

Don't Boo-Hoo for Tuvalu

by Patrick J. Michaels

This article appeared on cato.org on November 10, 2001.

It's nice to know, even in these troubled times, that eternal verities remain. One is outright lying about environmental issues in order to stampede world leaders who currently have bigger fish to fry.

The latest example of this agitprop was generated in the Oct. 29 issue of The Guardian, the paper of the loony London left. It was timed to coincide with yet another U.N. meeting over the Kyoto Protocol, in, of all places, Marrakech, which began on the same day.

The Guardian describes the plight of all 10,991 poor inhabitants of Tuvalu, an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. They have pestered the New Zealand government into accepting each and every one of them as environmental refugees, cast adrift by sea level rise from dreaded global warming. The New Zealand government took the bait. The first evacuees are scheduled to arrive next year.

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However, sea level around Tuvalu has been falling precipitously for the last half-century. You could look it up in the Oct. 27 issue of Science, which was available for days before The Guardian went to press.

French scientists, led by Cecile Cabanes, used data collected by altimeters aboard the TOPEX/Poseidon satellite, and then compared them to a longer record of deep ocean temperatures that extends back to 1955. Sure enough, where the data overlapped (the satellite went up in 1993), there was very good agreement. The warmer (or colder) the ocean became, the more sea level rose (or fell).

There's a beautiful color map of sea level changes in Cabanas's Science article. It shows that Tuvalu is near the epicenter of a region where the sea level has been declining for nearly 50 years. In fact, the decline is so steep that even using the U.N.'s lurid (and wrong) median estimates of global warming for the next century will not get the Tuvalus back to their 1950 sea level until 2050.

Unfortunately, The Guardian isn't the only left-wing paper that didn't do its homework about sea levels around Tuvalu. On Sept. 9, the Travel section of the Washington Post carried a huge article headlined "The End is Near," complete with that umptysquat-point headline drowning in the ocean.

Writer Mike Tidwell includes the following tidbit: "Perhaps the most surreal indication of what might be in store comes from the idyllic, tourist-friendly nations of Tuvalu and Kiribati, in the South Pacific. Tuvalu is developing concrete emigration plans to evacuate its islands -- perhaps entirely -- in this century, migrating en masse to 'host countries' like New Zealand. This is because scientists say sea level rise could inundate Tuvalu and other low-lying countries almost entirely as polar ice melts and ocean water expands."

How difficult would it have been to check the facts first? The same "scientists" have published graphs in widely available U.N. reports showing sea level fall in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

What's the real reason for the Tuvalu exodus? I must be careful here, as my editors caution that a Cato scholar must use precise and non-inflammatory language: Tuvalu sucks.

There are no rivers or sources of potable water. Beachheads are eroding because the sand has been removed for building material. Most of the vegetation has been burned for fuel by the environmentally sensitive natives. The soil is poor. There are no mineral deposits and few exports. A large percentage of the GDP comes from licensing its area code for "900" lines and revenue from the sale of its ".tv" Internet domain.

In short, Tuvalu is a Tuvalu-made ecological disaster that is now an economic disaster. The natives want out because they wrecked the place. And why does New Zealand want them in? Perhaps because the socialist-green coalition government of Prime Minister Helen Clark sees 10,991 votes, largely without skills or jobs, bought and paid for with plane tickets and nurtured with welfare.

The Tuvalu story is an icon of environmental and political deceit, generated by a compliant media that have no regard for inconvenient facts. There are over 2,000 members of the Society of Environmental Journalists--all attuned to the goings on in Marrakech--and not one of them has the gumption to see if, in fact, Tuvalu is drowning. Instead, they sit quietly, supporting yet another tired attempt to stampede world leaders into an environmental treaty that all competent scientists know has no detectable effect on world climate, even as it costs a fortune to a world fighting for its very civilization.