

Political analysis of the book *Green is the new Red* by Will Potter

Varun Jain

Trainer,Lovely Professional University

Abstract:

Various catastrophic changes that are taking place today have caused an environment of fear and uncertainty. The Australian bush fires have resulted in a loss of immense flora and fauna. Many scientists blame the bush fires to the increasing temperatures caused due to warming of the earth. Last year Australia saw its average highest temperature at 41.9 degree Celsius on 18 December (source: BBC news "How did Australia fires start and what is being done? A very simple guide").

There are other instances where the impact of human exploitation of natural resources has been huge be it the destruction of around 2000 species of rare plants and animals including micro organisms on a daily basis due to felling of trees in the Amazon rain forests or the rampant killing of wild animals like bats and dogs and cats for human consumption. Most of the time it is seen that the powerful have tried to reverse the rhetoric of environmental protection by the use of their money and influence. This is what will be deliberated upon from Will Potter's book, "Green is the new Red" first published in the year April 2011.

Keywords: Environment, terrorism, lobbyists, activists, eco-terrorism, Earth first, animal cruelty, government, industry, free trade

Will Potter was working as a journalist for The Chicago Tribune when the bug for environmental activism saw him distributing leaflets to make people aware of the anti-animal activities of the Huntingdon Life Sciences firm. Huntingdon life sciences conducts clinical trials of various medicines on animals and is believed to have been killing around 75000 animals each year and has major pharmaceutical brands as its clients. For the distribution of leaflets which is not a criminal offence, Will Potter was summoned by the FBI and threatened to not getting the fullbright scholarship (which ultimately he did not get and the reason of which he could not ascertain) and also threatened to end his career. He was asked to become an informer of the FBI for giving information of the clandestine activities of various animal rights activists groups like the Earth liberation front (ELF), The animal liberation front (ALF) and "Earth First" to which he blatantly refused.

He and many other activists who had to face criminal charges underwent a transition in the way government and policy makers branded them. They were labelled as terrorists more precisely eco-terrorists. This was not a sudden tag. It was a gradual transition which occurred over the history of America changing from a "red scare" during the governance of Joseph Mycarthy (Mycarthyism) or the potential rise of communism to the "Green scare" in which these Animal protection groups and ecological protection groups were labelled as terrorist outfits and a potential threat to the US.

But how did this all start? The awareness on the nature was initially brought about by John Muir's essays and his environmental philosophy. Then came "A Sand County Almanac" by American forester Aldo Leopold (January 11, 1887-April 21, 1948) in 1949 which advocated that there existed a responsible relation between people and the land they inhabited. Fast forward 1962 and came Rachel Carson's (May 27, 1907-April 14, 1964) "Silent Spring" which brought to the fore the indiscriminate use of pesticides in agriculture. The trigger to write the book came from an incident in which a farmer reported dying of birds near his field after DDT was sprayed by the government agencies onto his land. Her revolutionary work led to the total banning of DDT in the United States. Then came Edward Abbey's (January 29, 1927 - March 14, 1989)

“The monkey wrench gang” which advocated sabotage as a means of achieving one’s ends of protecting animals and mother earth. Edward said, “ Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul”.This is the point at which the revolution gained momentum from being an awareness campaign to a resistance movement. The monkey wrench began to symbolize anything that was meant to thwart the environmentally destructive plans of any organization and it also inspired the formation of “Earth First” ,a radical environmental advocacy group that emerged in the Southwestern United States in 1979.

But how these activities came to be labelled as terrorist activities and these crusaders as Ecoterrorists remains to be seen .According to Will Potter, terrorism can never be defined independent of the group doing the defining. Nelson Mandela ‘s activities against apartheid in South Africa were labeled as acts of terrorism because they were acting against government policy but later on as he achieved success,he was given the Nobel peace prize and returned as the president of South Africa.So basically any form of violence directed against the government is labelled as an act of terrorism whereas if a nation does that,it is regarded foreign policy. Anyways, a government represents its people so anything that is directed against the government ought to be regarded as acts of terrorism. But this matter is not to be pondered upon in detail here .The question remains how come a peacefully protesting organization became hazardous for the government .Was it because they had formed solid organizations and were working according to a plan or was it because the influential or the people whom they were directly involved with and who were leading big businesses had a keen interest to thwart their designs.In hindsight ,yes,this was indeed the case.

Ron Arnold of “Centre for the defense of free enterprise” turned the tide to label these environmentalists as terrorists. The lobbyists of such industries that had an adverse impact on the ecology used money to get their work done.For example,it is mentioned that Frank Riggs , a representative from California took money from the logging industry to get the redwood forests(Headwaters) cut.The company involved was Pacific Lumbers company. Bribing of politicians is not an uncommon act. In “Beyond the hill: A directory of Congress from 1984 to 1993” by Rebecca Borders and C.C dockery ,Bosco ,another attorney is said to have received 15000\$ a month to lobby for the Pacific Lumber Company.When politicians are directly involved with these industry heads,the environmental sustainability is obvious to take a thrashing.

It was not that the environmental activism was purely non violent .There were cases of arson and destruction of public property by the activists. A sea shepherd conservation society founded by Paul Watson began ramming whaling vessels in Japan. Japan had a bigtime whale killing program which it said was for scientific purpose but that was not the case.There was a research clause in the “international Whaling Commission “ rules which Japan took advantage of.These whales were then sold in the open markets or displayed in exhibitions.

In another case,The ELF or the Earth Liberation Front which was more violent than the rest(although no killings were done by any of these groups) and considered itself “The burning rage of this dying planet” burned down multiple buildings of Vail Ski resort which was expanding by cutting down forests.This caused a loss of around 26 million dollars.The ELF said it did it to save the Lynx which is a cat found in the northern areas of North America.Till date,environmental activism has caused a total loss of 40 million dollars by way of rescuing of animals from labs and acts of arson and sabotage.

It is rightly said that if a government does not respond to peaceful protests which are done to bring about a change,it will have to deal with violent protests.In this case ,the environmentalists who worked peacefully for restoration of nature and its species were dubbed as terrorists which further annoyed them into resorting to unfair means like vandalising of public property which did not cause loss of life but may have triggered it. They never thought of instilling fear among the masses like terrorism does. In fact in the history of the activities of these environmental groups ,not a single death has been reported.Various companies have come up with Crisis management teams which make sure that their business plans ,howsoever adverse impact they might have on the environment ,are not jeopardized.In the words of Ron Arnold who has been an opponent of the environmental movement, “ We want to destroy Environmentalists by taking away their money and members.”

So it is by far imperative to see how far these activists can go in bringing about fundamental change in the thought process of the majority. The changing times have made it even more pertinent to address these issues lest there is an extinction of the species considered as the most intelligent on this planet earth.

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