

GREENPEACE—getting a piece of the green action

HAZEL NOTION

As scientists continue to confirm the rapid deterioration of the global ecology through the increasing pressures of acid rain, the greenhouse effect, depletion of the ozone layer, deforestation, soil erosion, loss of species, contamination of the food chain with toxic chemicals and the pollution of the world's oceans and waterways, all rational people have come to agree: the greenies (environmentalists) are right. Naturally enough, everyone now wants to be a greenie. All sorts of people are rushing in to don the verdant colours. There are evergreens and seasonal greens, red/greens (those migrating from the left) and blue/greens (from the right), verdigris (green rust on copper) and jade but the fundamental division is between light and dark greens. Dark greens want to change the world; light greens want to clean up the one we've got.

Since most of the major manifestations of the environmental catastrophe occur as expressions of industrial/consumer culture (or emulations of it) the dark green school says there is no way of saving the planet short of a total cultural reformation. Such a cultural deviation would have to be at least as dramatic and far reaching as the one that gave us the industrial revolution in the first place. This school of thought is largely an out-growth of the hippy/utopian vegetable growing movement so popular twenty years ago. These days, however, they are sometimes more sophisticated in their thinking and often style themselves as "deep ecologists".

The light end of the green spectrum, meanwhile, says it's just business as usual. The solution to pollution problems is to have cleaner industries, environmentally safer products and sustainably yielding forests. Furthermore, just around the corner there's a new technology or chemical that will fix whatever it is you're worried about. But whatever you do, don't panic.

HAZEL NOTION is Pseudonym for an experienced environmental activist.

In between these two doubtful shades there doesn't seem to be anything but varying degrees of inarticulate camouflage, confusion and angst. The situation seems to be giving rise to a slowly growing panic among those too young to be able to say with any degree of confidence, "at least it won't happen in my life-time".

Increasingly it seems people, desperate to be reassured that somebody is truly doing something to save the planet, are placing their faith in international environmental organisations like Greenpeace. This is unfortunate because many of them will be unaware just how far Greenpeace has gone in aligning itself with the "business as usual" light green school. A sell-out? Well, yes, but for a good price.

One has to understand that the business as usualists (BAU) are just the leading edge of the free market economy adapting to and exploiting a new market. To them an environmental catastrophe is just a new frontier to conquer and an opportunity to market new products and services. To the BAU environmental engineers, scientists and businessmen the mainstream environmental movement is the greatest promoter and asset their new environmental industry could ever hope to possess. Without really realising what was happening organisations like Greenpeace have become fully integrated into this new environment industry. How did this happen? Well they were just successful and got big. And they started caring more about their corporate fortunes than about changing the world.

In 1989 Greenpeace had a turnover of nearly \$100 million. \$35 million of this was dedicated to fighting environmental campaigns around the world. To the BAU people this was a whole lot of free publicity for their environmentally sound products and pollution control equipment.

The new executive director of Greenpeace Australia put the corporate image in perspective recently. He said he'd been sent out from the United States as a troubleshooter to clean out the hippy image of the local outfit and bring it into line with the rest of the Greenpeace world. He immediately fired a quarter of the existing campaigning staff and replaced them with people better suited to the new conservative and bureaucratic requirements. The survivors of the shake-out tended to be those skilled at internal campaigning. That is, instead of spending their time campaigning on environmental issues, they saved their best efforts for promoting themselves on the internal Greenpeace network. Career orientation and corporate loyalty are apparently the qualities Greenpeace is now seeking in employees.

The new boss was recently quoted offering gratuitous flattery of the Australian Prime Minister, normally more noted for his support for uranium mining, Australia's nuclear alliance and the pocketbooks of large corporations. "Never before have I seen a leader who is so green. Hawke is doing for the environment movement what Gorbachev did for east-west relations. He is ahead of us all."

These are the words of a man who is perhaps capable of making small

sacrifices of reality in the interests of pragmatism. Being the Prime Minister's friend, it seems, would be to his advantage. And those pragmatic interests he states repeatedly. He wants to quadruple the local "subscribership" to 1% of the population, namely to 170,000 people, and increase the Greenpeace income proportionally. (You can't become a member of Greenpeace, only a subscriber.)

Greenpeace Australia have no doubt chosen a competent person to clean up hippies and raise money. He is a veteran of the Vietnam war and during a recent three year sojourn away from Greenpeace he managed to turn himself into a multi-million dollar property developer. (He recently told startled Australian staff members how he was planning to turn an organic fruit farm, that he had bought in the US as a speculation, into a high-density residential development. He also confided that if he was successful in re-ordering the Australian branch he had been promised the top job in the US, possibly to be followed eventually by the top job in Greenpeace International.) His salary package for the Australian job includes a rent-free mansion with views of Sydney Harbour (\$37,000 per year), a car and a \$45,000 per year salary.

With such conventional minds in charge of Greenpeace it makes one wonder just how they ever acquired their radical image and just what function they are actually serving in the world.

In discussions with Australian staff about campaigning tactics the new boss dismissed suggestions that tactics should be adapted to local political and cultural conditions. He said Greenpeace was like McDonald's and it had its own well proven recipe that had worked successfully all over the world. What he was apparently referring to was the Greenpeace propensity for direct action against known polluters to publicise the pollution they cause. This often takes the form of harassing dump ships in zodiacs (small sea craft) and placing temporary blockages in disposal pipelines. All done, when possible, with full television coverage.

The dramatic pictures that these actions produce for TV news are often flashed around the world and constitute the recipe of Greenpeace at work that has proved to be so successful. The appeal to the public of this kind of dare-devil opposition to polluters and whalers is undeniable. However it is obvious that the choice of issues and the timing of actions is more dictated by Greenpeace's need for self-promotion than by an inspired commitment to the environment. One complaint that is regularly leveled at Greenpeace is that they don't have the commitment to follow through issues to a conclusion. They just publicize an issue (and themselves) and move on.

Another complaint, linked to the need for publicity, is the way they raise money. It has been described as pyramid selling environmentalism. Every evening dozens of "canvassers" are despatched in teams to the suburbs of all Australia's major cities to knock on doors, ask for donations and sell subscriptions. The canvassers keep 40% of the money they collect. Their

task is made much easier and more lucrative by good news coverage of Greenpeace actions. If they find householders are repeatedly asking them why isn't Greenpeace doing something about a particular issue, this may lead to Greenpeace adopting the relevant cause.

The most cited criticism of Greenpeace is the centralisation of power, the old boy promotion network and the rigid bureaucratic authority structure. The commando style actions coupled with a military command structure have led many a dark greenie to lift an eye-brow over the years and speculate as to just who the remote and unaccountable leadership might be using for role-models. One question these eye-brow raisers sometimes ask is just how does Greenpeace manage to always locate their target whaling and fishing boats in the midst of vast oceans? Is it possible they might sometimes be satellite assisted and, if so, how do they return the favour? Perhaps by offering employment as a cover? Certainly there are some people working for Greenpeace with backgrounds more suitable for information gathering in areas other than environmental affairs.

To put the activities of Greenpeace into perspective one has to see them as becoming increasingly a lighter shade of green but with dark green roots. The shift has occurred with the maturing of the small upper echelon of original leaders who still hold power. As a light green organisation integrated into the new environment industry one can see them as packagers and marketers of a new product; environmental theatre. This product is sold by subscription to suburban householders who use it as a palliative for environmental anxiety. Regular doses appear to allow suburbanites to continue normal producer/consumer lifestyles. It is also basically advertising and promotion of pollution control equipment and new environmentally-sound products by creating a demand for them.

Whether one sees them as doing more good than harm or vice versa probably depends on what shade of green the reader is. Certainly the vast majority of people in western democracies now are varying degrees of light green and most of them are bound to give some degree of approval to harmless consciousness-raising activities such as Greenpeace carries out.

This growing obsession, however, with what amounts to a civilisation's dirty habits is fast beginning to distract us from those areas of human endeavour, like social justice and spiritual quest, which always seemed so promising for the cultural evolution to a fairer and more enlightened society. That such a society would have the wisdom to avoid ecological self-destruction through the collective expression of greed used to be always taken for granted. □

A STRAIGHT LINE IS SHORTEST IN MORALS AS WELL
AS IN GEOMETRY.

—Rahel
