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Final Paper:

A Case Study of the Formation of the Greenpeace Organization

Greenpeace is the largest independent environmental action organization is the world. Frank Zelko claims, “Its logo, at least in Western countries, is almost as recognizable as those of Coca-Cola and McDonald’s”(1). In its early days, during the 1970s, Greenpeace was primarily a sea-based protest group and its main focus was creating an anti-nuclear movement. In its past, a multitude of forces came together to impact the formation of Greenpeace. These include but are not limited to, advances in science, the development of ecology, the rise in popularity of eastern religions and the impact of Quakers. Each of these factors played a significant role in ensuring the success of this organization. I believe without anyone of them this organization wouldn’t have grown to be so successful, and had such a broad range of accomplishments.

The seventies was a groundbreaking decade when in came to improvements in technology. Intel invented the first microprocessor, the ink-jet printer was born, and on top of all that, the cell-phone was created. Amid all of this innovation there was also a rise in scientific research. One study especially significant to Greenpeace was Merril Eisenbud’s research with strontium-90 radiation. Eisenbud’s research took place in 1958, but by the 1970s it had become widespread knowledge for the first time.

In an article Barry Commoner published for *Science* magazine in 1959, he explains the implications of Eisenbud’s research and this article helps develop public awareness on of the dangers of high frequency radiation. Commoner thoroughly analyzes Merril Eisenbud’s research in the field and concludes that the excess radiation from strontium-90 enters and bone marrow of humans and deposits itself there. This then leads to have many adverse health effects. In the short term the strontium can effect the composition of milk produced by organisms. In fact it often led to organisms feeding their young poisonous milk. And as Zelko notes, “It is hard to imagine a more powerful symbol of impurity than the though of innocent and helpless infants threatened by the insidious contamination of their mother’s milk” (204). The data from Eisenbud’s research also shows that a significantly higher percentage of strontium-90 radiation is depositing itself in the bone marrow than predicted earlier (Commoner 2). And once strontium-90 is inside the bone marrow, it is linked to increased risk of leukemia and cancer.

Commoner’s article was only the beginning though. In many ways it created a chain reaction, where increased awareness led to increased scientific investigation and increased investigation led back to more awareness about the dangers of synthesized chemicals and nuclear reactors. As a result a cycle of investigation began and sparked hysteria through fear.

Fear is a strong motivator for humans, and I would say they most vital in inciting action. The fear that scientific awareness spread was synonymous to the fear in a much more infamous example: McCarthyism. As we had seen before the fear of communism caused Americans to take overly cautionary measures, and during the 1950s a similar sensation developed with regards to nuclear warfare. Popular movies like Neville Shute’s *On the Beach,* which depicted a future in which nuclear fallout known as World War III had polluted and wiped out all life in the northern hemisphere, helped to reinforce these fears in America. Zelko claimed it “propagated an increasingly gloomy cultural mood in which the nightmare scenario of a nuclear world war began to seem increasingly inevitable” (204). These fears were critical in motivating the anti-nuclear actions of Greenpeace.

The next factor that was vital to the formation of Greenpeace and its role in the anti-nuclear movement was the influence of the Quakers. Quakers were Protestant reformers, who settled and formed a society in present-day Pennsylvania. A lot of the activism within the peace movement was organized and put into action by the Quakers (Zelko 198). The Quakers “fundamental tenets”, as referred to by Zelko, lined up with the goals of the Greenpeace group. One principle they stressed heavily was pacifism. They were the first organization to ban slavery . In his paper Zelko claims, “Quakers believe that every person has direct access to God, everyone is a potential channel of truth, no mater how misguided they may seem at any given moment” (198). As a result they were highly opposed any wartime movements, especially the nuclear movement (Zelko 198).

The Quakers were responsible for introducing the Gandhi’s attitude of non-violent protest, known as *Satyagraha* to the United States (Zelko 199). As Zelko writes,” Its key principles included: refusing to return the assault of an opponent, refraining from insulting opponents, not resisting arrest, and behaving in an exemplary manner if taken prisoner” (199). These ideas were visible in the early protests and rallies of the Greenpeace organization against the production of nuclear weapons.

The Quakers pacifist methods included refusing to pay any war task and another form of protest known as “bearing witness” (Zelko 198). This simply meant that another person was present at the site of the activity being disapproved and just through their presence they placed a sense of ethical pressure on the wrongdoer (Zelko 198). The Quakers first official organized act of defiance was at a Nevada nuclear weapons testing facility in 1957. Here the Quakers displayed all four principles of *Satyagraha,* when they crossed over into a prohibited area, to “bear witness.” Since the Quakers’ goal was to simply oversee the process and hope the perpetuators would have a change of heart, they did not inflict any physical harm or verbally insult anyone at the nuclear weapons testing facility. Thus they demonstrated the first two key principles of *Satyagraha.* Eleven of those protestors were then arrested and didn’t refuse or dispute such a punishment fulfilling the last two key principles.

What is exemplary about their actions is that the Quakers managed to stick to their beliefs and remain calm in protest, even when their opponents’ views and responses were on the opposite end of the spectrum. Their nonaggressive efforts eventually did pay off when the *New York Times* wrote an article on them. This type of acknowledgement gave their actions and protests a huge validation boost. Without the Quakers, Greenpeace’s entire configuration and means of protest would have never developed so strongly or been as effective. Peaceful protest was the right choice to fit the group’s goals so they could achieve results without being labeled as hypocrites.

The third major factor that pushed the formation of Greenpeace was the influences of eastern religions. “Various religions such as Taoism, Jainism, Shinto and most notably Zen Buddhism”(Zelko 15), complemented the growth and vision of Greenpeace for a future. In this paper we will look at one specific case study: the diffusion of Zen Buddhism from Japan to America. For a single instance in history, all of the six steps Henry C. Finney, in his case study of the diffusion of Zen Buddhism form Japan to America, claimed need to exist to allow for the adoption of new religions, existed at once. The *first* step is the “predisposition of the source culture to export elements of its own culture”. In other words the host country must be willing to share their own religion and beliefs with others. This barrier was broken when Japan, after World War II, jumped back into the world economy and began trading with the United Sates. The *second* factor is the most active pursuit of exporting such religious beliefs and we can see this in the Japanese missionaries, who at the time were eager to try and convert westerners and worked with the Soto bureaucracy of the time to send emigrants there (Finney 393-394).

Together these two steps allowed America to receive knowledge about eastern religions, which they then chose to adopt. And although initially Greenpeace was solely an anti-nuclear group the ideas put forth by these religions helped to gradually shape its role as pro-nature group instead of solely anti-nuclear. The *third to fifth* steps discuss the new regions receptivity to the host regions views. And because of the countercultural trends during this time period, and rejection of many societal norms that were intricately linked to Christianity, people became more open to new ideas. Influential figures, like Maezumi, who founded the Zen Center in Los Angeles, helped lay the initial framework for this diffusion. California, because of its large hippie influence, became a major center for the movement. Even Hollywood eventually played a role in the movement with films like Seven Years in Tibet and Kundun. Seven Years in Tibet, describes the adventures of one man as he treks the Himalayas and finds himself in a Buddhist sanctuary with the Dalia Lama. The popularity of the religion by media, led it to soon be seen as the new ‘hip’ and ‘trendy’ path the follow (Finney 393 – 394).

The *sixth* and final step looks at how the receiving party responds to or reacts to the new religion (Finney 395). Zen Buddhism is a complex idea to understand, so the response to it is hard to quantify. It isn’t something physical that can be categorized, but rather an experience. The fundamental principle is so simple that is easy to overlook. Zen Buddhism emphasizes the notion of letting go of your individuality and merging with the universe. That last idea of become one with the universe is the key to Greenpeace. Christianity, the prominent religion before this, emphasized anthropocentrism. This is the idea that humans are the center of the universe and superior to all other creatures. Once eastern religions, like Zen Buddhism began coming in, they emphasized the idea that “nature should be respected rather than objectified or desacralized” (Zelko 15). Zen Buddhism stresses the harmonious interaction between man and all of nature, working together as one, and this was a strong influencer of Greenpeace’s shift to becoming pro-nature.

The ecology movement complemented the adoption of eastern religions. Both helped Greenpeace make its shift from solely an anti-nuclear organization to one that encompasses all green causes. The popularization of ecology began on Earth Day of 1970, which brought forth a wave of enthusiasm for the topic. The subject’s reputation reached its climax with the passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. This symbolized a huge step for the ecology movement, “because the underlying premise of the act is that humans have no right to willfully cause the extinction of other species, regardless of their value, or lack of value, for humans” (Devall 19). This made it socially acceptable for the first time for environmentalists to rebel against its destruction and pollution. As a result of this act Robyn Eckersley, a professor at the University of Melbourne, Australia, coined the phrase “beyond human racism”. This symbolized the newfound idea of equality for all organisms beyond those with whom we can directly communicate. This transcends the previous notion that since humans are at the top of the food chain, we have the right to regulate other animals, and presents the notion of non-discrimination between all organisms.

Devall’s research paper on the development of ecology explores the how, over the last four decades, ecology emerged as a distinguished branch of science. The paper differentiates between what it coins as ‘shallow ecology’ and ‘deep ecology’. Shallow ecology is only fighting against resource depletion and pollution, while deep ecology goes beyond that to target the root of the issue against sustainability (Devall 19). Greenpeace helped to transition environmentalists from shallow ecology to deep ecology and thanks to it “by the late 1960s, ecology had become a metaphor for a certain way of viewing the natural world and the place of human beings within it” (Zelko 14).

The modifications to ecology were intricately related to the Greenpeace movement. “Ecology became a wellspring from which environmentalism dew its core values” (Zelko 211). Soon after the term “green” was an indicator for a universal and holistic perspective (Zelko 215). The sudden popularity of the branch sparked rebellions by the Greenpeace groups. One such example occurred in Minnesota, where activists, in order to protest gasoline pollution, performed a mock burial of an internal combustion engine (Zelko 209). As a whole the popularization of ecology made it okay in the eyes of the public for such countercultural movements and the actions of Greenpeace to occur, without the fear of being ostracized. It symbolized the shift of the environmental movement from counterculture to mainstream culture. Accordingly, President Richard Nixon later proclaimed the seventies as the “decade of the environment” (Devall 20).

Advances in science, the development of ecology, the rise in popularity of eastern religions and the impact of Quakers, all placed crucial roles in shaping Greenpeace into the organization it is today. The lack of anyone of these factors would have probably not allowed for this organization to grow to its current day size and popularity. In fact, it is astonishing how far Greenpeace has managed to come over the last few decades. In 1976, it was an organization that was “four Greenpeacers grouped in a line who brought the Norwegian ship (with hunters trying to kill endanger seals) to a halt (1),” according to a *New York Times* articles written by Reuters. Now, Greenpeace has the establishment and resources to bring down entire corporations like Best Buy for destroying endangered species habitats and not taking any precautions to respect indigenous organisms rights.