

Obituary

Philip Lloyd: Climate change sceptic who shared Nobel prize 1936-2018

Provocative and outspoken, he favoured fossil fuels, nuclear and teaching mathematics

Philip Lloyd, who has died in Cape Town at the age of 81, was part of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) team that shared the Nobel peace prize in 2007.

Ironically, he was something of a climate change sceptic and questioned the panel's impartiality.

He was a professor of chemical engineering at Wits University and a research fellow at the Energy Research Centre of the University of Cape Town (UCT), where his major interest was how people living in informal settlements could satisfy their energy needs without burning their homes down .

At the time of his death he was a professor of energy at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and consultant to the petrochemical industry.

He believed in fossil fuels and nuclear energy. He helped build the R11bn Mossgas project and was involved in SA's pioneering and world-acclaimed pebble bed modular reactor. He believed that the decision by the Mbeki government to pull the plug on the project was a blunder of note. As a result 'the baton was handed to the Americans who in essence are being gifted our technology and expertise', he said.

Lloyd was as formidably intelligent as he was cantankerous, outspoken and provocative.

On one occasion, the leader of the Campaign Against Nuclear Energy, who was also his next-door neighbour, had to save him from being bodily ejected from an anti-nuclear meeting.

He believed the cost and unreliability of wind and solar power made them unrealistic and ultimately unaffordable alternatives to fossil fuels and nuclear energy.

While a member of the UN panel on climate change, he found that the work of scientists was misrepresented by those involved in the policy-making process.

'What the scientists were saying was being translated into words I did not recognise as being the scientists' words,' he said. Many of the predictions of the climate change lobby were not coming true, he said, but scientists tended to gloss over this.

'There are scientists involved in this thing who are not necessarily unbiased,' he said, adding that he did not necessarily dispute climate change but did dispute the view of the IPCC and climate change lobby that carbon dioxide (CO₂) was to blame .

'The temperature change between 1920 and 1940, which is not regarded as being CO₂-driven, is very similar to the temperature change from 1970 to 2000, which the IPCC puts solely down to CO₂,' he said.

He also believed the information being used to determine the effects of climate change was too recent to form a good basis for conclusions.

Contrary to widespread reporting, he said, global temperatures were not rising excessively and there had been no recent indications of an acceleration in sea levels rising.

It was predicted that burning fossil fuels would cause an increase in hot weather, droughts, floods, violent winds, cyclones and sea levels.

'But when you dig out the evidence for these increases, you find remarkably little support for them,' he wrote.

'It has been warming for at least 180 years. Yes, it has become warmer, and glaciers are melting. But as the ice disappears on alpine passes, so footpaths appear that were last in use 800 years ago, when it was warmer than today.'

Most of the purported increases in extreme climate could barely be detected, he said.



**Caption—Philip Lloyd disputing evidence for climate change at a National Science and Technology Forum conference in 2017.
Picture: NSTF**

Obituary *(continued)*

He believed the case for carbon taxes was more about populism than science, and that it was naive to put too much faith in predictive models .

“I seem to recall some recent models which proved beyond all doubt that Hillary Clinton would be the next president of the US”.

He believed the “current panic about global warming will go the way of the 1970s panic about global cooling”.

Lloyd was born in Sheffield in the UK on September 9 1936. He moved to SA with his family at the age of nine to escape the hardships of postwar Britain.

He won an organ scholarship to Diocesan College (Bishops) in 1949. He lost it when he ignored the ‘DO NOT’ signs, pulling out all the stops on the school organ for Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, which brought down the acoustic tiles from the chapel ceiling.

For his doctorate in chemical engineering at UCT he developed a uranium extraction process which is still in use.

He worked for the Atomic Energy Board which sent him to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for a year.

On his return he worked for the then Chamber of Mines and helped develop a plan to rework mine dumps. As head of research at the chamber he led a team which devised a revolutionary underground processing plant to save having to bring all the ore to the surface.

In the ‘70s he was instrumental in starting Protec, an NGO offering higher-grade maths and science teaching to 1,000 black pupils every year.

Some 80% of black pupils who matriculated with higher-grade maths and science came through Protec.

With the arrival of democracy in 1994 it closed shop, believing there would be no need for it in a post-apartheid education system.

Instead, as Lloyd pointed out, a higher percentage of black students passed higher-grade maths and science before 1994 than after.

He frequently tackled his next-door neighbour, education minister Kader Asmal, about this.

Lloyd, who won the ‘most outstanding young South African’ award in 1976, was no mere swot.

He climbed mountains, skied, sailed and drove rally cars. He was the first South African to complete the 3,500km Monte Carlo rally.

He produced a never-ending stream of papers, articles and erudite letters to the editor until shortly before his death.

Philip had been a member of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy for 50 years at the time of his death. He was regularly called upon to referee papers for the Journal and he was very forthright and constructive in his adjudications. At the AGM in 1972 he was awarded a gold medal for his paper ‘The determination of the efficiency of the milling process’ and not long before he passed away he donated the gold medal back to the Institute with the wish that the Institute sell the medal and use the money for education purposes. The proceeds from the sale of the medal are to be credited to the Institute’s Scholarship Trust Fund.

He was divorced twice and is survived by three children. — Chris Barron.

Acknowledgement

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