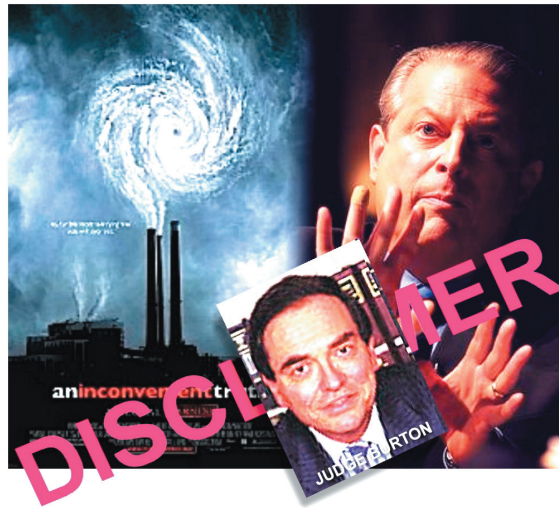


BACKGROUNDER

An Inconvenient Court Ruling

BY MICHAEL ZWAAGSTRA



Executive Summary

- The movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is regularly shown in public schools in North America.
- *An Inconvenient Truth*, hosted and produced by former U.S. vice-president Al Gore, presents the viewpoint that human-caused CO₂ emissions are responsible for global warming.
- In reality, there is no demonstrable causal relationship between the CO₂ record and the temperature record at any point in earth's history.
- When the United Kingdom's government announced it planned to distribute a copy of the movie to every secondary school, a lawsuit was launched which asserted schools should not be party to promoting propaganda to students.
- Judge Michael Burton ruled that while he felt the movie was "broadly accurate" it contained too many substantial errors to be shown in public schools without a disclaimer.
- In his ruling, Judge Burton identified nine scientific errors in the movie that were serious enough to warrant correction.
- *An Inconvenient Truth* is regularly shown in Canadian public schools; they would be well advised to look at this example and re-examine some of their practices.
- Teachers need to ensure that students receive a rigorous education where they learn the facts and all the different perspectives — regardless of whether they fit into the popular version of environmentalism.

Introduction

It is essential that students gain a solid grasp of the key fundamentals that underpin the environment.

Public schools are meant to be places where students are exposed to a wide variety of ideas and perspectives. As places of learning, it is important to ensure that the information students receive is as objective and unbiased as possible.

Without a doubt, the environment is one of the most important topics students will learn about in school. Given the importance of a correct understanding on this subject, it is essential that students gain a solid grasp of the key fundamentals that underpin the environment.

Unfortunately, there is good reason to believe that this is not always happening in public schools. The popularity of the movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, hosted by former U.S. vice-president Al Gore, is one reason to be concerned. This movie is regularly shown in public school classrooms at all grade levels as an authoritative source of information about climate change. Despite the fact that the movie is arguably propaganda for radical environmentalism, teachers show the movie as an authoritative source of information about climate change.

Background

Is it fair to call *An Inconvenient Truth* propaganda? A British judge thinks so, which means that a recent court decision might reverse the disturbing trend of presenting Gore's film as fact.

The background to this ruling is that after the British government announced plans to send a DVD of *An Inconvenient Truth* to all secondary schools, a concerned parent and school governing board member went to court to block distribution of this movie. Judge Michael Burton ruled that *An Inconvenient Truth* had major scientific inaccuracies, was not unbiased, and could not be shown in public schools without a strong disclaimer.

This unprecedented court ruling could have the effect of finally forcing schools to do what they should have always have done — help students to think for themselves on the important topic of the environment.

The "official" perspective on global warming goes as follows. The earth's temperature has gradually increased over the past century and this alleged temperature increase is predominantly attributable to greenhouse gas emissions produced by humans. The increased greenhouse gases (primarily carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere cause more of the sun's heat to be retained on the earth's surface and this leads to a higher average temperature across the planet. It has been asserted that this climate change could lead to rising sea levels,

increased natural disasters, the melting of the polar ice caps, and the mass extinction of various species.¹

The problem with this simplistic summary is that it is not accurate. While there has been a small increase in the world's average temperature over the past century, climate changes of much greater magnitude have taken place over most of Earth's history — long before humans produced significant amounts of greenhouse gases. This automatically means that naturally-caused climate change must be seriously considered as a possibility. In addition, there is no demonstrable causal relationship between the CO₂ record and the temperature record at any point in Earth's history.² An awareness of these and other important facts are necessary in order to have a proper discussion about climate change in the classroom.

In 2006, the movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, produced and hosted by former United States vice-president Al Gore was released. This movie presented a very one-sided view of global warming by claiming unequivocally that human greenhouse gas emissions were responsible for significant climate change. It also stated that catastrophic weather events (such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005) were increasing in frequency largely because of human-caused climate change.

When the United Kingdom government announced it would distribute a copy of the movie to every secondary school in the country, Stuart Dimmock, a concerned father of two, launched a lawsuit claiming schools should not be party to promoting propaganda to students. He sought to have the movie removed from public schools.³ The result was a ruling from Judge Michael Burton; he ruled that while he felt the movie was "broadly accurate" it contained too many substantial errors to be shown in public schools without a disclaimer.

Schools should not be party to promoting propaganda to students.

Inconvenient Errors⁴

In his ruling, Judge Burton identified nine scientific errors in the movie that were serious enough to warrant correction.

The errors are as follows:

Judge Burton identified nine scientific errors in the movie that were serious enough to warrant correction.

1) Sea level rise of up to 20 feet (7 metres) will be caused by melting of either west Antarctica or Greenland in the near future.

This claim was described by Judge Burton as “distinctly alarmist” since such a sea level rise would only occur over several thousand years. This piece of information makes the sea level rise much less concerning.

2) Low lying inhabited Pacific atolls are being inundated because of anthropogenic global warming.

Judge Burton noted that there was no evidence that this was occurring.

3) The Ocean Conveyor is in danger of being shut down due to human-caused global warming.

The International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) notes in its report that this is very unlikely to occur.

4) Graphs of CO₂ and temperature levels over the past 650,000 years show that there is a strong correlation between these two variables. As a result, we should be concerned that man-made CO₂ emissions are leading to increased global temperatures.

Judge Burton noted that while there is a connection between these two variables, the graphs do not show what Al Gore claims they do. In fact, climate records show that temperature increases normally precede CO₂ level increases.

5) The disappearance of snow on Mt. Kilimanjaro is directly the result of global warming.

The scientific consensus is that it cannot be clearly stated that human-induced climate change is the cause of this change.

6) The drying up of Lake Chad is a prime example of a catastrophic result of global warming.

There is not enough evidence to support such an assertion. Judge Burton noted that the drying up of Lake Chad is more likely the result of factors such as population increase, over-grazing, and regional climate variability.

7) Disasters such as Hurricane Katrina are directly attributable to human-induced global warming.

Judge Burton pointed out that there was little evidence to support this conclusion.

8) Polar bears have been drowning because they have to swim farther in order to find ice.

Although Al Gore claimed in the movie that scientific studies had shown that this was occurring, no such study exists. The only study presented to Judge Burton was one that indicated four polar bears had drowned as a result of a storm. This obviously has no connection with global warming.

9) Coral reefs around the world are bleaching and all the fish species that depend on the coral reef are in jeopardy. Species loss is now occurring at a rate 1,000 times greater than normal.

While it is true that an increased average temperature would cause problems for the coral reef species, Judge Burton noted that it was almost impossible to separate these from problems caused by other stresses such as over-fishing and polluting.

In short, Judge Burton concluded that the errors were significant enough that a "guidance note" had to be inserted in the package with the DVD in order to make teachers and students aware of these and other errors. Apparently, the lack of balance in the movie's presentation made it biased enough that these warnings were needed.

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Conclusion

The court refused to allow the blatant environmentalist indoctrination to continue.

This recent court decision in the United Kingdom should serve as a warning to all public school administrators. Public schools are supposed to be centres of knowledge that encourage learning and allowing for a diversity of opinion. The fact that a judge had to order the education department to attach a warning label stating that a mandated video had substantial biases is deeply concerning.

However, it is also fortunate to see that the court refused to allow the blatant environmentalist indoctrination to continue. Public schools in Canada would be well advised to look at this example and re-examine some of their practices. An Inconvenient Truth is regularly shown in Canadian public schools; teachers have an obligation to ensure that students are given all of the facts, not just those that fit with Al Gore's particular perspective.

The current state of affairs is not satisfactory. Teachers need to ensure that students receive a rigorous education where they learn the facts and all the different perspectives — regardless of whether they fit into the popular version of environmentalism.

Receiving an education should mean, among other things, that students are being trained to develop their critical thinking skills. In order for this to happen, they need to learn as much as possible about the world around them. This includes being exposed to a wide variety of theories and being taught how to make critical judgements based on the evidence presented.

Hopefully this court ruling serves as a wake-up call to public schools and encourages a more balanced presentation of environmental issues in the classroom.



To see the England and Wales High Court decision on An Inconvenient Truth from Mr. Justice Burton, follow this link:

<http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2007/2288.html>

Footnotes

1. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Global Warming – Impacts," <http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/content/impacts.html>
2. Tim Ball, *Man-Made Global Warming: Science versus Politics*, Frontier Centre for Public Policy, January 31, 2007. http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=1669
3. William Lee Adams, "British Court: Gore Film 'Political,'" *Time*, October 12, 2007. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1670882,00.html>
4. *Dimmock v. Secretary of State for Education & Skills*, October 10, 2007. <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2007/2288.html>

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The author of this study has worked independently and the opinions expressed are therefore his own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Board of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

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