

The Tea Party's new pin-up

The latest Republican darling isn't a mama grizzly but an English lord who was too extreme for the Tories and is the world's most flamboyant climate-change denier. **Christopher Silvester** charts the mad march of Viscount Monckton



With the success of Tea Party candidates in the US Congressional midterm elections, one person whose stock is set to rise yet further in

Washington Republican circles is Christopher Monckton, the 3rd Viscount Monckton of Brenchley. This grandson of a Tory Cabinet minister and son of a major general might seem an odd hero for America's Tea Party movement, but Monckton has already addressed vast Tea Party rallies about what he considers to be the scientific establishment's hoax of climate change. Indeed, audiences from the American backwoods seem to lap up Monckton's curious mixture of aristocratic demeanour, intellectual grandstanding, Anglo eccentricity and vaudeville vulgarity, as is evidenced by the enormous number of hits that videos of his speeches have received on YouTube (over 3.5 million). They don't seem to mind him joking about their deficient educational standards and they seem to revel in the fact that a 'gin-u-ine' English lord is on their side. He has also twice addressed Congressional committees about climate science, invited by a Republican Congressman, and has become a welcome guest on the Tea Party movement's favourite TV discussion programme, Fox News' Glenn Beck show. Indeed, Beck, who is the Tea Party's spiritual patron, treats Lord Monckton with profound reverence.

Back in Britain, Monckton is a more marginalised figure. Euroscepticism has long been his other pet cause and earlier this year he became joint deputy leader of the UK Independence Party. When he presented UKIP's 'climate-change statement' at the party's Westminster campaign offices in March, a *Private Eye* reporter wrote that he had the appearance of 'an indignant raven' and noted that 'to call his long speech "swivel-eyed" would be

both unkind and inaccurate, for the most prominent thing about this one-time Fleet Street leader writer is the way his eyes do not swivel but bulge'. Even like-minded commentators, such as *The Sunday Telegraph* columnist

Christopher Booker, are wary of him. 'Oh, lord! I don't want to comment,' he says when I seek his opinion of Monckton. 'I'd rather you say I was unavailable.'

Nonetheless, Monckton's family connections are impeccable. Through his sister Rosa, who was Princess Diana's great

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Top: Viscount Monckton near his home in Perthshire in 2007. Above: a Tea Party rally in Washington DC this month

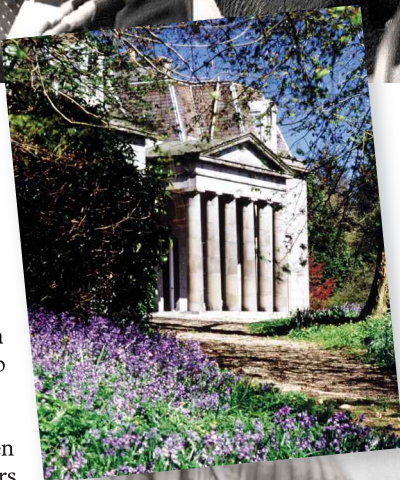
friend, he is brother-in-law to Dominic Lawson, Lord Lawson's son and the former editor of *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Monckton inherited his viscounty in 2006, long after most hereditary peers had been banished from the House of Lords, though he still insists on referring to himself as 'a member of the Upper House, but without the right to sit or vote'. He even uses a doctored version of the official House of Lords crowned portcullis emblem on his notepaper (his is purple as opposed to the official red). But during the summer, the parliamentary authorities asked him to cease and desist. 'Lord Monckton is not and never has been a member of the House of Lords,' a spokesman announced. 'The clerk of the parliaments has written to Monckton, confirming that he has no association with the House and advising him to stop branding himself as such.'

Back in the 1980s when Monckton was working for Mrs Thatcher in Downing Street's Policy Unit, he encountered her in a corridor one day. As an enthusiastic rider of powerful motorcycles, he was in the habit of going to and from work in full leathers. On this occasion he had donned his helmet before leaving the building and, already imposing at over six feet, he resembled Darth Vader – the only thing missing was a long, swinging cape. Despite his disguise, the PM recognised him instantly. 'Where are you going, Christopher?' she enquired. 'I'm off to meet the People, Prime Minister,' was his jaunty reply. This anecdote captures Monckton to a tee: the outlandish outfit, the air of invincibility, the patronising thought, the juxtaposition of ancient and modern.

Or take another off-the-wall episode in his career as a political functionary, which he wrote about recently in the course of a *Daily Mail* article extolling the virtues of his favourite item of headgear, the bowler hat. During the miners' strike, Arthur Scargill's pitmen marched on Parliament Square. While his colleagues covered behind, if not below, their desks, Monckton strode out of Downing Street wearing his bowler and doffed his hat at the miners with a smile. He invited them to a pub and promised to convey their views to the PM. 'Like schoolchildren with their teacher, they filed amiably across Whitehall to the pub, where I bought them pints of ale and made a careful note of what they said.'

Monckton was born in 1952, the eldest of three siblings. His father was a major general in the British army, and ran its PR in the 1960s, and his grandfather, Walter Monckton, was a lawyer who had advised Edward VIII during the abdication crisis. When Christopher was a



From top: Margaret Thatcher at a Tory party conference, 1985; Monckton's former home, Crimonmogate, in Aberdeenshire; Monckton on Ludgate Hill in 1987

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Magisterial Grace, Monckton mingles with other Catholic aristos engaging in elitist charitable activities. 'They are very, very self-conscious about their status,' observes Reverend Johnson.

Having trained as a journalist in Cardiff, Monckton worked for the *Yorkshire Post*, then as a Conservative party press officer. Already a mustard-keen Thatcherite, he wrote a paper about the privatisation of council housing that gained the attention of Downing Street. In 1982 he was recruited to join the No 10 Policy Unit by Ferdinand Mount. John Redwood, Mount's successor, recalls Monckton as 'by far the most difficult person I had to manage – though I say that warmly – for two reasons. One was that he tended to brief the press off the record, the other was that he was ultra-radical.' Along the way, Monckton acquired the nickname of 'the Mad Monck'.

In the late 1980s he returned to journalism, first at *Today* and then at the *Evening Standard* as a leader writer. An example of his desire to shock was a notorious article he wrote for *The American Spectator* magazine in 1987 with the rather pompous title 'AIDS: A British View', in which he argued that the only way to stop AIDS 'is to screen the entire population regularly and to quarantine all carriers of the disease for life. Every member of the population should be blood-tested every month... all those found to be infected with the virus, even if only as carriers, should be isolated compulsorily, immediately, and permanently.' He described the task of isolating between one and a half and three million people in the United States as 'not altogether impossible' and that of isolating another 30,000 people in the UK as 'not insuperably difficult'.

Monckton's views on AIDS were perhaps coloured by his own sexual naivety. For many years he was mocked as the oldest virgin on Fleet Street for his strict observance of Catholic prohibitions against premarital sex. Indeed, Monsignor Gilbey even dedicated a pamphlet to Monckton about the perils of masturbation. But around 1990 Monckton became engaged to Juliet Malherbe Jensen, a woman of Scandinavian background, and immediately proved his loyalty to her when he uncomplainingly (in public, at least) lost £60,000 in

her abortive shirt-making business. They were married at the Brompton Oratory.

Monckton embraced the Eurosceptic cause, opposing the Exchange Rate Mechanism and taking part in marches on behalf of the newly formed Bruges Group think-tank (patron Baroness Thatcher). Patrick Robertson, who founded the group while a student at the LSE, gives an assessment of Monckton's gifts: 'He's an exceptionally intelligent man, very logical, extremely well informed, and geeky in an attractive way. He's also completely maddening. If you disagree with him, he gets personal almost instantly. He's not reflective. He does most of his thinking on his own – to be fair to him, most of his ideas are really good. He's full of energy, he's fertile, he's creative... he's not stale.' Other former colleagues attest to his geniality but also to his stubbornness and purblind conviction that he is always right.

Monckton was fired from the position of chief leader writer of the *Evening Standard* in 1992, for being too right-wing for the new editor, Stewart Steven, a cheerleader for John Major. Thereafter Monckton moved to Loch Rannoch in Perthshire and began to concentrate on his parallel business career as an adviser to foreign governments and wealthy individuals on how to deal with public officialdom. His résumé on the UKIP website lists many victories on behalf of clients over the years, but Monckton's career suffered a severe setback in the late 1990s when he fell victim to a disorder similar to ME that rendered him lethargic. 'He has made a remarkable comeback,' says Reverend Johnson, 'because for ten years he was in bed with ME, which must have been awful for his wife.' In the last five years, however, the Monckton finances have benefited from his fascination with matters mathematical, in particular from his authorship of Sudoku books.

It has been what he sees as the threat of bogus climate science that has more recently caused Monckton to cross the Atlantic and court Tea Party followers through meetings and appearances on television and internet radio shows. In essence, Monckton argues that the warming effect of carbon dioxide has been exaggerated; that the real reason for global warming is that the sun is hotter than it has been for 11,400 years; that climate scientists ignore the so-called medieval 'warm period', distorting the historical record of the planet; and that the climate-change Cassandras are engaged in an effort to impose a tax-hungry global enforcement regime on us all.

'He's the most flamboyant critic of climate science,' says Professor John Abraham of St Thomas University in Minnesota, who first challenged Monckton's arguments in a video lecture posted on his faculty website.

Monckton responded with threats of legal action, hitherto not followed up, demanding compensatory libel damages, \$10,000 from Abraham and \$100,000 from the university, to be paid to a charity in Monckton's name. Since Monckton testified before Congress in May, Abraham and four co-authors have released to Congress a document in which 21 climate scientists each rebutted the nine key assertions in Monckton's testimony. Abraham believes that Monckton's arguments are without scientific merit and he deplores the fact that 'someone without any scientific training, who's known for making inflammatory comments, was invited to appear in front of Congress while we're trying to come up with legislation to make a better future.'

Abraham will no doubt find Monckton a tough dragon to slay, regardless of the evidence, since, says the Reverend Johnson, he lives his life according to his own doctrine. 'It's called Monckton logic. Did you know that washing makes you dirty? Only dirty people wash... Jogging makes you fat, because you only see fat people jogging.' Added to that is his tenacity. 'He will not ever, ever, give way,' says Johnson. 'It's one of his most exasperating features. A friend of mine once said that in most families your mother would give you a slap for being so self-confident. But once he's taken

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a position he won't give way.' A former colleague in political projects acknowledges Monckton's tendency to play dirty. "'The problem with you,'" he'll say, peering down that aquiline nose, with that faintly supercilious tone... It's typical that he should go from Euroscepticism to climate-change scepticism, because there's nothing he likes more than an intellectual punch-up with inferior beings. He's quite capable of being economical with facts... if he's close to winning an argument and he just needs a clincher.'

Warped logic, hyperbole, self-aggrandisement, mockery, and even vitriol directed at his enemies, are all part of Monckton's rhetorical armoury. So, too, is charm. He flies to Washington several times a year and has met the leading Republicans in both houses of Congress on the issue of climate science. 'They've been very good to me over there,' he says, while on a train from Scotland to a speaking engagement south of the border. 'I've had more access than one would have any right to expect. I've been able to talk about the science and the economics, and to some extent the politics, to groups of 50 or 60 Congressmen at a time gathered at dinner, with me as the keynote speaker. This has had the effect of making the Republicans in Congress probably the most aware political party anywhere in the world of where the problems lie with the official theory of global warming.' Whether Professor Abraham, the climate-science fraternity, and the rest of us, should welcome this is another matter.

Hostile climate

Which side of the global-warming debate are you on?

Apocalypse now

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (152 scientists from 30 countries, reviewed by more than 600 experts) states that most of the increase in global temperatures since the mid-20th century is 'very likely' due to the increase in man-made greenhouse gases.
- Burning coal, oil and natural gases releases CO₂. Studies of polar-ice layers show that in the past, rises in temperature have been followed by an increase in CO₂. Now it is a rise in CO₂ that is causing the temperature to rise.
- Concentrations of CO₂ have increased by more than 35 per cent since industrialisation began, and they are now at their highest for 800,000 years.
- Forests and oceans absorb about half the CO₂ we produce, but research suggests that CO₂ 'sinks' such as bogs and forests have reached saturation and are starting to release CO₂.
- There is a network of lobbying groups funded by companies such as ExxonMobil, General Motors and Ford to discredit the IPCC.
- There is an increase in freak weather events. The rise in global surface temperature has averaged over 0.15C per decade since the mid-1970s. The latest IPCC report projected a worst-case scenario of increases of 6C by 2050. Think floods, desertification and hurricanes. **Time to build that bunker.**

Keep on truckin'

- 'Warming' is a conspiracy to damage business and make us pay more tax.
- Throughout history there have been temperature fluctuations, such as the medieval Ice Age, and this is another. There is nothing we can do about it.
- A recent review into the IPCC concluded that it 'assigned high confidence to statements for which there is very little evidence'; such as claims that glaciers in the Himalayas would disappear by 2035, which may have been a misprint for 2350 in a pamphlet from a pressure group.
- Recent studies suggest that human influence on warming is more local than global, and it is more apparent in affluent parts of the world. An oil plant in Texas could not cause a hurricane in Peru.
- Attempts to halt global warming are often useless, or more damaging than warming itself, such as the Carbon Credit system that gives companies carte blanche to pollute, and the manufacture of biofuels that devastates rainforests. **Give up on the recycling.**



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