperature curve flattened out at a level significantly lower than the freak year 1998, and in recent months temperatures have dropped to levels not seen since the early 1980s.

Despite the best efforts of the global-warming lobby to keep the scare going, the northern hemisphere enjoyed its coldest winter for decades, and this summer has shown the curve sinking even lower.

Even the warmists are having to find excuses for the fact that their theory doesn't exactly seem to be holding up, conceding that the next 10 years may see a period of global cooling,

before the "underlying warming trend" returns worse than ever.

Other scientists point out that, rather than look to CO2 for an explanation of global temperatures, a much more convincing link can be seen in the activity of the sun, with current sunspot levels having dramatically fallen to levels associated with historic periods of global cooling recorded in the past.

Yet just when such huge question marks are being raised over the "CO2 equals warming" theory, our politicians have swallowed it whole, as an act of blind faith - using it to justify such massive costs to our economy that our whole way of life seems destined to change significantly for the worse.

The third respect in which all this is becoming seriously dangerous applies specifically to us here in Britain. While Gordon Brown prattles about wind turbines, and plays silly games for the cameras with electric cars, Britain within a few years is facing the near certainty of a massive shortfall in our electricity supplies.

By 2015, thanks to the obsolescence of our nuclear power plants and the forced closure of nine of our major coal and oil-fired power stations under EU anti-pollution rules, we are due to lose 40 per cent of our current generating capacity - and Mr Brown hasn't the slightest practical idea of how to fill the gap.

Forget the nonsense about a 50 per cent cut in carbon emissions by 2050. Our Government has already committed Britain to go even further, by imposing a statutory cut of 60 per cent through its Climate Change Bill.

But long before that, unless those who rule us come down out of cloud cuckoo land very fast, our lights will go out, our computers will shut down, our economy will judder to a halt and we shall face a national catastrophe. We may well be meeting that 60 per cent target sooner than we think - but not for reasons that reflect well on our politicians, of any party.