

Climate expert accused of working as a lobbyist for the Government

By Christian Brøndum, cbr@berlingske.dk

(Printed in "Berlingske Tidende", 16 December 2007)

The Danish Energy Agency paid a scientist to duel with Bjørn Lomborg and speak to the press. Other scientists are surprised.

For several years, the previous Social Democratic / Social Liberal coalition Government paid a scientist at the Technical University of Denmark not only to advise the Government in matters of climate trends but also to work as a lobbyist for the view that humans are mainly responsible for climate change.

That is the belief of one of the scientists, Jens Olaf Pepke Pedersen, who, along with another physicist, Henrik Svensmark, is working on the theory that the activity of the Sun plays the biggest role in climate change.

The allegation that the Energy Agency paid a scientist to lobby for a specific explanation for climate change is based on a number of reports that the scientist sent to the Energy Agency with details of what his working time was spent on.

The scientist, who was on the Government's payroll during the last years of the Social Democrat/Social Liberal Government, was Peter Laut, an associate engineering professor, who is now retired. He was employed part-time for 500 hours a year with the task of helping the Energy Agency to monitor and analyse the scientific results on climate change and the reasons for this emerging at that time.

Independent scientist

But that was not enough for Peter Laut. He also took part in a great number of interviews with the media as an independent scientist and also took part in debates, including again Bjørn Lomborg, who is sceptical about the greenhouse effect.

»There is nothing wrong with working for the Ministry for part of your time, and nor was it a secret. But it is an ethical problem when you are acting as if you are an independent scientist taking up the fight against Lomborg but are, in reality, financed by the Energy Agency. Compared with recent criticism of ministerial censorship, this is much worse«, Jens Olaf Pepke Pedersen believes.

He has also noticed that, according to his own report, the Government-paid adviser went into a debate meeting with Lomborg with the aim of making a fool out of Lomborg.

Scientist refutes this

Peter Laut admits that you could get the impression that he was acting as a lobbyist when you read isolated sections of the reports that he used to send to the Energy Agency on how he spent his time. But he never had a specific view of climate science imposed on him, he says.

»I had a free hand, and I have never conducted any missionary, political activity«, he adds.

In your report to the Energy Agency on the debate with Lomborg, you write that »the project was successful«. »For once it was Lomborg who looked the fool«. Why were you proud of that?

»That is perhaps how you would initially interpret it. But I was told in advance that I was to spell things out, otherwise Lomborg would make everything frivolous and have the audience laughing. The project was about me not being made a fool of ,« Peter Laut explains today.

For several of those years, Peter Laut kept a meticulous account of the time he spent preparing for and being interviewed by journalists and in TV debates.

Over three years, this came to 103 working hours. Although he was usually referred to as associate engineering professor at the Technical University of Denmark and an expert on climate, it was the Energy Agency that was paying for his time with the media.

Jens Olaf Pepke Pedersen believes that, on the basis of Peter Laut's activities, the media and the public around the turn of the century were being manipulated in a different, more serious manner than Hans Christian Schmidt (Liberal) was accused of before the election in the autumn.

Hans Christian Schmidt was accused of having amended a brochure and a scientist from the Danish Meteorological Institute, Eigil Kaas, told us that, following the change in Government in 2001, he had felt it necessary to impose self-censorship on himself during the debate about reasons for global warming.

A troublesome disciplinary matter

The Energy Agency did not wish to comment on the matter as it has not had sufficient time to investigate in more detail.

Pepke Pedersen's interest in Government-paid climate lobbying was aroused when he wanted to investigate what the Energy Agency's so-called »climate

advice group« was up to. The name covered an informal two-man group, consisting of Peter Laut and an official of the Energy Agency, Jesper Gundermann, who later died.

Gundermann, who was one of Denmark's members of the UN's climate panel, was greatly involved in climate policy. In 2004, he was the subject of a disciplinary matter when, on behalf of his office, he accused the producer of a TV Documentary about the climate of being corrupted by the oil industry.

Climate debate has just led to ministers and heads of government deciding on a new timetable for a global environmental agreement in 2009 in Bali.

The principal focus on the climate

By Christian Brøndum, cbr@berlingske.dk

(Printed in "Berlingske Tidende", 16 December 2007)

In Bali, the world's environmental ministers have been fighting over the bill for man-made global warming. But, in Denmark, a small group of physicists is still fighting to prove that the SUN is the biggest cause of the climate crisis. They believe that they have been fighting against lobbyists in the form of Government-paid scientists and officials.

The students at Aarhus University's large auditorium laughed aloud when Bjørn Lomborg tried to blame a mistake in one of his graphs on a student assistant. Lomborg was set to discuss his book, »The Skeptical Environmentalist«, and his opponent in the discussion that took place at the beginning of May 1999 was associate engineering professor, Peter Laut.

Laut presented himself as a scientist from the Technical University of Denmark and he was very content because, on that day in Århus, it was Lomborg who was being laughed at.

But it was not just the *scientist* Peter Laut from Denmark's Technical University who had the public laughing at Lomborg. At the same time, Peter Laut was employed on a part-time basis as an advisor for the Energy Agency under the Ministry of the Environment and Energy, which was putting a lot of energy at that time into refuting Bjørn Lomborg's climate theories. The Ministry of the Environment and Energy paid Laut for 500 hours of work a year and, when he penned his account of his use of time to the Energy Agency at the end of the year, the scientist stated that he had spend a total of 80 hours, i.e. more than two weeks, preparing for the meeting with Bjørn Lomborg, who is sceptical about the greenhouse effect.

»As I had heard reports about Lomborg's way of ridiculing decent scientists, I decided to prepare extra thoroughly ... For me, the project was successful: For once, it was Lomborg who looked the fool, « Peter Laut wrote to his employer at the Energy Agency, who accepted how he spent his time without question.

The meeting at Århus took place at a time when human activity had not yet been promoted as the main reason for global warming, just as it was not yet the view, approved by the UN, that the temperature and seas would definitely rise. The man-made greenhouse effect was only recently canonised when the former American vice-president, Al Gore, and the UN's climate panel received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, just as the reasons for climate change were no longer the subject of much discussion when the world's environmental ministers attempted

this week to split the bill for global warming at the climate meeting in Bali.

But despite the Noble Prize and Bali, the fight for global climate truth is not over. Not in Denmark in any case, where some of the key figures on the theory that solar activity plays a greater part in the temperature of the Earth than humans have not given up.

Henrik Svensmark, a researcher at the National Space Institute, and his colleague, Jens Olaf Pepke Pedersen, are among the best known researchers into the influence of solar activity. They believe that if, as predicted, solar activity declines in the next 10-20 years, the temperature of the Earth will also fall. They also believe that Government-paid advisers such as Peter Laut and his partner, Jesper Gundermann, who was an official with the Energy Agency and later the Ministry of the Environment, behaved more like tax-paid political lobbyists than neutral experts in the battle for the truth about the climate.

In his account of his work for the Energy Agency in 1999, Peter Laut began by stating that the question of whether the Sun or man is the real driving force behind the Earth heating up» was of the greatest of importance for Denmark«. If the Sun is the villain, the result would be »a general need to reorganise Denmark's polices in the areas of energy and the environment«, Laut, who also had an eye for the political consequences of climate research, warned. At that time, it was Svend Auken (Social Democrats), who, as Minister for the Environment and Energy, had put renewable energy, such as wind turbines, at the top of the agenda and the foundation for demands for changes in human behaviour would fall away if it were to be proved that the Sun was the main reason.

The fact that Laut considered it part of his role not only to provide advice to the Energy Agency but also to leave his mark on public debate is shown in a report on a debate meeting with 60 upper secondary school teachers: »As their more or less good understanding of climate problems will leave its mark on many students in the future, I considered it particularly important to deliver a presentation ... adapted to their needs,« Laut wrote in his annual account, which then went to the Ministry of the Environment and Energy.

Over the course of the year, Peter Laut helped write several feature articles for Svend Auken, and also contributed towards responding to questions from the Parliament. According to his account to the Energy Agency, he spent 100 hours on the feature articles and a number of smaller tasks. Assignments for Jesper Gundermann and responses to the Parliament, ministers and the public cost 400 hours. In total, his work as an advisor – or lobbyist – ran up to 1,100 hours in 1999, but the Energy Agency was only presented with a bill for the agreed 500 hours. In the following years, Laut also worked far more than the agreed 500

hours. In 2000, Peter Laut participated as a scientist, together with Jesper Gundermann in, among other things, the first European scientific conference on the Sun and the Earth's climate in Tenerife. Here, Laut launched a frontal attack on the solar theorists from the rostrum. One of Denmark's leading scientists in the area, Professor Eigil Friis-Christensen, was accused of misleading people regarding the connection between the Sun and the climate of the Earth and, according to Henrik Svensmark, who was present, the accusations were »extremely embarrassing«.

»It was most extraordinary. His tone was absolutely strident,« says Henrik Svensmark. Peter Laut's bill to the Energy Agency ran to a total of 320 hours of work on the conference and a subsequent scientific article on the subject.

Journalists of the time were not all totally straight about who they were talking to when they used Peter Laut as the expert who laid down what was true and false in the debate on the climate. One of those who most quoted Peter Laut was Jesper Tornbjerg, who was a journalist for the newspaper, Politiken, at the time. He wrote 14 articles using Laut as a source and, in four of these, he mentioned that, in addition to his title of researcher, was also an adviser for the Government. Another journalist for Politiken, Niels Nørgaard, did not, on the other hand mention Laut's job as an adviser for Svend Auken's Energy Agency.

»If I didn't write it, it was because I didn't know, « he says today.

The Berlingske Tidende newspaper's environmental journalist, Paul Andersen, mentioned Laut's part-time job as an adviser several times, but was not clear about Laut sending a detailed account to the Energy Agency for the hours he spent on conversations with journalists and interviews with newspapers and TV.

»I was clear about Peter Laut being an adviser for the Government. But, when I interviewed him, it was in the belief that he was an impartial university researcher who provided the Government with professional advice. If he was the Government's paid lobbyist in the debate on the climate to that extent, then that is a big surprise for me,« he says today.

Other environmental journalists of the time, David Rehling of Information and Allan Høxbroe from DR's news bulletin, Radioavisen, do not, on the other hand, believe that Laut's work for the Energy Agency was a problem.

»It is neither here nor there,« says Allan Høxbroe.

Just like the climate divides scientists, journalists are split into at least two camps. The TV documentary-maker, Lars Oxfeldt Mortensen, who, in several documentaries, has asked questions about the theory of man's decisive influence on the climate does not have a great deal of respect for his journalist colleagues.

»Some of the environmental journalists have lost their ability to take a critical approach ,« he believes.

In the film, »Doomsday is Cancelled«, Lars Mortensen visited the Maldives, which is, according to the human greenhouse theory, in the process of sinking into the sea, along with a researcher. But, according to the film, it proved to be the case that the water level in the Maldives has not risen, but fallen. Two days before the film was even broadcast, Lars Mortensen was contacted by e-mail by Jesper Gundermann, who was now an official at the Danish Environmental Protection Agency. Gundermann hinted that Lars Mortensen's film, which was critical of the greenhouse effect theory, had been paid for by the oil industry, that the journalist was, therefore, corrupt, and Gundermann also predicted, as a representative of the Environmental Protection Agency that Mortensen would not have any great future as a journalist. The story ended in a personal apology to Lars Mogensen from the newly appointed Minister for the Environment, Connie Hedegaard, and the CEO of the Ministry of the Environment, who initiated disciplinary action against Gundermann. Lars Mortensen is also in the process of making another documentary on the importance of the Sun for the climate.

Today, Peter Laut does not regret his role. On the contrary, he recalls with pleasure how he was complimented by the then chairman of the UN's climate panel, Sir John T. Houghton, for having confronted the solar theorists in Tenerife. And he maintains that he was not pursuing politics.

»I tried to help the Energy Agency to analyse what to believe in and, if the Sun was a decisive factor, we wanted to know« he says. He also believes that the majority of environmental journalists were aware of his job as adviser on the climate for the Energy Agency. But he admits that his partner, Jesper Gundermann, who, in addition to his job as an official, was also one of Denmark's official members of the UN's climate panel, was not a neutral official.

»He felt he was a missionary, a crusader, whose job was to reveal what was going on. That was politics and I distanced myself from that,« says Laut.

He still does not have much time for scientists like Henrik Svensmark and Jens Olaf Pepke Pedersen. They are just a small group, »whose basis for living and fame« rests on the solar theory and who are, therefore, in the opinion of Laut, trying to throw suspicion on people like him, who have now retired.

Henrik Svensmark and Jens Olaf Pepke Pedersen are in the midst of preparing for an international project, where their theories on the effect of solar radiation on cloud formations and thereby on the global temperature will be tested during experiments at the CERN Institute's particle accelerator in Switzerland. »It may well be the case that people are thinking that the solar theory has lost the battle.

But, the fact is that science has not yet had its say. Nature is absolutely indifferent to the decisions of politicians. The scientific results and interpretation of what exactly is going on are not sufficient to produce the catastrophic scenarios around the globe,« says Henrik Svensmark.

Over the last week, Svensmark acquired an individual new ally. According to the British Daily Mail, Pope Benedict XVI attacked the »doomsday prophets« of recent times and warned them that solutions to global warming must be based on firm evidence and not ideologies.

On the bill

When journalists met with the associate engineering professor from the Technical University of Denmark, Peter Laut, the bill for his time was going to the Energy Agency: 7 December 1999: Interview on television news, Niels Jacob Andersen, 6 hours. Responding to approaches from journalists: 20 hours. April 2000: Contribution to DR2: 8 hours. Ongoing discussions with journalists: 15 hours 14 April 2000: Interview on »Deadline«: 7 hours 9 November 2000: Lecture, reported by Niels Nørgaard, Politiken. 40 hours. The article is attached as an appendix. 3 December 2000: Interview on TV news: 4 hours. 29 March 2001: Briefing for Jesper Tornbjerg, Politiken: 2 hours. 29 March 2001: Interview with Allan Høxbroe, DR: 1 hour. October 2001: Comments on TV documentary about the influence of the Sun: 40 hours.