

IDEAS  
ON LIBERTY

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## Average Americans versus Environmentalists



A few years ago *American Enterprise* magazine carried an article by Karl Zinsmeister titled “Environmentalists vs. Scientists.” It’s mostly a report on research published by two academics, Stanley Rothman and Robert Lichter, in their book *Environmental Cancer: A Political Disease*. The authors surveyed a cross-section of environmental leaders at organizations such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defense Fund, Nature Conservancy, and National Audubon Society. Identically worded survey questions were administered to different groups of scientists. Among the groups surveyed was the American Association for Cancer Research, whose members are specialists in carcinogenesis or epidemiology.

It turns out that scientists and environmentalists hold markedly different views. Sixty-seven percent of cancer specialists believe there’s no cancer epidemic, while only 27 percent of environmental activists hold the same view. Only 27 percent of cancer specialists agree with the statement “industry causes rising cancer rates,” while 64 percent of environmentalists do. The scientists didn’t trust the media. Only 22 percent of cancer specialists consider the *New York Times*’s reporting on cancer topics to be trustworthy and only 6 percent found the TV network news to be so.

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When 400 climatologists, oceanographers, and atmospheric scientists were asked whether evidence supports the “greenhouse effect” theory, 41 percent agreed compared to 66 percent of environmentalists. Similarly, 51 percent of energy scientists say nuclear power plants are safe compared to only 10 percent of environmentalists.

Environmentalists not only differ from scientists, but they are markedly different from the general public as well. Environmental activists are a narrow elite: 76 percent are male, 97 percent are white, and a third have incomes over \$100,000. They are also unrepresentative of America politically. Sixty-three percent describe themselves as “liberals,” compared to 18 percent of the general public. Only 6 percent are Republicans; ten times as many are Democrats.

Environmentalists support causes like race quotas, abortion on demand, and special homosexual rights at rates of 70 to 80 percent, versus 34 to 40 percent of the general public. Rothman and Lichter say in summary, “Although most Americans are willing to describe themselves as environmentalists, from these data it seems clear that environmental activists do not speak for the public. . . . The perspective and background of this movement’s leadership are considerably removed from those of the majority.”

The authors of the study don’t quite reach a conclusion that I’ve reached about environmental activists, whose agenda calls for confiscation of private property and control over the lives of ordinary citizens. Back in

the 1960s and 70s America's leftists called themselves socialists and communists. They were the people who paraded around college campuses singing praises to tyrants like Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, and Pol Pot. Today the communist system has been revealed as both a miserable failure and a system of unprecedented brutality. Thus communism and socialism have become embarrassments. Environmentalism is the new name for an old agenda.

### Little Regard for Human Life

It is not hard to understand how radical environmentalists sympathize with tyrants who have little regard for human life. One need go no further than their own statements, such as those cited in Chris Horner's article "In Gaia We Trust," in the Competitive Enterprise Institute's *Monthly Planet* newsletter (February 2003):

- Ecologist Lamont Cole said, "To feed a starving child is to exacerbate the world population problem."
- Regarding the deaths of millions of people because of a worldwide prohibition on DDT spraying, Charles Wursta of the Environmental Defense Fund said,

"This is as good a way to get rid of them as any."

- Paul Watson, founder of Greenpeace, said, "I got the impression that instead of going out to shoot birds, I should go out and shoot the kids who shoot birds."

Then there are statements like these:

"While the death of young men in war is unfortunate, it is no more serious than the touching of mountains and wilderness areas by humankind." —David Brower, founder of Friends of the Earth, and former executive director of Sierra Club.

"Human happiness, and certainly human fecundity, are not as important as a wild and healthy planet." —David M. Graber, research biologist with the National Park Service

"Human beings, as a species, have no more value than slugs." —John Davis, editor of *Earth First Journal*

Davis also opined, "I suspect that eradicating small pox was wrong. It played an important part in balancing ecosystems."

Is it not obvious that these people have an abiding contempt for humankind? □