

An Inconvenient Truth

An inconvenient truth is mostly associated with the exposure of a closely guarded secret, a scandal with a capacity to foil an ambitious politician's plans. Exposing these truths is more often than not the adopted role of the media. You don't usually expect politicians championing the uncovering of inconvenient truths. That is why Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* is worth noting. Because Al Gore's truth is not merely inconvenient; it is terrifying.

Not surprisingly it has been shot down 1) as unsubstantiated; 2) as not offering the 'other side' a forum to respond as documentaries should, and 3) as a communication tool aimed at boosting Gore's candidacy for the 2008 Democrats' presidential nomination.

With all due respect to the level of analysis worthy of this newsletter's status, the way the weather has been acting in recent years on this side of the Mediterranean is substantiation enough to kill off the first argument. The way nature is changing is not speculative as Gore's opponents may suggest.

As to the second argument, it has been rather obvious that besides igniting civil wars around the globe all the US government has been doing since George Bush rejected the Kyoto Agreement has been to undermine the argument against global warming. As for argument (3), personally, I am not too bothered; in fact I wouldn't mind at all if the next president of the United States was a neo-conservationist. But that is a decision for an encouragingly angrier US electorate to make next year.

Of course the film is built around Al Gore and of course it is irritating to hear him speak about his geography teacher and his celebrity friends. Yes he comes out the star. But so did Diana with the AIDS and land mines campaigns; so is Angelina Jolie with poverty stricken children around the world. This is the way the communication game is played these days, and Gore knows how to win

it both for the benefit of the arguments he espouses and – ok - for the benefit of the image he wishes to project.

What doubters must have in mind is that the method he opted for was a risky one for the US audience. Not only because it is a tough subject to tackle but because unlike what conventional American communication wisdom prefers, the topic is a deeply depressing one. Nonetheless the way he carried it through - with humour and Clintonian flair - and certainly the weight of the issue per se appear to have made the difference.

Perhaps skeptics should also ask whether a would-be US presidential candidate would waste time on a grueling lecture tour of Australia, Europe and south-east Asia to collect votes for the US primaries. The truth of the matter is that the problem is a global one and it needs a credible global ambassador to propagate it. Having checked his joint manifesto with Bill Clinton dating June 1992 [Putting People First] the chapter on global warming is right there on page 93. The same arguments with much less evidence than what nature has unfortunately afforded us since. Interestingly a reading of the 1992 Clinton-Gore agenda reveals that George Bush Senior's aversion to environmental policy was far worse than George W's.

Bottom line: Gore's message is clear, convincing and alarming. The debate he has stirred is necessary. He has brought a meaningful issue to the centre stage of the global debate, and that can't be a bad thing. And though he has encountered friendlier audiences in the European Union than in the United State where change would matter most, he has made a difference even there. The State of California has recently become tougher on carbon dioxide emissions. On our side of the world the European Commission is grinding its teeth at industrial polluters having greater popular backing and stronger conviction. Having the European Union warming up to a US politician – even if he was a failed next president - is something we haven't seen in quite a while. It could in fact help forge a convenient alliance for change.