



Against Nature

Green Dreams or a Fascist Nightmare?

- Simon Hughes, *The Age*, 21 July 1998

Against Nature was shown on ABC TV in July 1998. Hailed by conservatives as 'the real story' behind environmentalism, it was denounced by green activists as misleading propaganda. While *Against Nature* is not the only series that attempts to discredit the environment movement, it is unusual in that it is the product of a small left wing group which uses 'independent experts' from conservative and right wing think-tanks. As one of the groups who were mis-represented in the series, Friends of the Earth (FoE) sees the debate which was generated by the series as an opportunity for renewed debate on the direction and priorities of the environment movement.

After the series was shown on Channel 4 in the UK, FoE England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) participated in two "Right to Reply" debates on Channel 4 in December 1997. The first of these actually attracted a larger viewing audience (1.5 million people) than did the original programme (under one million). Ultimately, FoE EWNI was satisfied about both of these programmes.

FoE EWNI also lodged complaints with the Independent Television Commission (which is responsible for the licensing and governing of independent TV in the UK) and the Broadcasting Standards Commission. In a victory for the movement, the ITC found that the views of the FoE campaigner interviewed had been 'distorted by selective editing' and that he and the other interviewees had been 'mislead' over the 'content and purpose of the programmes when they agreed to take part'. Tony Juniper demanded that ABC TV edit him out of the series before it was shown here. ABC refused to do so.

Debate about, and scrutiny of, the environment movement is necessary and desirable. However, this program has not contributed to this debate in either a constructive or legitimate way. Rather, it has created a character of what environmentalists believe. In particular the program has the following basic problems:

- the fact that sheer propaganda can be sold as 'objective reporting' and that ABC TV has defended the series as such;
- the fact that the real issues- including over consumption in the affluent countries, the legacy of colonialism, the role of transnationals are simply not dealt with, and that science and industrialisation is presented in such a way that it implies that they have only brought benefit to the world, when this is certainly not the case;
- the fact that the series uses 'experts' who are employed by research bodies established and funded by big business, yet does not advertise this fact. In opinion polls, the general public select Non Government Organisations as the source of information which is most trusted. Having lost the 'publicity war' on environmental issues, many large corporations are attempting to use 'junk science' and 'independent' research bodies in an attempt to discredit the environment movement. Greens demand 'truth in advertising'. *Against Nature* is a classic example of the green backlash.

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What are the real issues?

Against Nature attempts to paint greens as neo-colonialists who blame the 'third world' for all our environmental problems while attempting to deny the benefits of western technology and 'development' to these same people. In reality, while there is great diversity of opinion amongst environmentalists about the causes of the current crisis, there is generally consensus that it is actually consumption in the 'first' world rather than 'over population' elsewhere which is the single greatest issue.

Consumption

The 'Northern' (or first world or the western world) comprises only 25% of the world's population, yet use around 75% of the resources which are consumed globally. Pre-existing political and economic structures, the legacy of more than 500 years of European colonialism, have resulted in a situation where the Northern countries, through the activity of Northern based companies and individual lifestyles of people in those countries, draw vast levels of resources from Southern countries. This drain of basic commodity resources and raw materials has greatly undermined the capacity of Southern countries to feed themselves. We are also witnessing a lowering of work conditions as more and more businesses locate 'offshore' into the Southern countries.

If the consumption levels of the Southern countries equalled that of the industrialised North, the burden on natural resources would triple, even with zero population growth. Research shows that 'if everyone were to adopt the lifestyle of a typical North American, we would need at least two more planets to produce the resources, absorb the wastes and maintain the life-support systems' (Friends of the Earth Sustainable Societies Program: Beyond Slogans in Action on Sustainable Societies: the FoE Experience, June 1997). As it would be immoral to enforce poverty on the rest of the world, the only way to solve this dilemma is to increase consumption in the South while simultaneously reducing it in the North. Fundamental to this is the need for local control of development and effective technology transfer. As almost all current tech transfer occurs for the purpose of profit, the results of current initiatives will only enforce current inequity. Even in the North, where there is a growing gap between rich and poor (and hence environmental impact), inequity in consumption is a key social issue. Enclaves of high consumers in the

Southern countries means that there is global commonality between 'haves' and 'have nots'. In effect, consumption is determined by class. *Against Nature*, supposedly coming from a left-wing analysis, does not address this issue.

A number of environmental groups do target 'population' as a key issue in the environmental debate. This has sometimes lead to them adopting problematic positions on immigration, population control and social justice. FoE would re-iterate that population cannot be addressed on its own and that to do so will lead to flawed solutions.

The role of transnationals

In an era of globalisation, where international trade agreements are actively undermining environmental protection at the local, regional and global level, it is remarkable that the series did not even mention the role of transnational companies or trading blocks. Integration of all regions of the world into a single market has resulted in unprecedented environmental destruction as resource extraction from remote areas has seen the fastest rates of tropical rainforest and temperate forest clearance and loss of biodiversity ever witnessed by humankind. This, in turn has lead to huge social disruption to farming and indigenous communities around the world.

A fundamental issue is how 'development' occurs. The creation of a single global market through the forces of globalisation is under-pinned by the philosophy of capitalist expansionism and economic rationalism. *Against Nature* implies that the 'fruits' of technology will appear for the poorer countries if only the greens would stop meddling. Any analysis of why money is invested would show that this is a simplistic and flawed analysis. It is estimated that private investment accounted for 85% of money flowing into the developing world in 1996, and that the ratio of private to public investment in the top developing and transitional economies was a staggering 80:1. Just as public

pressure was beginning to have an impact on publicly-financed development projects, private investment began moving into developing countries to finance the same kind of inappropriate mega-developments that had previously been backed by the World Bank. It is becoming increasingly clear that only wealthy multinational corporations have the money necessary for financing roads, dams, electrification, water and sewer systems - the needs of developing countries. Critical development projects that don't generate profits, such as environmental protection or health care for the poor, are falling by the wayside' (Michelle Chan-Fishel; The Corporate Slam Dunk: how Multinationals Profit with Help from the World Bank, Governments and Taxpayers Money. Link magazine, Issue 82, Jan/Feb 1998). While viewers of the series could get the impression that the World Bank is simply an arm of the global environment movement, the reality is that the international movement has literally campaigned against thousands of World Bank funded projects over the last 50 years.

Industrial agriculture

The show has 'experts' speaking in glowing terms of the 'green revolution', the global program which sought to increase yields of food producing crops through industrial farming, increased use of pesticides, hybrid species and fertiliser-dependent strains of crops. As noted by prominent Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva, the green revolution, which was designed as "a technological strategy for peace, through the creation of abundance" has instead brought "diseased soils, pest-infested crops, water-logged deserts, and indebted and discontented farmers" (Vandana Shiva, The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics, Third World Network, 1991, p 11-12). The green revolution was supported by global corporations and development agencies, and controlled by "opaque bureaucracies controlling policy, credit, standards, and technology" which has "destroyed the cultures and ecologies of innumerable regions. All this has been excused in the name of industrial 'abundance'" (Tom Athanasiou, Slow Reckoning, Vintage, 1995, p87).

While the destruction caused by the 'green' revolution is now widely acknowledged, it is remarkable that the producers of the show gave an entirely uncritical analysis of this agricultural

disaster. This seems to be indicative of a worldview which assumes that technology will solve any environmental and social problems and ignores the forces behind the 'technological fix'.

Urbanisation

In the series, urban centres are presented as being the pinnacle of human endeavour, leaving the impression of almost a religious fervour about cities such as New York City. Without entering any debate about the pros and cons of agricultural versus mega-city living, the glaring point missed in *Against Nature* is that, of the millions of people moving into cities, very few of them get to experience the 'cafes, the bars, the cultural diversity' that *Against Nature* talks about. People ARE moving to urban areas in vast numbers, for a variety of reasons. It is expected that half the world's population will live in cities by the end of the century. However, the reality is that most of these people are ending up in fringe dwellings, ghettos and shanty towns. Chronic unemployment, absence of social services and infrastructure, overcrowding, poverty, and lack of social cohesion are all well documented results of this rural-urban flight. To take one example amongst many thousands - it is estimated that 40% of urbanised South African communities have access only to contaminated water supplies. Again, the series is silent on the issue of urban environmental realities and the urgent need for improvement in infrastructure and opportunities.

The global environment movement

The series ignores the strong environmental and social justice movements that exist around the world. There are many thousands of community controlled Non Government Organisations around the world working for sustainable, locally controlled development and environmental protection. Some of these are famous (such as the Chipko movement in India) but many are not. To imply that 'environmentalism' is simply a romantic western notion that is being imposed on the rest of the world is both offensive and dangerous to many of the groups resisting the activities of transnational companies. Many of the individuals in these organisations risk death, harassment and imprisonment because of their activities to protect the environment. It is a shame that the producers of the series didn't bother to seek some of these activists out.

Who's behind Against Nature?

An article by George Monbiot, *the Guardian*, 18 December, 1997

There has never been a series on British television like Channel 4's *Against Nature*, which ended with a debate on Tuesday night. The environmentalists it interviewed were lied to about the contents of the programmes. They were given no chance to respond to the accusations the series made. They were misrepresented to the extent of falsification. One couldn't help suspecting that *Against Nature* was driven not by healthy scepticism but by shrill ideology.

If this were so, where might it have come from? At first we thought the Far Right might have been involved. But, over the last three weeks, another picture has begun to form. *Against Nature IS* the product of an extreme political ideology, but it comes from a rather different quarter: an obscure and cranky sect called the Revolutionary Communist Party.

Frank Furedi, the series' key interviewee and a protagonist in Tuesday's debate, has been described as the father of the modern RCP.

He is a regular contributor to the RCP's journal, *Living Marxism*. Of the two main contributors to the third programme, one, John Gillott, is *Living Marxism's* science correspondent. The other, Robert Plomin, though not RCP, has recently been interviewed sympathetically by the magazine. Martin Durkin, the director of the three programmes, describes himself as a Marxist: the only brand of Marxism which follows the line the series takes is the RCP's. The husband of his deputy, *Against Nature's* assistant producer, is the co-author of the RCP's manifesto and Books Editor of *Living Marxism*.

Line by line, point by point, *Against Nature* follows the agenda laid down by the RCP. Greens, both the series and *Living Marxism* maintain, present themselves as radicals, but are really doom-mongering imperialists, engaged in the deification of Nature and the rejection of

human progress. Global warming is nothing to worry about, while sustainable development is a conspiracy against people. Greens have plotted with the film industry to make science terrifying. Genetic engineering and human cloning are not to be feared but cherished, as they will liberate humanity from nature.

The ideologues in the series have some strange bedfellows, but the RCP has always been good at making selective alliances, whether it is promoting anti-environmental ideas, or campaigning against a ban on landmines and in favour of the Bosnian Serb forces and the Hutu militias. Its members are controversialists, but more than just that: the principle targets for their attacks are alternative outlets for radical action.

I had scarcely broached this subject on Tuesday night's debate when Martin Durkin began - and I do not exaggerate - screaming. I was a McCarthyite and a despicable conspiracist. What on earth did his personal political views have to do with this series?

Well, rather too much. The RCP and its associates can make as many programmes as they like as long as they do so openly and honestly. Indeed, among its perversities and cheap controversialism, the RCP has some interesting and provocative views, which are worth hearing and debating. But Martin Durkin and his commissioning editor, Sara Ramsden, maintain that *Against Nature* is not a polemic, but a well-balanced documentary series. There was no presenter; instead we were instructed, in true documentary style, by an authoritative voice-over. The RCP/*Living Marxism* interviewees were not captioned as such, but presented as independent experts.

It's an extraordinary coup for a tiny group of cranks: three hours of prime time propaganda. But how on earth did they pull it off? It is surely inconceivable that Channel 4's top decision-

makers, such as Sara Ramsden, also belong to the party. But many television executives hate environmentalism. They see it as a grim memento mori at the bottom of the picture, spoiling the good news about cars, clothes and

consumerism. So when the film-makers suggested an all-out assault on environmentalists, their proposal fell on fertile ground. The revolution, as the RCP sees it, has been televised.

BIOGRAPHIES ON WISE USERS PARTICIPATING IN THE 'AGAINST NATURE' PROGRAMMES

FRED SINGER (Science and Environmental Policy Project)

The Science and Environmental Policy Project (SEPP) was founded in 1990 as an affiliate of the Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy, a Moon-funded think tank that provided SEPP with free office space. Since severing its ties with the Moonies and strengthening its links with the conservative Virginia-based George Mason University, SEPP has gone on to hold a number of conferences and seminars attempting to discredit ozone depletion, global warming, acid rain, pesticide exposures, and toxic waste as real or potential threats to human health. Its executive director, Fred Singer, has become the most popular science speaker on the anti-environmental circuit since the death of ex-Washington Governor Dixy Lee Ray.

Fred S. Singer, who in 1994 proposed a \$95,000 publicity project to "stem the tide towards ever more onerous controls on energy use," has received consulting fees from Exxon, Shell, Unocal, ARCO, and Sun Oil, and has warned that they face the same threat as the chemical firms that produced CFCs. "It took only five years to go from... a simple freeze of production [of CFCs]," Singer has written, "... to the 1992 decision of a complete production phase-out all on the basis of quite insubstantial science."

LARRY CRAIG, Senator (R-ID):

Larry Craig is a far right-wing, anti-environmental Republican Senator from Idaho, closely linked to the forest and logging industries. He is also a prominent representative for the Wise Use movement. He has been a panellist at The Alliance for America's annual "Fly-In for Freedom" gatherings in Washington, which is a forum where everyone who is anyone within the Wise Use movement meet to sort out their strategies to fight

the environmentalists. Alliance for America itself is a leading nation-wide Wise Use and property rights coalition formed in 1991 to "put people back into the environmental equation" and to "fight the environmentalists, who really are our hard-core enemies." It claims to have over 500 member organisations in all fifty U.S. states, but the vast majority of them are trade associations connected with the timber, mining, fishing and cattle industries. Their list of funders include: American Freedom Coalition (started by Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (The Moonies), as the Church's political wing), American Mining Congress, American Petroleum Institute, National Rifle Association and the National Trappers Association.

Larry Craig has also participated in various Alliance for America fundraising events.

GREGG EASTERBROOK, author

Gregg Easterbrook is a former *Newsweek* journalist, and now best known for his book "A Moment on the Earth," which espouses the falsely optimistic view that many environmental problems have been overstated.

When it was first released in 1995, "A Moment on the Earth" received much attention. The mainstream press erupted over the book's "radical" messages: That the environment in the industrialised nations is improving; that toxic and nuclear wastes aren't as hazardous as they have been portrayed; and that the most important thing about Rachel Carson's famous work *Silent Spring* is that virtually none of what Carson predicted has come true. Global warming? An exaggeration by overexcited scientists. Ozone hole? A minor phenomena for most of the globe, only severe in lifeless Antarctica.

Simultaneously, in environmental and progressive publications, "A Moment on the Earth" was

denounced as being factually skewed and for being "a rousing call to inaction." Jack C. Schultz, professor of entomology at Pennsylvania State University (USA), wrote in *Natural History* magazine that "A Moment on the Earth" "contains some of the most egregious cases of misunderstanding, misstated, misinterpreted, and plainly incorrect 'science' writing I've ever encountered."

Mobil Oil recently took environmental protection to task in ads headlined, "The Sky is Not Falling" (a title borrowed from one of Fred S. Singer's many papers on global warming) and "More Good News." Mobil's supposed good news came in part from Easterbrook's book.

GEORGE VERGHESE, Centre for Policy Studies (UK):

"The Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) is an independent centre right think tank which develops and publishes public policy proposals and arranges seminars and lectures on topical policy issues, as part of its mission to influence policy around the world. It also maintains a range of informal contacts with politicians, policymakers, civil servants and the press, in Britain and abroad.

The CPS was founded in 1974 by Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph, and claim a large share of the credit for initiating policies such as privatisation, trade union reform, council house sales, pensions deregulation, education reform, free trade, health service reform and the recent restructuring of the tax system to favour traditional families.

The Centre bases all its policy proposals on a set of core principals, including the value of free markets, the importance of individual choice and responsibility, and the concepts of duty, family, respect for the law, national independence, individualism and liberty." (CPS's Web-site: <http://www.cps.org.uk/start.htm>)

NB! There is a similar USA "Center for Policy Studies" linked to the right-wing, anti-environmental Heritage Foundation. It is not known which of the two CPS's Vergheese is representing.

MICHAEL GOUGH, Director of Cato's Science and Risk Program Cato Institute:

The Cato Institute is a libertarian right-wing think tank, founded in 1977, sponsors policy conferences and distributes publications on issues as diverse as the global economy, military intervention and "ecoterrorism". Cato views the environmental

movement and the demands it places on industry as a major obstacle to its vision of small government and an unregulated economy. Ben Bolch and Harold Lyons, authors of a recent CATO book, "Apocalypse Not", argue that "much of the modern environmental movement is a broad based assault on reason and, not surprisingly, a concomitant assault on freedom."

Cato's director of natural resources studies, Jerry Taylor, wrote in "USA Today" that "natural resources are better protected by individual owners with vested interests in their property", than by the government. "Environmental treaties are biased against economic growth despite the proven correlation between wealthy economies and healthy environments."

Among Cato's funders are American Farm Bureau Federation, American Petroleum Institute, Amoco Foundation, ARCO Foundation, Association of International Auto Manufacturers, Exxon, Ford Motor Company Fund, Monsanto, Philip Morris, Proctor & Gamble Fund, Sarah Scaife Foundation, Toyota Motor Sales (Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organisations, 1992)

The Cato Institute is a founding member of the Wise Use movement (attended The Multiple Use Conference, Nevada 1988, regarded as the founding conference of the movement).

Michael Gough himself has argued against politics-driven government funding of science and in favour of private funding. In particular, he has testified against the Advanced Technology Program, a Department of Commerce corporate welfare program, and against government funding of "environmental research," which he believes is focused on extending the underpinnings regulation, not scientific understanding.

He has examined the differences between science and risk assessment and "exposed the shoddy science that underlies government risk assessments." Gough argues that testing and certification of consumer products by non-government, third-party laboratories will provide safe and effective products in a far more timely fashion than current regulatory schemes based on prejudiced government risk assessments.

JULIAN SIMON, University of Maryland (Cato Institute)

Besides being a University of Maryland business professor, Julian Simon is also a Cato adjunct

scholar. In 1992 he told a policy conference that "The plain fact is that the gloom and doom about our environment is all wrong."

DENNIS AVERY, Director, the Hudson Institute

"Hudson Institute is a private, not-for-profit research organisation founded in 1961 by the late Herman Kahn. Hudson analyses and makes recommendations about public policy for business and government executives and for the public at large. It does not advocate an express ideology or political position. However, more than thirty years of work on the most important issues of the day has forged a viewpoint that embodies scepticism about the conventional wisdom, optimism about solving problems, a commitment to free institutions and individual responsibility, an appreciation of the crucial role of technology in achieving progress, and an abiding respect for the importance of values, culture, and religion in human affairs. (Hudson Institute Web-site: <http://www.hudson.org/about/hud.html>)

"Dennis T. Avery is a Senior Fellow of Hudson Institute and Director of Hudson's Center for Global Food Issues. At Hudson, Avery monitors developments in world food production, farm product demand, the safety and security of food supplies, and the sustainability of world agriculture. He is the author of *Saving the Planet with Pesticides and Plastics*, a book published by the Hudson

Further information

There are a number of excellent resources on the 'green backlash' which include the roles of corporate funded think tanks and publicity firms. These include:

Green Backlash - Global Subversion of the Environmental Movement, Andrew Rowell, Routledge, 1996;

Global Spin: the Corporate Assault on Environmentalism, Sharon Beder, Scribner, 1997.

See also the work of Bob Burton. Some readily available examples include: **Right Wing Think Tanks go Environmental**, in *Chain Reaction* magazine, Number 73-74, May 1995 and **Public Relation Flunkies and Eco-Terrorism**, in *Chain Reaction*, number 72, December 1994.

The FoE sustainable societies program can be found at: <http://www.X34ll.nl/~foeint> See also the books:

Tomorrow's World: Britain's Share in a Sustainable Future, Duncan McLaren, et al, FoE/Earthspan, 1998, and *Sharing the World*.

Sustainable Living & Global Equity in the 21st Century, M Carley & P Spapens, Earthspan, 1998. All these books are available via the Friends of the Earth bookshop in Melbourne.

Towards a Sustainable Australia: Fair Shares in Environmental Space & Ecological Footprint Analysis, John Hepburn, September 1997 (Available from the Sustainable Australia campaign, c/o FoE Brisbane, PO Box 5702, West End, QLD, 4101)

To contact the ABC about the series, contact Hugh McGowan, Network Programmer. Fax 02-9950 3055

The homepage of the Revolutionary Communist Party is at: <http://www.informinc.co.uk/LM/>

The ruling of the Independent Television Commission regarding *Against Nature* is available at: <http://www.itc.org.uk/divisions> (go to complaints reports, then Feb/March 1998, then *Against Nature*).

A response from FoE Togo (western Africa)

"We acknowledge receipt of a press release sent on the 28th of Nov 1997 from the information officer of Friends of the Earth International - the network we are very proud to belong to and if it took quite a while for us to react, it is simply because we have been completely upset by its content.

To be more precise, our reaction is related to your programme "Against Nature", wherein according to the information we have received, the environmental movement is nothing other than a bunch of fascists ideologically similar to Nazis in their beliefs and which is responsible for killing children in poor countries by focusing solely on nature protection issues.

Sirs, what do you know about poverty and hunger? A common African saying, says: "If you are ignorant of a matter, simply abstain from putting your mouth inside it". And it is fair to acknowledge that it applies to you. We are still wondering whether you are true professional journalists, since you seem to have no information about the environmental movement in the South. It is pitiful.

Moreover the method used for pinching an interview from Tony Juniper, campaigns Director FoE England is a ludicrous one. A shame for Channel 4 management. For your guidance:

- Les Amis de la Terre-Togo (ADT-Togo) is a branch of Friends of the Earth International. Togo is a small country (56 600 km²) from west Africa.
- We have 20 local groups. Each year we arrange during summer time an average of six international workcamps which could gather up to 120 volunteers both from north and south. These workcamps deal among others of the reforestation of our forests razed to the ground by European firms (mainly French and German). They also make a contribution to the education of southern children (whom you seem to show so much concern for), through the construction of school buildings and latrines.
- We also carry out awareness campaigns on environmental issues wherein children are target groups.
- We also provide financial and technical assistance to women and to the youth in the indigenous societies.
- In November 1995, ADT-Togo, as a full member has hosted the FoEI AGM at NANGBETO, a village where the World Bank has financed a big dam project which have had a quite devastating impact on the proximate environment (mainly destruction of the natural habitat of several animal species) and on people (socio-economic problems - displaced persons with no compensation, no more drinkable water, no more schools), who therefore became the castoffs of this dam project.

We "Les Amis de la Terre-Togo" would finally like to invite the management of CHANNEL 4, who allowed this outrageous programme to come to air to visit us here so that they can substantiate their prejudiced view of the developing countries.

The Director,
Mensah TODZRO

FoE Australia Background Paper #1

Produced by Cam Walker for Friends of the Earth Australia, August 1998.

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Many thanks to Ann Doherty (FoE International), George Monbiot, Beth Mellick and Damien Lawson.

FoE Australia is a national federation of independent groups working towards a socially equitable and environmentally sustainable future, and is active in most States and Territories.
FoE Australia is the national member of FoE International, which has groups in 58 countries. FoE is a membership based organisation: please contact us for details.



Friends of the Earth
Les Amis de la Terre
Amigos de la Tierra