

Greenpeace: millions, power, and methods—and unwanted criticism

Part IV of an EIR Investigation

As we reported in part I of this series (EIR, Jan. 5, 1990), the wave of legal actions started by the huge “ecology” multinational Greenpeace has attracted even more attention than its publicity stunts in the recent period. 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. Central to the challenged publications is a series of critical questions concerning the political benefits that third parties derive from actions done by Greenpeace, strategic background information, and the devastating effects of those actions on local economies.

The more we concern ourselves with Greenpeace, that worldwide organization that gladly accepts being called the “environmental conscience of the world,” the more obvious it becomes that this organization, both in the way it came into existence and in its method of operation, has little to do with a spontaneously awakened public awareness of the environment, and is rather, on the contrary, more concerned with cleverly staged publicity campaigns that generate millions in contributions, which are then used to finance further advertising campaigns. Moreover, Greenpeace’s non-profit status still carries tax benefits, and the organization is equipped with all the sophistication of a well-thought-out corporate structure, ensuring a minimum of liability and internal sharing in decision-making and a maximum of profit and public influence.

Critical voices are therefore becoming louder and louder. Bavarian Radio felt obliged to perform some damage-control for Greenpeace in a live discussion panel on the topic, “Greenpeace—Business with the Environment?” The 1988 book by Jürgen Reiss, *Greenpeace, Der Umweltmulti—Sein Apparat, seine Aktionen (Greenpeace, the Environmental Multinational—Its Structure and Actions)*, packaged unavoidable criticisms within a thick layer of effusive praise.

On the symbiosis between the media and Greenpeace, according to the motto “One Hand Washes the Other,” Reiss,

himself a journalist, writes, “In fact, the rainbow warriors are the pampered pets of many editorial offices. Greenpeace offers ‘the right mixture,’ as they say in the trade. Current, explosive subjects such as the poisoning of the North Sea or the danger of nuclear power; spectacular pictures such as two men alone in a rubber boat battle against a looming chemical company fuel ship; and then a bit of human interest and emotion when tiny baby seals bat their button-large eyes with such beautiful trust.”

Although Greenpeace does spend its own money on advertising, German magazines and newspapers such as *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and Springer’s *Hör Zu*, run Greenpeace ads free of charge. According to Reiss, “Even Greenpeace’s timetable for actions is arranged according to editorial deadlines” whenever possible. “Because they are mutually dependent, the media on the Greenpeace story and Greenpeace on the media, the work often goes hand in hand. The multinational also makes its organizational network available to journalists. If necessary, Greenpeace activists are reachable via car telephones from comfortable editorial desks. Greenpeace knows what matters: The newspaper can convey to its readers the impression that it had spoken to the environmentalists on location.”

Thus the media are simultaneously the inspiration and beneficiary of Greenpeace’s slick propaganda methods. In the aforementioned radio discussion, Greenpeace ex-members admitted that the effective campaign to save the touching “baby seals” (*Spiegel*: “Piglets are not ‘baby pigs’”) was primarily a benefit to the bank balance of the environmentalist organization. Entire wills have been signed over for “the benefit of the seals.” Since the campaign took on a life of its own, it is a perfect example of the interplay of Greenpeace and the media. Reiss quotes a typical headline in Germany, “Chancellor Kohl will now go quickly to the aid of the little seals.”

Wolfgang Fischer, Greenpeace member and marine biologist, confirmed in the same radio broadcast that the seal campaign was again and again given priority because of its emotional attention value. According to Reiss, even Greenpeace International President David McTaggart says today, “The seal campaign was schmalzty for me. The problem

could have been solved with negotiations.”

But then there would have been fewer contributions, and some population groups and regions, such as the Eskimos of Greenland, who previously lived predominantly from the sale of seal pelts, would still have their livelihood. “Their villages are virtually deserted, and many have simply moved away because there is no work. Those who stayed often live on welfare, often in depression, addicted to alcohol,” Reiss writes under the headline, “Seals Can Cry—And So Can Eskimos.”

Magnus Gudmundsson, who documented the ruthless campaigns of Greenpeace and other environmentalists in his film on the struggle for survival of the people of the Far North, related that 90 of the 130 cities in Greenland are dependent on hunting—*nota bene*, young seals have never been hunted there, and seals are in no way threatened by extinction. Michael Haas of the Society for Endangered Peoples protested against the destruction of the existence of primitive peoples. Greenpeace spokesperson Ingrid Jütting made the remarkable statement that, in light of the great dangers to the environment, we can’t “allow ourselves to take a small minority into consideration.”

Where does the money really go?

But how much of the millions collected by Greenpeace—in 1989, it was about 50 million deutschemarks (\$29 million) in Germany alone—actually go to save the threatened environment? According to the statement of ex-Greenpeace member Daniela Bolze on Bavarian Radio, “Greenpeace is more interested in making money than in environmentalism,” and Wolfgang Fischer objected that at most one-third of the contributions actually do the environment any good. Ingrid Jütting confirmed that DM 22 of the DM 50 million in Germany go abroad “for international work.”

The transactions involved have not, up to this point, damaged the indirect government support coming through Greenpeace’s non-profit status. Financial officials have, according to Reiss, voiced “their concerns that there has never been anything like this: an organization for such a good purpose and so rich. Through a little detour, therefore, the DM 14 million [in 1988] is arranged: Greenpeace Germany concludes a proper contract with Greenpeace International in which the national branch entrusts the international organization with certain tasks for the common good, for which the latter must account to the German branch in an orderly way and must submit the proof for review of the financial authorities. For non-profit funds donated in the Federal Republic need not also be disbursed in the Federal Republic.”

How simple: Greenpeace president David McTaggart, former construction tycoon and millionaire, has built up the environmental multinational according to all the rules of management, including the formation of many subsidiaries, in which Greenpeace acts as 100% stockholder. “But the sub-groups function as independent companies. Thus, the

environmental multinational is safe legally. In case damages must ever be paid, then the functioning of the entire organization is not called into question, and officials cannot simply freeze Greenpeace bank accounts.”

Globally, Greenpeace has over 350 employees, over 2 million regular contributors, plus occasional contributors who are mobilized in part through direct mailings, newspaper ads, and so forth. In the Federal Republic alone, *Greenpeace-Nachrichten (Greenpeace News)* appears in a press run of 600,000 and is distributed to newsstands by the Axel-Springer Publishing Company—making it one of the 10 largest West German magazines.

Greenpeace’s internal power structure corresponds to its professional business character. Campaigns are decided by the “Council,” on which the 22 member countries of the environmental multinational are represented. Only those national sections that are personally and financially independent and that make contributions to the international organization have a vote. Who has a vote is determined by the five-member international board of directors, with two seats for Europe and two for the other countries. McTaggart stands uncontested at the top. In practice, the international board of directors determines the overall international work, and also the use of “extraordinary expenditures.”

The West German national section is also built like a pyramid: At the top are the business leadership and the board of directors with three members, both chosen by the 25 full voting members, in contrast to the 500,000 support members who have no vote. That is, of the 70 full-time Greenpeace employees who work in the Hamburg office alone, less than one-half have a vote in the membership meetings. Wolfgang Fischer reports that a change in the by-laws is planned according to which former employees are not eligible to be full members. Thus, those who have devoted their labor, possibly their lives and health, are excluded from voting rights. The journalist Daniela Bolze, a member until 1982, had to leave Greenpeace after she criticized the hierarchical structure. There have been court suits against volunteer members who made similar criticisms. Moreover, according to Bolze, Greenpeace kept the number of its employees small for a long time, in order to prevent unionization.

Similarly, Greenpeace uses the work of 50 contact groups in West Germany, which industriously do advertising for Greenpeace, but have no influence on policy. There are licenses between the central and subgroups concerning the use of the rainbow logo—which supposedly was loaned to Greenpeace by the Cree Indians, without royalties, of course—as well as the signature and name “Greenpeace.” A quote from one contract: “The licensor retains the right to control all objects and actions that are related to the use of the trademark by the licensee or are connected with that use. . . . As payment for the herein granted license, the licensee will pay to the licensor those amounts that the licensor determines from year to year.”