

Mannerism - Aug, 2014

University 'book burners' are busy again!

We witnessed a remarkable situation in May, this year, when a local university returned a \$4 million research fund to host noted Danish academic, Bjorn Lomborg, and his Consensus Centre.

The proposal was to research and debate matters of climate, malaria and safe drinking water for the world's less developed nations, ranking the "return on investment" of hundreds of different policy choices.

A preliminary study, reviewed by a panel that included two Nobel Laureates, found that for each dollar spent on trade liberalisation over \$4,000 of benefits were created, while investments in mosquito nets for rural Africans and immunisation also had high returns. 19 targets were identified that represent the best value-for-money in development over the period 2016 to 2030, each offering more than \$15 back on every aid dollar invested.

I would encourage all readers of this column to look at Lomborg's work and make up their own minds at <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/>

The thought of opening a 'debate' on some pet topics of a select few stirred a proverbial hornet's nest and the funds were returned and the Consensus Centre was sent elsewhere.

Now, today, it's interesting to see that the same situation is being repeated at South Australia's Flinders University (*The Australian* - July 27th, '15 - article by Andrew Burrell).

"Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, has been searching for an institution to host the Centre, since the University of Western Australia pulled out in May, citing a backlash from academics unwilling to work with Dr. Lomborg's Copenhagen Consensus Centre.

The revelation of the talks promoted an immediate backlash from Flinders' staff and students who warned that they would protest against any move by the university to host the centre."

All this was reminiscent of a similar event in Perth in 2010 when the 'noisy few' launched a protest at Christopher Monckton's visit when he wished to open a debate, focused on 'global warming - climate change'.

I don't think anyone doubts that the climate changes, as it always has and always will, but there seems a great unwillingness to actually discuss the extent to which the causes may be apportioned to 'mankind' or nature and its accessory volcanoes - see <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/27/richard-rahn-climate-change-very-unsettled-science/>

So, isn't there something unhealthy about particular views being hysterically silenced in this way?

Rather than query the motives of the noisy objectors, could we spend a few moments reflecting on the words of British Philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who wrote in his book, *On Liberty*, in 1869, as follows:-

"If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation."

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