

CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTERESTS

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It is not reasonable to find, among climate change critics, politicians and businessmen whose interests are being threatened by a policy of control of the greenhouse effect

In the last few months we have seen criticism of the climate scientists, which confused the public opinion. Particularly due to the fact that a report of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change about the melting of the Himalayan glaciers was based on a poorly reliable source, the "critics of the global warming" increased the power of their attack on the policies that are already in practice or that are being proposed to prevent global warming. On the subject, the newspaper *Valor* published last week (March 11) an excellent article by Jeffrey D. Sachs. The Columbia University economist made a "political economy" analysis of the problem. Climate critics, he says, are part of the same group led or supported by the *Wall Street Journal* that has been trying to prevent public policies from limiting the damages caused by economic activities to people's health and to climate sustainability.

In his words: "Today's campaigners against action on climate change are in many cases backed by the same lobbies, individuals, and organisations that sided with the tobacco industry to discredit scientific evidence linking smoking and lung cancer. Later, they fought the scientific evidence that sulphur oxides from coal-fired power plants were causing "acid rain". Then, when it was discovered that certain chemicals

called chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) were causing the depletion of ozone in the atmosphere, the same groups launched a nasty campaign to discredit that scientific evidence, too. And then, starting mainly in the 1980s, this same group took on the battle against climate change.&rdquo

Evidently, the interested parties may argue that what really matters are the scientific arguments. Yes, of course, but the point is that scientific arguments and empirical evidence of global warming are accumulating for many years, and therefore nobody is avoiding the central debate. However, it is also necessary to understand the interests that lie or may lie behind all this. When countries as different as the United States and India resist the global pressure to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, this indicates not only that these policies represent costs for the country, but also that there are necessarily groups that do not want to incur those costs.

On the other hand, there will always be very good scientists who will deny global warming, for a very simple reason. Despite the significant development of natural sciences, they cannot provide a definitive truth about this issue. Among substantive sciences, just physics and the astronomy are relatively precise. In the other ones, particularly in social sciences (as the recent crisis dramatically demonstrated with regard to the economy), but also in sciences related to life, there are many unanswered questions. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that some scientists would disagree from the majority on a subject as complex as the global warming. It is reasonable and necessary, because criticism is a way of controlling the production of scientific knowledge. It is not reasonable, however, to find, among climate change critics, not only dissenting scientists but also politicians and businessmen - probably uninvited - whose interests are being threatened by a policy of control of the greenhouse effect.