

Greenpeace: a critical look at the ecological multinational

Part I of an EIR Investigation

The ozone hole, the greenhouse effect, poisoned drinking water—new announcements of catastrophes continually shake Europe and America, and the crusade against the alleged environmental criminals is in full swing. Nowadays, this propagandistic crusade cannot be conceived apart from what may be the most powerful, richest, and most spectacular ecological organization in the world: Greenpeace. Everyone is familiar with the dramatic camera shots of Greenpeace members guiding their rubber boats up to whaling ships or in the vicinity of nuclear tests, climbing smokestacks or construction cranes, or plugging the outlet pipes of chemical factories. This naturally never occurs without securing the greatest possible media publicity in advance. Wilhelm Bitorf, a journalist for *Der Spiegel* who sits on the governing board of the West German branch of Greenpeace, has been actively beating the drum for his organization in the “German news weekly” for years.

Recently, the wave of legal actions started by Greenpeace has attracted even more attention than its stunts. In the Federal Republic of Germany, six lawsuits are pending in the Hamburg state court with penalties of DM 155,000-410,000 (\$90,000-240,000) against the publisher, authors, and editors of two issues of the German-language magazine *Fusion* and the Patriots for Germany political party. Greenpeace first obtained a temporary injunction against a series of statements, and is seeking a permanent injunction. No decision has been made in the cases overall.

Central to the challenged publications is, by our information, a series of critical questions concerning the political benefits that third parties derive from actions done by Greenpeace, possible strategic background information, and the devastating effects of those actions on local economies. The remarkably hectic and massive court action has attracted special attention because the size and circulation of the publications sued are, in comparison to other media, rather small. For this reason, we have decided to look into the Greenpeace organization more closely, and our findings will be published in subsequent parts of this series.

Greenpeace is the only worldwide environmentalist organization with 33 offices in 20 countries (connected by a computer network), a base in Antarctica, and a fleet of highly modern ships (which communicate via satellite), a fabulous

worldwide budget, estimated at over \$100 million, and, what is perhaps most astonishing, powerful patrons and supporters in the West and the East. In 1971, Greenpeace began its work with obstruction of U.S. nuclear weapons tests; it then discovered it had deep feelings for whales and seals, and battled as well against nuclear waste, nuclear energy, nuclear reprocessing, and chemical wastes. Currently, much attention is being given to the Greenpeace demand to make Antarctica into a “world park” that is to be left to itself without any human interference—apart, of course, from the research of the Greenpeace members stationed there, and the publicity stunts such as the Antarctic crossing by Reinhold Messner.

There are continual criticisms of Greenpeace, even from other environmental organizations. In 1982, the groups in Kiel and Bremen split off, with sharp criticism of “Kiespeace,” which in the eyes of many involved co-workers was “only interested in money transfers.” The Canadian Paul Watson, a Greenpeace activist since 1978 who broke with Greenpeace to form the more militant organization called “Sea Shepherds,” admitted in an interview with Canadian Broadcasting Corp. that Greenpeace primarily regarded seals as a fundraising issue, since they make it easy to involve people emotionally. “Seals are not in danger of extinction,” Watson said. “But I think that of all the animals in the world, the harp seal is the easiest issue to raise funds.” He said that whales are not nearly so profitable—but even here, Greenpeace has succeeded in collecting \$4.5 million in one year (1989) in the United States alone for “saving the whales.”

The general secretary of the Danish World Wildlife Fund, Skat-Rordam, also voiced doubts about the Greenpeace campaign against seal hunting: “Most of the quarter-million seals killed each year would have died anyway from natural causes before reaching adulthood. But baby seals look soft and cuddly, so this was a good campaign for Greenpeace. Their ability to dramatize an environmental problem so people understand it is just fantastic. We can’t match them.”

Graham Searle, founding member of the Friends of the Earth, recently criticized an irresponsible campaign against toxic PCBs. “Rather than reading up on it, they chose to hype it up. In this they have succeeded. Their membership has grown and money has poured in. The British public has been conned.”

Spending decisions

Another topic that should be investigated is how decisions are made to spend the huge amounts of money raised. In 1988, Greenpeace in West Germany had contributions of DM 39 million (\$23 million), which included the sales revenues from numerous ecology articles the organization offers. In the Hamburg central office, 60 officials who work there, receive, according to *Der Spiegel*, gross monthly salaries of DM 2,000-5,100 (roughly \$1,200-2,900). According to *Der Spiegel*, 400,000 supporters contribute about \$30 monthly—"the number of voting members, for the purpose of the organization's 'being able to function,' is approximately 20." The coordination of the state sections is done by the Greenpeace International Council in Amsterdam, a foundation set up under Dutch law, under the direction of world president David McTaggart. Monika Griefahn, the German member in the exclusive council, said a few years ago to the alternative paper *tageszeitung* "We are not a democratic organization, if you mean by that that actions are decided by means of general meetings."

A further reason to closely examine Greenpeace is that its spectacular actions not only relieve well-meaning contributors of their funds, but also cause devastating economic damage to many of those affected. A recent example is the Greenpeace worldwide campaign, ended a few months ago, to boycott all Icelandic fish products, because Iceland, under the pretext of scientific research, continues to hunt whales. Seventy to eighty percent of all exports of this small North Atlantic country are fish products. According to Greenpeace's own figures, the boycott campaign had cost Iceland \$50 million through August 1989; according to the German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*, it cost as much as \$150 million.

Since scientists confirm that Iceland's scientific whale hunting does not threaten the whales of the Atlantic Ocean in any way, and that other countries are more heavily involved in whale hunting, a big question is again raised as to the motives behind the Greenpeace campaign.

How some people, at least, received the boycott is documented in a letter to the editor in the July 2 edition of the Danish paper *Berlingske Tidende*, which observed, "The situation is certainly not improved by the fact that the organization is initiating a massive boycott action against another tiny nation, where the most life-giving source of income is being attacked, where they accuse a whole nation of being murderers. Apparently a good argument for those who look at whales as pets, and there are enough of those to ruin small nations. This, I think, has scary parallels to the slogan of Nazi Germany, 'Kauft nicht bei Juden' [Don't Buy from Jews]."

After the long campaign against seal hunting, which was carried on for years by animal rights people, had ruined the market for seal pelts, with corresponding impact on seal hunters in Newfoundland and elsewhere, Greenpeace asserted that baby seals were also being hunted in Greenland, even

though seals do not breed there—only adults go there to search for food. After the campaign, which economically devastated the Eskimo tribes dependent on seal hunting, Greenpeace did apologize to Greenland, but so far, has not paid any compensation.

Propaganda campaigns, which are perceived in part by the affected people as economic warfare, must be investigated, not only with regard to their economic justification, but also with regard to who derives the economic as well as the political-strategic benefit from the campaigns.

Nervous about exposés

It is striking that this ecological multinational is reacting with increasing nervousness to criticism and questions. In Spring 1989, the documentary film "Survival in the High North" by Icelandic journalist Magnus Gudmundsson, made headlines. The film dealt with the difficult struggle for existence of the Scandinavians of the far north and the campaigns of environmentalist organizations such as Greenpeace. Before it was shown for the first time in Iceland, Greenpeace unsuccessfully tried to get a temporary injunction against showing the film.

In April, the Danish newspaper *Det Fri Aktuelt* wrote, "Greenpeace seems to have chosen to keep a low profile in its attitude toward the controversial movie, which among other things accuses the environmental organization with having staged scenes of suffering animals. The movie, 'Survival in the High North,' had its premier on Icelandic TV on March 14. The day after, a spokesman for the Greenpeace International headquarters in Great Britain, Martin Leeburg, said to Ritzaus Bureau that there would be lawsuits against anybody who had anything to do with the movie. He stressed that he meant the producer of the movie, Magnus Gudmundsson, the state-owned Icelandic TV, as well as any other TV station which aired the movie. Since then, the movie has been shown in Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Finland, and Holland, and on Tuesday, Norwegian viewers will get a chance to see it. But nobody has yet been sued by Greenpeace."

In a statement issued to the press on the sharp attacks from Greenpeace on his film, author Gudmundsson wrote, "The reaction of the Greenpeace organization against the documentary, 'Survival in the High North,' is the reaction of a group of desperate people who have been exposed for what they are: a power- and money-motivated organization that does not hesitate to use grossly biased and even deceitful methods to increase their influence at the expense of countless innocent victims. Throughout the years they have manipulated public opinion by mass propaganda, disinformation, and economic boycotts aimed at destroying the means of livelihood of thousands." At the end of April, Gudmundsson's film was shown at the international film festival at Cannes, France. Again, there were no legal consequences.

To be continued.