



Fact or Fiction?

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Poor Judgment (Lies?) by Environmental Groups

Environmentalists often bristle when charged with being addicted to gloom-and-doom messages, but every now and then an environmental group will confirm the stereotype. In April 2006, Greenpeace mistakenly posted an incomplete draft press release on its Web site that read: "In the twenty years since the Chernobyl tragedy, the world's worst nuclear accident, there have been nearly [FILL IN ALARMIST AND ARMAGEDDONIST FACTOID HERE.]."¹

Let look at some other actions of Greenpeace where [ARMAGEDDONIST FACTOIDS] were used. In 1995, when Shell Oil tried to dump the Brent Spar oil platform in the Atlantic Ocean, Greenpeace launched a vicious and sophisticated \$2 million campaign arguing that the dumping of the Brent Spar could cause unforeseen damage. Frank Furedi notes, "This view was virtually unanimously accepted by the media. Under pressure from public hostility, Shell gave up its plan and abandoned the project. The speed with which the battle lines were drawn and the swift humiliation of Shell indicated the strength of public trust in Greenpeace's science."² A year later Greenpeace issued a written apology effectively admitting that the entire campaign had been a fraud. Paul Driessen observes, "Of course, the admission got buried in the business pages or obituaries. Flush from their victory, the Rainbow Warriors went on to shake down other companies and promote bogus claims about chemicals, wood products and genetically modified 'Frankenfood.'"³

Dennis Avery reports, "In the 1970s, Greenpeace took the lead in condemning DDT after the chemical had been used successfully to rid North America and Europe of malaria, which had been endemic throughout both continents. Greenpeace claimed DDT caused cancer in humans, which has since been proven untrue. It said DDT caused thinning in the eggshells of raptors, which isn't true either. American bald eagles have resurged because the



Congressional Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940 halted the shooting and poisoning of the birds. Greenpeace's opposition to DDT has contributed to at least 30 million deaths, most of them African children."⁴

Here's a surprise. After all the years demanding elimination of DDT, Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) apparently have reversed their long standing opposition to the use of DDT to fight malaria.⁵

Chlorine has been a long-standing target of Greenpeace and other groups opposed to any use of man-made chemicals. This topic is so broad that it will be covered in a future column.

Also from Avery, "In the 1970s, Greenpeace claimed salmon were going extinct in the Columbia River because of logging, pollution, and irrigated farming. It turned out the real culprit is a long natural cycle now dubbed the Pacific Decadal Oscillation. It shifts the food sources in the Pacific to favor either the Columbia salmon or the fish in the Gulf of Alaska, but never both at the same time. Similarly, since the 1980s, Greenpeace has predicted the world would lose a million or so species because of global warming, yet the warming has caused no wild species extinctions."⁴

Greenpeace is death on biotech foods, and in the process hurts impoverished nations with starving people the most. Developed in 2000, golden rice, a genetically-modified rice contained a precursor of Vitamin A, rich in beta-carotene. This product is vitally important to people in remote, rural areas of underdeveloped countries where diets are low on vitamins and minerals. Banner Cohen observes, "According to the World Health Organization, 230 million children, predominantly from poor countries, are 'at risk' for clinical or subclinical Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) - and 500,000 go blind from it every year. VAD also impairs children's intellectual development and lowers the body's resistance to disease. As many as two million children die each year from problems directly related to VAD."⁶

"Greenpeace lost little time in attacking golden rice, saying it had too little beta-carotene and that a child 'would have to eat about seven kilograms a day of cooked rice (equivalent to three kilograms of uncooked rice) to obtain the required amount of Vitamin A.'" Greenpeace's assertion was contradicted by the Indian Council on Medical Research, which found that the daily consumption of golden rice would be the equivalent of 200 grams of uncooked rice or one-fifteenth of the amount claimed by Greenpeace. Among the other mistakes Greenpeace made was its assumption that golden rice would have to supply all the Vitamin A that a child needs. The problem in poorer countries is a deficiency in Vitamin A, not a complete lack of it."⁶

In the summer of 2002, when famine gripped Africa, the U.S. sent massive amounts of corn to several countries, including about 17,000 tons to Zambia. But there it rotted. It turns out the Zambian government had been told by environmentalist groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth that the food was 'poison.'⁷ Says Dennis Avery, "Thus Greenpeace and Friends say that starving Africans should forgo foodstuffs that most of these organizations' American members have

been eating for the past decade with no ill effects, so that Western greens can make a political point.” Never mind that this was the same pest-resistant corn that had been approved for safety by three different U.S. government agencies, and eaten daily since 1995 by millions of Americans in such forms as corn flakes, corn flour, and through livestock feed, hamburgers and ice cream. Avery adds, “Biotech foods have undergone more testing than any foods in history with no danger found.”⁸

Few environmental organizations enjoy the prestige and power of the National Audubon Society. The 500,000 member organization has an admirable history of doing things like establishing wildlife sanctuaries and funding solid science ideas all the way back to the 1880s. But it stretches the truth like most special interest groups. Thirty-eight years ago the Audubon Society got caught in a trap when an official of the group accused scientists of lying about bird counts and DDT. After a years-long court fight, it wiggled out of any liability (mostly because it is almost impossible to win a defamation case under the First Amendment).⁹

For some years, the Audubon Society has allowed oil and gas wells on one of its own wildlife reserves in Louisiana, which certainly suggests that oil and gas production is compatible with habitat production. Revenues for Audubon from this activity totaled more than \$25 million over the years.¹⁰ The Audubon Society explains its position in one of its own pamphlets:

There are oil wells in Rainey which are a potential source of pollution, yet Audubon experience in the past few decades indicates that oil can be extracted without measurable damage to the marsh. Extra precautions to prevent pollution have proven effective.

To its credit, the Society made the sanctuary successful in spite of the oil wells. Indiscriminate use has been excluded (recreation, for example, is completely forbidden), but wildlife preservation and resource development have been made compatible.¹¹

However, organizations often make different decisions in the political arena than they would make in the free market. So the story is far different on land owned by the government in Alaska. The Audubon Society is adamantly opposed to oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. “A wildlife refuge is no place for an oil rig!” says one of its flyers, as the organization argues vehemently that drilling would be destructive.¹⁰

Summary

What special interest groups have in common is a willingness to distort and outright lie to get their point across. Read John McPhee’s laudatory biography of David Brower, a major environmentalist of the postwar period (founder of many environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club Foundation, Friends of the Earth, Earth Island Institute, and others). McPhee repeatedly describes Brower’s habit of making up “facts” to support his arguments against industrialists and developers. McPhee concludes, “In the war strategy of the conservation movement, exaggeration is a standard weapon and is used consciously on broad fronts.”¹² I would add that in many cases it isn’t just exaggeration that is used but outright lying and falsification of data. However, given society’s worship of caution, such “mistakes” (or lies) are unlikely to diminish the public’s trust of those who warn of the danger of tampering with nature. **P&SF**

References

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4. Dennis T. Avery, “Greenpeace: A Long History of Poor Judgment,” *Environment & Climate News*, **11**, 15, March 2008; <http://www.heartland.org/publications/environment%20climate/article.html?articleid=22794>.
5. Nicholas D. Kristof, “It’s Time to Spray DDT,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2005
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7. Michael Fumento, *Bio Evolution: How Biotechnology is Changing Our World*, Encounter Books, San Francisco, CA, 2003; p. 259.
8. Dennis T. Avery, “Environmentalists Turn to Terrorism,” Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, 2002; http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=1982.
9. David Mastio, “The Dirty Secret of the Environmentalist Movement,” *IntellectualCapital.com*, May 11, 2000.
10. Richard L. Stroup, *Eco-nomics: What Everyone Should Know about Economics and the Environment*, The Cato Institute, Washington, DC, 2003; p. 25.
11. William Tucker, *Progress and Privilege: America in the Age of Environmentalism*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1982; p. 145.
12. John McPhee, *Encounters with the Archdruid*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, NY, 1971; p. 37.

Answers to I.Q. Quiz #449

From page 20.

1. (c) Charles Henry Proctor
2. (d) Chelsea Hotel, New York, New York
3. National Electroplaters Association of the United States and Canada (NEPA)
4. 1913
5. NEPA *Quarterly Review* (1910-1913); AES *Monthly Review* (1913-1932); AES *Quarterly Review* (1932-1933);* AES *Monthly Review* (1933-1948); *Plating* (1948-1975); *Plating & Surface Finishing* (1975-).**

* The publication frequency was cut back to quarterly for one year during the depths of the Great Depression.

** The technical papers were briefly published in a separate quarterly journal, the *Journal of Applied Surface Finishing* (2006-2008).