

Interview with Pat Mooney of the ETC Group

The ETC Group came to our attention not long before the Copenhagen Climate Summit of December 2009, where they gave a press conference on geoengineering. ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)), making it possible, in our local context of Aegina, Greece, for there to be a [relaunching](#) of the discussion that had been stalled since the suspension in 2003, on legal advice, of the Aegina Council's pioneering attempt to take action against the "chemtrails" aerosol spraying. The ETC Group appeared to offer a less "marginal" way of approaching the problem and was welcome for that reason.

As a first assessment of the interview with Pat Mooney, there is a problem with Pat Mooney's unwillingness or inability to recognize a distinction between the "opposition to geoengineering" of e.g. the Cyprus Greens and the "opposition to geoengineering" of other Green parties on this planet, an opposition that is of a very different character and value, being hypothetical, theoretical and "virtual". Pat Mooney's non-recognition of the fact that the moratorium on geoengineering passed at Nagoya (primarily if not exclusively as a result of the actions of the ETC Group) is evidently, and grotesquely, not being respected..... is another limiting factor on the value of the ETC Group's work. These limitations will not help overcome the divisions in the anti-chemtrails movement between climate change sceptic adherents of Lord Monckton (who are not as worried as they should be about the lack of support for their own anti-chemtrails concerns by Lord Monckton and other leaders of the mainstream climate change sceptic movement) and ecologists such as the Cyprus Greens (who still represent only a tiny minority of the Green movement internationally).

W.H.

W. Hall: Hello from Greece. We are calling from under the Acropolis to the ETC Group because the ETC Group are people that we have been following for some time and we very much appreciate the work you have been doing in the area of geoengineering and climate modification, and analyses of these activities. What we really want to do is to help with the integrating of your activity into the general discussion of our movement and that's one of the reasons that we'd like to talk to you now, and I have a few comments and questions that I'd like to start with.

Pat Mooney: Sure.

W. Hall: The first point is this: we have compiled [a video clip](#). You may have seen it, or you may have heard it, with extracts from a European Union publicity film on the extension of the emissions trading scheme to aviation, and also from a BBC publicity film on the effects of aircraft emissions on global temperatures. Now the first film says that aircraft emissions are a significant contributory factor to global warming. The second film says that aircraft emissions generate contrail cirrus, which reflects sunlight and has a cooling effect that could mitigate global warming. In other words the scientific conclusions are diametrically opposed. Does this mean that science in general is nothing more than a product of whatever political agenda one happens to have? If one wants to introduce a carbon tax or emissions trading one says that aircraft emissions are part of a global warming problem. And if one wants to promote solar radiation management or geoengineering one says that aircraft emissions can have a cooling effect and mitigate global warming. Is this an unjustified conclusion?

Pat Mooney: I think it is true to say that science is manipulated by politicians all the time. It always has been historically. It's not new that in this particular situation that what is thought to be, or presented as, sound science, is in fact simply how a politician chooses to play the game.

W. Hall: Another example of this. There are different claims. You probably know about the studies that were carried out immediately after the 911 attacks in the United States when there were no aircraft flying, or virtually no aircraft flying, for a number of days. There was a study made by David Travis. Now, I have seen three separate claims in relation to David Travis's findings. There is a certain Buzzle blog that says that in the days after 911 temperatures fell. There is a claim made by CNN that the difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures diminished, with cooler days and warmer nights. And then there is the claim by the BBC that temperatures rose. Now these can't all be true.

Pat Mooney: No, they can't. I wasn't paying any attention to those studies, frankly, in 2001, so I didn't look at them, I really can't comment on them other than that, again, depending where you are, how you measure, all of those kinds of things make the big differences as to what kind of results you get. We work a lot in the area of nanotechnology and it's quite normal that scientists in different labs who are well-intentioned and skilled can't duplicate the same results using the same equipment in different labs. And they're not quite sure why that is, even. They recognize it and they address it, but they don't know why still, because they don't know enough about their own science at this point. It's not unusual.

W. Hall: Not unusual. Are you familiar with the term "extemism" that was used in the 1980s by members of the non-aligned nuclear disarmament movement to describe the bipolar logic of the Cold War nuclear arms race? Have you heard of this term at all?

Pat Mooney: No, I haven't actually.

W. Hall: Well, it was a term that was in use and I would like to hear your view of what I say now: that there are continuities between the bipolar logic of the Cold War nuclear arms race and the bipolar logic that justifies geoengineering. There is an assumption of an intransigent enemy. In the Cold War it was called the Soviet Union. Now it's called the right-wing climate change skeptics. And this intransigent enemy forces you to do things that really you prefer not to do, like building more and more nuclear weapons or like spraying toxic metals into the atmosphere, because the intransigent enemy won't allow you to solve the climate change problem the way you really want to. Now, aren't these two scenarios equally fraudulent? Shouldn't the person who says that anthropogenic climate change is a hoax be the most resolute opponent of geoengineering? Don't people who believe that anthropogenic climate change is a hoax have even less excuse than ecologists to be tolerant of solar radiation management?

Pat Mooney: I think there are a lot of parallels between the hubris of science and governments around the Cold War and now the so-called hot war of climate change. There are a lot of comparisons that can be made. I would never have thought to describe the right-wing think-tanks and groups, for example in the United States, as being the only problem in relation to climate change, or the only barrier. I don't see them as the counterpart precisely to the Soviet Union at all. I see the intransigence of our society to recognize climate change and deal with it properly as being a big issue. So it's a problem in many parts of the world, and also it's a problem in India and China, for example.

W. Hall: One thing that we do find among at least some anthropogenic climate change skeptics is an unwillingness to talk about geoengineering. The skeptic John Christy, for example, was invited to take part in a video discussion with you on the subject of geoengineering, and he declined. He said: "The issue of geoengineering is not one I deal with on a basis I would feel comfortable debating. Where it comes into my realm is that with so many unconstrained degrees of freedom in the climate system, there really is no confident way one can predict and attribute changes due to geoengineering. The liability issue also will never be settled, not to mention the colossal costs. So it's pretty much a non-starter in the real world of politics, citizen lawsuits, budgeting, etc. I don't think geoengineering will happen. It's too expensive and too uncertain in its results. Who would be liable when and if something goes wrong?"

So he doesn't say that he is opposed to geoengineering. He just says that he doesn't think it can happen. When all the signs are that it IS happening and it's going from strength to strength, and it is making an all-out bid, and apparently not an unsuccessful bid, for public acceptance. What do you have to say about this?

Pat Mooney: Well, I hope he's right. But I don't think I agree with what you're saying. I don't think that geoengineering is going from strength to strength. I do think he is right. There is a huge opposition to it. Unfortunately there also is....it certainly is true... there is strong support for it as well. I think it is a moot point at this stage whether or not the geoengineers have the upper hand or in fact are losing ground. I would think from some of

the things I have seen recently they are in some ways losing ground. But there are other so-called right-wing skeptics of climate change like Newt Gingrich who are supporters of geoengineering.

W. Hall: Yes, yes.

Pat Mooney: They're all over the map. Quoting one scientist isn't that helpful, frankly.

W. Hall: Well this was the scientist that we approached, but it seems to me that he has a very sanguine approach to the whole subject. He doesn't seem to live in the same world as many of his fellow citizens. It seems to me an incredibly insular and ivory-tower approach to the whole subject.

Pat Mooney: I think the same as with the Cold War, governments felt totally entitled to set off nuclear bombs over the Pacific and so on and do all that kind of stratospheric testing, even though it had all the risks and dangers for societies that it did have. Governments will feel equally sanguine today to do geoengineering if they feel that that is their only option or their best option, or the cheapest option.

W. Hall: The Copenhagen Climate Summit, which had been preceded by the Climategate scandal, marked a defeat for the supporters of the Kyoto Protocol. But on the other hand it was also the occasion of the first press conference of the ETC Group on the subject of geoengineering, which gave a new orientation and a new lease of life to anti-geoengineering activists. Would you say that the balance sheet of Copenhagen was negative or positive?

Pat Mooney: I think it was negative. Terribly negative. I don't think it was the first.....we've been talking about geoengineering since 2007 and we already had the moratorium against ocean fertilization in 2008, so it wasn't our first experience with this. But certainly there is no question that Copenhagen was a debate.

W. Hall: Are you familiar with the poster of the Swiss WWF which says, in German: "Cooling the earth with artificial clouds is the solution for tomorrow. Perhaps. What if you were the solution for today?" Does it surprise you that the WWF should bring out a poster of that kind which seems, in a way, to be supporting geoengineering, although not openly.



Pat Mooney: I actually hadn't heard that, and I am horrified by it. I think that is a disgusting and disgraceful way to present things. It is Swiss German, is it? I'll have to look for it.

W. Hall: Swiss. I can send it, actually I think I already have sent it, but anyway, the parliamentarian of the Cyprus Greens, George Perdakis, says in relation to that poster: "The approach should not be that geoengineering could provide a solution, but the best solution is our solution, that leads to reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. We say that the only solution is reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and another society with less energy consumption generally." Why do you think it is that the Cyprus Greens have not succeeded in winning other Green parties over to opposition to geoengineering. They are the odd ones out. They are an exception.

Pat Mooney: I think there is a lot of opposition to geoengineering, and it's in lots of Green parties in fact. I don't know how many have actually made resolutions about it, but the European Parliament itself had a statement a year and a half ago now, opposing geoengineering, and even the Rio + 20 Earth Summit in June of last year came out with a very strong statement at least against ocean fertilization as one form of geoengineering. The statement would have been a heads-of-state decision of 193 governments against geoengineering if we'd had about another few days of negotiating time. It's just that some of the governments actually didn't really get it and it was being pushed by maritime countries that were most concerned with ocean fertilization and at this point where they were willing to expand it to involve all of geoengineering it was just too late in the negotiating process to change language. So there's a lot of strong opposition.

W. Hall: Well there was a very negative attitude to the Cyprus Greens when they were [here in Athens](#) at the Conference of the European Greens last November.

Pat Mooney: Well I didn't notice that at all when I was in Brussels with the Greens and other parties. I find strong opposition to geoengineering. Certainly in the UN General Assembly there is very strong opposition to it.

W. Hall: In October 2010 at the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Nagoya, the ETC Group succeeded in having a de facto moratorium imposed on geoengineering projects and experiments. What's your assessment of the value of that moratorium given that it is evidently not being respected?

Pat Mooney: We've only had one effort to violate the moratorium since 2010. Or there are two really. That we are aware of. One in California and one that was thought to be done in the U.K. The one in the U.K. was stopped. The one off the coast of California was a very small one. And then there is the crazy characters off the coast of Canada as well, this last year. That's true, there's a third one. But, frankly, first I'd say the major goal for us in pushing the moratorium in Nagoya was to create a political awareness on the part of governments that geoengineering was a serious issue they had to pay attention to. I think we achieved that. There is an awareness of that now. That's why it went to the Rio + 20 heads-of-state conference in Brazil. I think secondly, even in the case of Canada, where this rogue character Rusty George did an ocean fertilization dump last summer, even the Canadian Minister of the Environment said that it was illegal and they are looking at forms of legal action against them. We wish they would move faster, but they have said they will take legal action and they put that in the context of the moratorium, so again even when we have the worst governments of the world now in terms of climate change, Canada, seem to take the moratorium seriously. I'm not surprised by occasional violations, especially by private companies, but none of them at this stage have been significant.

W. Hall: In the ETC Group's paper "Geopiracy, the Case against Geoengineering" you say that "the push to advance geoengineering is being led by the U.K.'s Royal Society and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, joined by counterparts in other countries such as Canada, Germany and Russia." You say: "policy makers who are looking for a way through the next election, even more than a way out of climate change, are listening." Now how can it be explained that politicians who are primarily concerned about being elected should pay more attention to the Royal Society and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences than they do to the increasing numbers of citizens who totally reject geoengineering, or geopiracy to use the ETC Group's term, and everything connected with it.

Pat Mooney: Well, most of society doesn't know anything about geoengineering. I think the studies that I've seen say that something over seventy percent of people in industrialized countries have never heard of it. So I think politicians feel that there is relatively safe territory at this point. There isn't much knowledge of it. They would also I think imagine that those who are now saying that they are against it in society, and it's a significant number still, could be persuaded to change their mind if governments and scientists convinced them that it was cheaper or safer to do, or it was more urgent to do, than trying to reduce emissions. It's a case of where there is support against geoengineering, but it is very thin on the ground. It's not an in-depth knowledge of what the issues are, so of course it is open to change.

W. Hall: Well of course there is a very rapidly growing chemtrails movement, but there is a problem here with differences of assessment. But certainly this movement is numerically not small and I don't know to what extent politicians will pay attention to it. There are some isolated instances of politicians in Greece, for example, paying attention to the concerns of this movement. Of course they are not supported by their parties. But this is an element, of course, that is a little bit difficult to bring into the conversation. But when you take it together with the factor of the climate change skeptics who it is absolutely incomprehensible cannot be taking a more active stance against geoengineering, given that they think that there is no reason for it anyway because they reject the idea of climate change, anthropogenic climate change. I think it needs a lot of explaining how it is that the Royal Society and the National Academy of Sciences can have the ear of politicians to the extent that the ETC Group claims. It seems quite remarkable.

Pat Mooney: Well I'm not surprised really. I mean, I think it's also true that these major scientific bodies have a certain amount of influence with governments. They are organized to make their case and to appear to be scientifically neutral whereas the public in general isn't well organized on these issues, doesn't understand what the issues are at this stage even. Because they don't have a mechanism for getting the message across in the same way. I met with the Minister of the Environment in Germany a couple of years ago, in 2010. He invited me to meet with him to talk about geoengineering and he admitted to me – it was a private discussion, but - he admitted to me that he had never even heard of geoengineering until a few weeks before. This was after, even after, we'd had the moratorium established on ocean fertilization, in Germany, and in the Biodiversity Convention negotiations in Bonn, in 2008. So there's not much understanding there. And of course his response was to get scientists in Germany to study it, which they did, and they've done a couple of reports since then on geoengineering.

W. Hall: Well, it may well be that politicians are less aware than the public in general. This is something that may well be the case. Or perhaps pretending to be less aware, I don't know.

Pat Mooney: Well, everyone claims the majority. Richard Nixon talked about the silent majority back in the 1970s. And everyone thinks that their side is legions of people ready to move, and in fact I don't see many people moving very much.

W. Hall: Mmm hmm. All right then, well thank you very much for agreeing to this discussion. We'll see what the response to it is, but anyway I think we've covered the subjects that I wanted to talk about. Do you think that there is anything else that we should be talking about?

Pat Mooney: No, no I think you're... I mean our focus is not just geoengineering. We work with synthetic biology, nanotechnology, several other...-genomics and so on as well. But I think geoengineering is an extraordinarily important issue. It is one which will...if we don't frankly strengthen the moratorium into a ban on geoengineering in the next couple of years it could well be that politicians will be railroaded by some industries and by some scientific organizations into doing geoengineering. I think that's terribly terribly dangerous.

W. Hall: Of course there is a growing rejection of the whole idea of ..what we call the financialization of nature. This is something that... there is beginning to be discussion about the financialization of nature which....this discussion does have one advantage in that it is not divided the way that the climate change discussion is divided. There is a war going on between two different sides. The financialization of nature debate appears to have a potentially integrative function that the climate change debate does not have since it is divisive. I don't know what you think, if this financialization of nature debate might be, you know, the promising next step.

Pat Mooney: Well I think it is quite divisive. Our friends, the ones we work with, are opposed to the financialization of nature but again you'll have WWF, IUCN, many standard sort of development agencies and non-governmental organizations that are paid to do development aid work who actually see it as a beneficial thing, which is to me incomprehensible. So there are definitely tensions over the idea of it. We felt that in the World Social Forums and again in the Rio + 20 negotiations that went on for a couple of years. There was a real wall between those who felt that it was a new way to get money to global South and others who felt that it was a disaster.

W. Hall: All right then, well thank you very much and we hope that we'll have another discussion in future but we'll see what the response is to what we've said.

Pat Mooney: Sure. OK.

W. Hall: Thank you very much.

Pat Mooney: Thank you.

W. Hall: Bye.

Pat Mooney: Bye.