

WITH PAUL DRIESSEN, ENVIRONMENTALIST AND AUTHOR OF ECO-IMPERIALISM



Paul Driessen is senior advisor with the Committee For A Constructive Tomorrow, Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise and the Congress of Racial Equality, one of America's oldest civil rights organizations, where he was a panellist for their 2004 Martin Luther King program. All three are non-profit public policy institutes that focus on energy, environmental, economic and human rights issues. His 25-year career includes tenures with the United States Senate and the U.S. Department of the Interior. Paul has spoken about health, economic development and eco-imperialist issues on many college campuses and in the media, and has testified as an expert witness before the United States Congress. Recently he delivered a series of lectures in the Netherlands and keynoted a debate on Eco-Imperialism and corporate social responsibility at Yale University. Paul Driessen holds a BA in geology and field ecology from Lawrence University and a JD from the University of Denver College of Law. His book, *Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death*, is in its second American printing, has been published in Spanish and will soon be available in Italian, African and Indian editions. he was interviewed after his lecture to the Frontier Centre in Winnipeg on December 9, 2004.

**Frontier Centre:** In his introduction to your book, the Congress of Racial Equality's Niger Innis describes the environmental movement as an \$8-billion a year international gorilla. Are they really that awash in cash – and where do they get it?

**Paul Driessen:** As best the experts can determine, they do apparently have that much cash. It is very hard to track because much of the government money, in particular, is not traceable. They are hardly transparent – the government is not saying and they are not saying – but the best anybody can come up is about \$8 billion a year for the international environmental community. It comes from individual contributions, corporations and government agencies, and from big charitable foundations – many of which originally got their money from natural resource development or manufacturing.

**FC:** You are calling them to account for hypocrisy, for adopting a posture of moral smugness all the while they engage in immoral activity. How have they insulated themselves from that self-perception? Are the intellectual blinders on?

**PD:** The insulation is due to several factors working together. One is that the news media are very friendly to them and very reluctant to engage in the level of scrutiny they give corporations. Another is the extensive PR efforts these activist groups can afford, which portray their organizations in the best possible light. People generally do care about the environment and don't know enough about what is going on, so they assume the best for these groups, even as they assume the worst for corporations. But another aspect of it is that in the United States (and I would venture to say probably in other countries as well) they are not obliged to follow the same rules that for-profit corporations must follow, such as the U.S. Lanham Act.. This law requires that corporations be honest in their statements about their products and services and, if they lie or misrepresent their own or their competitors' products and services, penalties can include injunctions, corrective advertising, product recalls, treble damages and, in egregious cases, attorney's fees and costs. But the non-profit world is exempt from this law – which was fine back years ago when not-for-profits meant basically the Red Cross. Today, though, it exempts activist groups that are pushing political agendas, and often lying about the nature

and extent of the problem, actions by corporations and the need for their policy prescriptions. I find it reprehensible that they insist on a totally different set of rules for themselves, particularly when they violate basic standards of integrity, honesty, accountability and transparency on a regular basis.

**FC:** Much of the rant from activists is reminiscent of the Luddites. How many people could the Earth support if we embraced their sentimental notions of pre-industrial economies?

**PD:** That's a tough one to answer, because there are so many variables. However, both Dr. Norman Borlaug and Denmark's Bichel Reoprt have concluded that, if we went to organic farming instead of modern industrialized agriculture, we would have to cultivate twice as much land, which would mean plowing under vast acreages of wildlife habitat. Or we would have to settle for half the productivity from the land we do cultivate, which would mean large numbers of people starving.

**FC:** We banned DDT because of bad science. It seemed to show it was causing great ecological harm and, therefore, millions now die from malaria. When did we discover that it had received a bad rap? Why is the public unaware of it?

**PD:** Many people knew it was receiving a bad rap right when it was getting a bad rap. One scientist's study that indicated bird eggs were thinned by the presence of DDT was castigated by his colleagues, who pointed out that the birds in his experiments had been fed 1/5 the normal amount of calcium – which is probably why they didn't have enough calcium to produce normal eggs. He re-did his study with normal calcium levels and the same amount of DDT. There was no eggshell thinning! But *Science* magazine refused to publish his new work, saying it would never publish anything that was not antagonistic to DDT. This is just one example of how Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, has effectively turned minds against DDT, because of the tremendous interest paid to her book and the many well-funded environmental groups that campaign against pesticides. As a result, people are still bombarded with half-truths and misrepresentations about DDT. So it is a slow process to make people realize not only that statements made about the chemical were false, but that taking this incredible pesticide out of the hands of people who are dying from diseases means rates go way up for

insect-borne diseases like malaria, typhus, yellow fever and dengue fever.

**FC: Environmentalist often oppose cattle and hog feed lots and are fanatically hostile to genetically modified grains that have made the Prairies one of the breadbaskets of the world. Only a small minority of farmers have gone organic. If they all did, what would happen?**

**PD:** As I mentioned earlier, the Bichel study calculated that if Denmark were to go organic, its agricultural productivity would plummet. Danish grain production would fall by 62 percent, pork and poultry output by 70 percent and potato production by 80 percent, largely because so much land would have to be devoted to growing grass and hay, to feed cattle, to produce manure, to fertilize crops and maintain soil fertility.

**FC: European governments also oppose GMOs, with the result that starving Africans cannot access food aid from North America. Why don't we just hand it out anyway?**

**PD:** It's a matter of getting past the bureaucracies and the upper class elites in those countries. Those agricultural ministries and upper classes benefit from trade with Europe. They don't want to see anything that's going to ruffle the feathers of European bureaucrats and agricultural ministers, who are trying to protect their own farmers in Europe.

**FC: Farm protectionism?**

**PD:** Yes. They will say that they would rather not get the grain or, if it has to come in, it must already be milled, which greatly increases the cost. The African bureaucrats don't want their people planting this superior grain, because they will get all kinds of grief from the Europeans.

**FC: How much real harm do you think is currently being done by such people? Is there reason to think that Third World countries are waking up to it?**

**PD:** There is definitely reason to think that Third World countries are waking up to it but the problem is increasingly severe, whether we're talking about pesticides or energy or GMO crops. Europe says it will ban all agricultural exports from any developing country if it detects a trace of GMO or DDT or certain other pesticides on any agricultural produce. The EU is also beginning to link developing nations' trade with Europe to their ratification of the oppressive Kyoto Protocol on climate change. I think more and more people in developing countries are starting to raise their hackles about all of this. We saw some of that at Johannesburg, where they basically rejected the Kyoto protocol because of what it would do to the developing world. However, poor people in these countries need to be encouraged to speak out more forcefully to their own ministers and demand equal protection – equal rights – under the law, vis-à-vis the Europeans.

**FC: The Sierra Club's belief that Manitoba should not further develop its hydro-electric resource seems counterintuitive. Aren't environmentalists supposed to support clean technologies?**

**PD:** They say they favour renewable energy, but they define that term very narrowly, to serve their political

agenda. Hydro power is the best renewable energy –the most reliable, since once you build the dam, you no longer need more land and can just rely on rain and snowfall to get abundant, reliable, affordable electricity. Wind power is intermittent, takes up hundreds of thousands of acres to produce electricity, and kills vast numbers of birds and bats in the process. If you are in favour of doing something about theoretical global warming, one would think you would want to get your energy from something that doesn't emit greenhouse gases, but here they are opposing one of the most efficient, renewable high tech sources of electricity. They also oppose nuclear. The question then becomes, where do we get our energy in the future – or do we simply have to go without?

**FC: What other problems do you see with windmills?**

**PD:** The electricity only gets produced when the wind is blowing within a certain ranges. That means you need back-up units of gas-fired power plants that can be turned on immediately when the wind turbines stop working, or you lose the electricity and whatever is running when there is a shutdown. The windmills also take huge amounts of land. For the United States to produce 20% of its electricity using wind power, you'd have to blanket acreage equal to the entire state of Virginia with windmills three hundred feet tall. In California, a single new 555-megawatt gas-fired power plant on 15 acres generates more electricity every year than do all 13,000 of that state's wind turbines, which cover 105,000 and kill over 10,000 raptors and other birds each year. Those are significant ecological impacts that wind power activists just brush under the rug.

**FC: What's your view on Kyoto and the whole climate change thing?**

**PD:** Kyoto is a very expensive misguided attempt to solve a problem that really doesn't exist. The models predict various degrees of global warming due to human activities, but weather balloon and satellite data do not back-up the models, and the models do a lousy job of replicating Earth's climate and weather systems. Moreover, even if all these countries adopted the Kyoto agreement and followed it to the letter – at a cost for the United States of an estimated \$300 billion per year – by the year 2050 global temperatures will have risen only 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one degree less than they would have if the Kyoto Protocol were not enacted. That's why climate activists are now saying we actually need a whole series of Kyoto treaties, 20 or even 40 of them, each one more restrictive than the last – and need to cut fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions by 60 to 80 percent, if we are to stabilize temperatures. The economic consequences would obviously be devastating, and none of these sacrifices would do a thing to address the enormous natural temperature changes that are caused by variations in solar energy output and other factors.

**FC: How would these treaties affect the Third World?**

**PD:** Third World countries are being pressured by Europe, the UN and environmental groups to avoid using fossil fuels to produce electricity and to forego improving their economies through manufacturing. They're being told that, because of global climate change, even though they haven't signed the Kyoto agreement, they shouldn't do anything

that's going to emit more greenhouse gases. In effect, they're being told not to address their real, immediate, life-or-death problems, to help protect the world from a distant, speculative problem.

**FC: Manitoba's largest forest company has fallen into the corporate responsibility trap and is allowing environmentalists to certify its harvest practices. Is it common for businesses to flirt in this way with people who really want to shut them down?**

**PD:** It is all too common. The activists either want to shut companies down or at least co-opt a portion of their profits and be in charge of their forestry and land management decisions. This ensures that money flows from the corporation to this organization that is going to certify their products, rather than to some other certification system that the forest products industry has developed. The net result is that environmental groups grow richer by imposing more and more restrictions on certain companies and gaining control over their operations and objectives, while the environmental gain is limited or nonexistent.

**FC: Objective indicators show steady improvement in air and water quality in North America. Isn't that to the credit of the environmental movement? Aren't the regulatory controls they insisted on responsible for the improvement?**

**PD:** They certainly played an important role. If the movement hadn't pushed for regulatory controls, we would probably be much further behind in achieving many of these air, water and other environmental gains. The problem is that they don't know when to stop, and rarely acknowledge the tremendous progress we have made. They continue to deceive people by saying air quality is getting worse when, in fact, it is getting better. They continue to utilize disingenuous claims about other environmental problems, to bring in more cash. As National Audubon Society chief operating officer Dan Beard has admitted, "What you get in your mailbox is a never-ending stream of crisis-related shrill material designed to evoke emotions, so that you will sit down and write a check." It's time to rein them in and demand honesty from them, too.

**FC: Environmentalists have won the day in the public schools, where children are fed a steady diet of green**

**propaganda. What do you recommend to restore balance?**

**PD:** This is another very difficult problem. The environmentalists have poured tremendous effort and money into getting this material into the schools, whether it is Rachel Carson's book, or some documents that they have put together or people coming in to give talks. Far too many of our educators have themselves been indoctrinated in these same beliefs and they are very intent on perpetuating and espousing these kinds of ideas. Industry and other concerned parents need to work together and take a hard look at factual, even-handed material like what is being developed by the Frontier Centre and similar organizations. The book "Facts not Fear" addresses a lot of these environmental myths, misconceptions and misrepresentations and presents the other side. It's another good starting point. But parents, companies and organizations that want to make sure their side of the issue is also discussed fully and fairly need to develop new materials that can go into the schools, insist that both sides of the story be told and, ensure that whatever is in the schools is based on science and not on pure emotions or some revenue generating ideology that is being pushed by activist groups.

**FC: The personal attacks on environmental heretics, like Patrick Moore and Bjorn Lomborg have been extreme and frightening. Are you getting the same sort of treatment?**

**PD:** Some, but not much so far. I'm obviously not at the high exposure level that Patrick Moore or Bjorn Lomborg have been, but there may be the additional factor that environmental groups may have recognized that they made a mistake by attacking these non-ideological ecologists so vigorously – and thereby drew more attention to Moore's and Lomborg's views, helped them sell more books, and gave them additional speaking engagements. There may also be concern that raising my profile will work against them and make my views even more commonly seen by the average person on the street. The fact is, though, that the human rights issues I'm raising need to be addressed fully in all public policy discussions, and I think this is beginning to happen.