

The Attack on Science---Part of the Deadly Class War on Workers' Health and Environment

The application of scientific knowledge has been embraced by industry as a means of enriching owners for over two hundred years. Science is knowledge of the natural and social world gained through observation and experimentation based on evidence.

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th century had a profound impact on workers' diseases. Rapid technological progress and industrial growth led to crowded, unsanitary working and living conditions, with a rise in the number of accidents, and exposure to toxic contamination at work and the environment. Science became increasingly important to owners of industry in the 20th century, and proceeded to rapidly expand into the entire corporate world. Science has allowed for corporate capitalism to make profits from pens to bombs and from computers to organ transplants. There are museums and organizations dedicated to science and technology. Industry's profit motive today provides seventy percent of science research funding.

On the other hand when it comes to the science of the common good, science is attacked. Science is denied, dismissed, and disregarded when it points to the health of the work site and environment. The war on the science that benefits workers has a long history. The Roman scholar Pliny in the 1st century CE, described mercury poisoning as a disease of slaves because mines contaminated by mercury vapor were considered too unhealthy for Roman citizens and thus were worked only by slaves.

Business Owners are driven by the drive to maximize profits. They are promoters of "free markets", the private sector, and limited government. In most countries the responsibility for health and safety at work is placed on the employer. "The workers desire for comfort, income, safety and leisure is continually counterbalanced by the employers' need for profit." As stated in *Occupational and Environmental Health* by Levy and Wegman, 1988. This is an "*iron rule of capitalism*". Lower profits occur when there are government regulations requiring, safe working conditions, clean environments, and safe disposal of toxic chemicals. Corporations generally refuse to test chemicals for safety and prefer to allow toxins to escape into the workplace, air, water, letting "society" worry about the clean up and cost. There is a well documented history of Industrialists continuously resisting attempts to protect the work site, the environment and the climate.

For over one hundred and fifty years workers have placed a high priority on safe working conditions and their environment. There is a rich history of this

struggle. From 1880 workers organizations such as the Knights of Labor pushed for safety laws in all the major industries. For decades workers struggled against accidents, deaths, disease, dust, toxins, fires, mine collapse and explosions. Workers were, jailed, beaten, shot or burned to death in work site fires or crushed in mines, and still the employers **denied demands for improved working and living conditions. There was the Triangle Fire of 1911, which killed 145 women garment workers in a sweat shop, then the Ludlow Massacre of 1914 where the National Guard killed 21 coal miners and their children. (“*Labor’s Untold Story*”, Boyer and Morais, 1955). The workers and their families were met by lockouts, police, violence and murder directed by the employers. It took decades of massive strikes in textile, mining, steel and other industries including the Great General Motors Sit Down Strike in Flint, Michigan to win any significant health and safety protection. Even with passage of The Public Contracts Act in 1936 which required health and safety standards, industrial accidents continued to increase. A coal mine exploded in 1968 killing 78 miners. Strikes and job actions resulted in the 1969 Coal Mine Health and Safety Act and in 1971 the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). Despite the OSHA laws, in 1973 Shell Oil workers went on a five month strike for health and safety issues. The Toxic Substances Control Act was finally passed in 1976. All of these laws have many partial regulation, loopholes and weaknesses, allowing for continued danger to workers and the general population. A coal mine catastrophe in 2010 killed 29 miners in West Virginia and toxic dumping into the environment by industry has shown NO significant reduction over the last forty years.**

Beginning in the 1970’s Industry mobilized and financed a propaganda machine on the basis of misleading evidence about the science of workers’ health. It was called The Business Round Table Corporate Action Committees, its avowed objective was to reduce government regulation, and stop the government from fixing the problem caused by the profit system. Continuing into the 1980’s, denial and uncertainty was promoted by industrialists, bankers and many politicians to deny and downplay science. *Today “Nearly all leading corporations* are part of trade groups that lobby for pro-business positions, such as lower taxes... limited government, free markets...more than a dozen groups promote half-truths and misrepresentations, sometimes outright lies. The Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) has been directly involved in personal attacks on scientists” (Are Tech Firms Anti science, Scientific American, July 2020) As a direct result of the pressure from industry, the government, which is heavily influenced by the political power of, corporations, bankers and the rich, has deregulated federal safety and health laws.

https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/mgilens/files/gilens_and_page_2014_-testing_theories_of_american_politics.doc.pdf The government has weakened OSHA, attacked OSHA whistle blowers, cut budgets, reduced the number of inspectors to weaken enforcement and substituted corporate “voluntary” compliance. Denying, downplaying and manipulating science that

helps the 99% extends **across the corporate world**--from Exxon to Amazon, from Google to genetics, from plastics, pesticides and opioids, to DuPont Chemical and nuclear power. *They deny science and reason to protect profits and because it points to the urgent need for radical social, economic, political and ecological transformation.* Below are a few important examples of the class war on the people's health.

The DENIAL that Cigarettes Cause Lung Disease. The history of tobacco lawsuits in the US dates back nearly 60 years. Tobacco companies hid the truth from the public with their **denial** and misuse of scientific evidence and the recruitment of scientists by the tobacco industry.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3490543/>

The DENIAL that Lead is a Poison Lead, known as a poison for two thousand years, was banned from paint by the League of Nations in 1922. US industries continued to add lead to paint and gasoline and mounted campaigns to **deny** and distort science, while poisoning millions of adults and their children.

The DENIAL that Asbestos Causes Disease By 1918 it was known that asbestos causes lung cancer and other deadly diseases. For fifty years the asbestos industry fought any sort of work place regulation and **denied** that asbestos causes cancer and other diseases. Millions have been sickened or died.

<https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/291/an-epidemic-of-deception>

The DENIAL of the Science of Global Warming 1979-1983 major fossil fuel companies, including Exxon, Mobil, Amoco, Phillips, Texaco, Shell, Sunoco, and Standard Oil of California and Gulf Oil (two companies that became Chevron) meet regularly as part of a task force to discuss the science and implications of climate change. The meetings are organized with the help of the American Petroleum Institute. A [minutes document](#) from one of the meetings suggests that oil companies knew that climate change was occurring, and that they would bear some responsibility for managing it. (Source: [InsideClimate News](#))

1989 Exxon and other fossil fuel companies create the [Global Climate Coalition](#) (GCC). The GCC is [created to oppose](#) mandatory reductions in carbon emissions by obscuring the scientific understanding of fossil fuels' impact on the climate. The GCC created a [scientific "backgrounder"](#) for lawmakers and journalists that claimed "The role of greenhouse gases in climate change is not well understood."

By 1992 Exxon has become a member of [American Legislative Exchange Council \(ALEC\)](#), which actively undermines action on climate change at the federal and state levels. (Source: [Union of Concerned Scientists](#))

<https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/global-warming/exxon-and-the-oil-industry-knew-about-climate-change/exxons-climate-denial-history-a-timeline/>

In 2005, NASA scientists were censored by the White House to prevent all NASA scientists from discussing Climate change.

- Under President Trump's leadership, Federal agencies have taken more than 7 deregulatory actions for every significant regulatory action.
- President Trump's deregulation efforts have already reduced regulatory costs by \$50 billion and are on track to reduce regulatory costs by at least that much in fiscal year 2020 alone. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-historic-deregulatory-actions-creating-greater-opportunity-prosperity-americans/>

All told, the Trump administration's environmental rollbacks could [significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions](#) and lead to [thousands of extra deaths from poor air quality each year](#), according to energy and legal analysts.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks.html>

COVID PANDEMIC DENIALS Cause Health and Economic Catastrophe The Trump administration has been repeatedly **denying** Public Health science and lying about the Covid-19 Pandemic. They have also suppressed the April 2020 CDC's Covid-19 Pandemic report, and have deliberately underfunded testing, and prevented accurate reporting of corona virus cases and deaths.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/29/trump-coronavirus-science-denial-timeline-what-has-he-said> "While many governments suppress the virus, the U.S. suppresses information about the virus."

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/07/15/warnings-possible-cover-progress-trump-orders-hospitals-stop-sending-coronavirus>

The Trump administration's pattern of sidelining science including censoring scientific experts, disbanding scientific advisory committees, and suppressing scientific research has created a medical and economic catastrophe that has cost almost 200,000 US lives to date, disproportionately affecting black and brown populations. <https://blog.ucsusa.org/anita-desikan/trump-administration-has-hindered-ability-to-respond-to-coronavirus>

In July 2020 the white House Press Secretary said “We will not let science stand in the way of opening schools..” <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2020/jul/16/coronavirus-us-covid-donald-trump-anthony-fauci-joe-biden-live-updates> Vice President Mike Pence also said “we don’t want the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to be a reason schools don’t open.”

The free-market fundamentalists have refused to accept a significant role for government in constraining the corona virus epidemic. By refusing to support a national strategy of mass testing, tracking and isolation, which is the only known method to contain and eradicate the pandemic, they have allowed a massive wave of disease and death to sweep across the nation.

Trillions of dollars worth of bailouts were given to Wall Street while pennies were given for Coveid-19 testing. Billions of dollars have been given to pharmaceutical companies to profit from a vaccine, while The Public Health Service, the one major organization that *could have protected the people from infectious diseases*, was denied hundreds of billions of dollars in funding over the last few decades. The business community has for decades pushed to privatize the hospital and health care systems, resulting in profits and death not health and life. History clearly shows that the scientific knowledge regarding the dangers and diseases caused by production for profit is viciously attacked, denied and discredited by those responsible--the industrialists, corporations and their investors. Pro business groups promote profits above all else, workers lives and the planet itself are expendable objects. This is an “*iron law of capitalism*”. Our lives and those of our children depend on abolishing this destructive political economy. The Covid-19 catastrophe has made this a matter of life and death.

As authoritarianism gains power in the US, let us take note of a passage that could have been written today in, “*Fascism and Social Democracy*” by Palme Dutt , 1934. “ The revolt against science, which bourgeois society encourages today in the ideological sphere, at the same times that it uses science in practice, is not only the expression of a dying and doomed class; it is a n essential part of the campaign of reaction. This is the basis which helps to prepare the ground for all the quackeries and charlatanisms of chauvinism, racial theories, anti-Semitism, Aryan grandmothers, mystic swastikas, divine missions, strong-man saviors and all the rest of the nonsense through which alone capitalism today can try to maintain its hold a little longer.....There is a method to the madness. For capitalism can no

longer present any rational defense, any progressive role, any ideal whatever to reach the masses of the population.”

A movement of millions, of and for the working class, dedicated to the needs of the 99%, can build a better, healthy world. We must break the deadly iron chains that bind us to capitalism, the chains of profit and death. To protect our health, life and climate, the times demand a mass mobilization to fight for a militant egalitarian society--- economic, social and political equality for all.

Dr. Nayvin Gordon, 8/12/20

Dr. Gordon writes about health and politics and may be reached at gordonnayvin@yahoo.com