

SILENT SPRING - THE AVIAN ARMAGEDDON

"Then a strange blight crept over the area . . . Some evil spell had settled on the community: Everywhere there was the shadow of death. There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example - where had they gone?"

The apple trees were coming into bloom, but no bees droned, so there would be no fruit. The roadsides, once so attractive, were now lined with browned and withered vegetation as though swept by fire.

Even the streams were now lifeless, all the fish had died. A white, granular powder still showed a few patches; some weeks before it had fallen like snow. No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.

"For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death." [Emphasis added.]

Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, 1962, page 2, and 15.

"Silent Spring"¹, first published in 1962, was a book written by Rachel Carson about the dangers of using industrial chemicals. With millions reading Rachel Carson's book, the Green's were galvanised into action, starting their first campaign against Industrialisation and Man. The campaign was filled with emotion, fear, guilt, and myths. Urgency was paramount. We had to act now because within fifteen years all the birds on the planet would be dead. If that did not scare you enough then cancer, solely caused by industrial chemicals, would spiral out of control and the longevity of American adults would fall to 43 years.

Once again, this would happen in fifteen years, a period chosen by the Greens for most of their campaigns in the next fifty years. This period was short enough to encourage rapid action, but long enough to delay the inevitable embarrassment of "prediction failure". By the time we could definitely show that the Greens were wrong, we were unable to reverse the damage that their campaigns had delivered.

For the first time, the Green's "End is Nigh Brigade" (See Handout 7-1) had sold the Western World a negative good (See Handout 6-2). Before anything happened, we were told to change our ways, at some expense in all senses of that word, and we would be rewarded by avoiding Avian Armageddon. So what did happen?

We were conned by the Greens. Decades after the predicted time of fifteen years, we find that there are birds everywhere. Well did 80% of the birds die? No. Well did 50% of the birds die? No. Well did 20% of the birds die? No. Undoubtedly, some birds have died as a direct consequence of contact with chemicals, but the percentage of affected deaths is such a small fraction of 1% that most commentators will not put a figure on it. We also saw a similar failure of the prediction of "cancer spiralling out of control" that would cause a dramatic drop in longevity. Undoubtedly, some cases of cancer may be triggered by coming into contact with industrial chemicals but, even today, you cannot claim that cancer, solely due to these

chemicals, has spiralled out of control. Decades after the prediction time of fifteen years, longevity of the American adult, depending on gender, has risen from the low seventies to high seventies and low eighties.

Somehow, Industrial Man survived Avian Armageddon!

Does that mean that there are no dangers in using chemicals – of course not! Let me use water as an example. Few would disagree that water brings many benefits to us as a community. However, it can be dangerous. If you were to hold an unsupervised three-day pool party for several four-year old children, there would be a significant risk that one of them would drown. Similarly, if you allowed your teenage children to have a water fight using boiling water, you would have to expect some injuries. Does that mean we have to ban that “dangerous chemical” called water? Of course not!

When realising the benefits gained from using any chemical, including water, our task is to maximise those benefits, while at the same time minimising all the disadvantages. As we grow up, we are taught how to minimise the dangers that accompany the use of water. While the benefits of using water outweigh the disadvantages, we will continue to use it. If for any reason, the balance of this trade off is reversed for any chemical, we would stop using it.

Unfortunately, the Greens rarely look at the benefits side of this trade off, and have their fear and emotion campaign solely focussed on the disadvantages. Holding such an unbalanced view is a well know trait of the Greens, and rarely leads to sensible decisions (NB. Environmentalists do not exhibit this trait. See Handout 6-1)

For instance, the Greens were quick to call for the banning of “dangerous chemicals” after the horrific accident at Bophal in India. An industrial accident released a chemical cloud that killed thousands of local people² who lived in close proximity to the plant. Yet in the same country, there were chemists using “dangerous chemicals” that significantly increased the productivity of agricultural crops which saved millions of Indians from starvation. You will always feel for those who died, and the thousands still suffering from that 1984 accident, but would you really ban “dangerous chemicals” to save these accident victims. If you did this, you would save them, but then watch millions of others starve to death? There has to be balance in making such decisions.

Consequences

Handout 7-2-1 looks at the consequences of the Silent Spring campaign and the lessons to be learnt from this Green campaign. The following is a short summary.

America took action first, and several chemicals were banned from being used in the country, among them “the poster child” of this campaign, DDT. In addition, significant restrictions on the use of many more chemicals were put in place. The

Green movement had come of age, and although these results were comparatively minor³, they cost the community several hundred million dollars. The non-dollar costs were to be much larger. Several other countries around the world, under similar Green pressure, followed America's action. For instance, the UN banned DDT, and European countries, in particular, forced their Green ideas down the throats⁴ of third world countries, insisting they should stop using DDT, even though it was the most cost effective means of controlling malaria.

As explained in Handout 7-2-1, many believe that the decisions taken about these chemicals were irrational. Even, if you disagree, and believe they were rational decisions, I believe they were probably the wrong decision. In looking at the trade off between the disadvantages and benefits of using these chemicals, the decision makers would have made the false assumption that the main disadvantages included the loss of all bird life and a spiralling rise in cancer deaths. In hindsight, this assumption was laughably wrong. Interestingly, now knowing how wrong this assumption was, all but one of these decisions has never been revisited. In 2006, the UN did reverse its ban on DDT to help combat malaria which *had* "spiralled out of control". Some estimate that 35 million people died unnecessarily in the Third World, because the West forced the banning of DDT on these countries (See Handout 7-2-1).

Lessons to be Learnt

The following traits and 'modus operandi'⁵ were exhibited by the Greens in this campaign and, because of the success of the campaign, have been honed and repeated in each of their campaigns in the past fifty years:

1. The campaign relied heavily on propaganda that was based on fear, emotion, guilt, and myths; while a few grams of facts would be sprinkled into this brew to enhance credibility.
2. Most, if not all, of their dialogue lacked balance. They did not hesitate to lie and deceive.
3. The propaganda was repeated often enough to "brainwash" those who either, did not have the time or inclination, to critically analyse the Greens' assertions. Once convinced, the ill-informed, but emotionally committed people brought political pressure to bear, leading to irrational decisions.
4. Scientists, behaving more like ideologues, would hide behind the skirts of science and use the status of science to give credibility to the Greens' arguments. (Those in doubt need to reread Carson's words at the top of the first page of this Handout, and ask yourself if this sounds like an emotional appeal or a disinterested marine biologist⁶ rationally using a factual argument. Also, we need to remember that Carson and the hundreds of scientists who supported her views were so unbelievably wrong.) This campaign was the first in which we saw "Green ideologue wolves dressed as scientists" misleading the community.
5. The Greens selling the community a "negative good" (See Handout 6-2).

6. The creation of undue urgency through arbitrary chosen time lines.
7. The fear campaign being based on some form of Armageddon. Man causes this Armageddon, and it can only be avoided by everyone adopting a Green lifestyle, and allowing the Greens to control different facets of our lives.
8. Finally, the waste of time, effort, and money from following the Greens' advice. These costs have increased with each new campaign.

Notes:

1. Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1962.
2. Estimates of deaths range from 2,259 to 15,000. Several thousand people still suffer from the effects of the accident today (2010).
3. Many, at the time, saw it as a political gesture where these token actions were taken to silence the Greens.
4. On offering to provide food aid to starving third world people, the European countries insisted, as a condition of delivery, that the receiving countries should stop using DDT.
5. Handout 7-2-1 gives more detail on each of these traits.
6. Rachel Carson was a marine biologist