

Danish Professor Denounced for 'Scientific Dishonesty'

Panel of Scientists Assails Scholarship of Book Praised in Press -- 'The Skeptical Environmentalist'

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Once hailed as a brilliant iconoclast who challenged environmentalists' gloom-and-doom prognoses of global warming, overpopulation and worldwide hunger, Danish author Bjorn Lomborg yesterday was denounced by a panel of his country's top scientists for engaging in "scientific dishonesty."

Lomborg, an associate professor of statistics at Denmark's University of Aarhus and a former member of Greenpeace, concluded in his best-selling 1999 book, "The Skeptical Environmentalist," that "air and water around us are becoming less and less polluted. Mankind's lot has actually improved in terms of practically every measurable indicator."

Members of the Danish Research Agency -- Denmark's equivalent of the National Academy of Sciences -- said Lomborg had "clearly acted at variance with good scientific practice" in light of his "one-sidedness in the choice of data and line of argument." The panel, responsible for investigating allegations of scientific dishonesty, said Lomborg lacked "any special scientific expertise" in dealing with "the extraordinarily wide-ranging scientific topics" in his book.

Lomborg's British publisher, Cambridge University Press, said it would not comment on the panel's finding. Sloane Federer, the publisher's New York marketing director, said in an interview that "we went through all the usual processes [of reviewing the material] in order for it to be printed." He added, "We have no reason to doubt the process."

Publication of the English-language version of Lomborg's book in September 2001 was greeted with glowing media attention. The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Economist and other publications praised the Danish professor, who dismissed many environmental concerns as "phantom problems created and perpetuated by a self-serving environmental movement." A Washington Post book reviewer concluded that the book was "a magnificent achievement."

Corporate-sponsored groups and libertarian Washington think tanks praised and promoted the book during Lomborg's visit to the United States. But the book touched off a wave of criticism from environmental groups and academics. They said Lomborg had been highly selective in his use of research data and secondary source material to attack the work of dozens of respected and prize-winning scientists and broad-based, peer-reviewed scientific panels.

Eleven distinguished scientists, including Thomas Eisner of Cornell University and Edward O. Wilson of Harvard, said in a letter to the publisher in July that "we rarely see this type of careless and manipulative scholarship in the undergraduates we teach."