

MAKING GREENPEACE:

The Development of Direct Action Environmentalism in British Columbia

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BRITISH COLUMBIA SEEMS an unlikely birthplace for a radical new form of environmentalism. A vast, rugged, sparsely populated land, its political culture was almost entirely shaped by the resource extractive industries that dominated its economy into the 1970s. From the early 1950s onward, the Social Credit (Socred) government, under the leadership of the demagogic W.A.C. Bennett, aggressively promoted a virulent form of interventionist state capitalism aimed at wringing the utmost from the province's vast reserves of timber and mineral wealth. And the population, by and large, approved. Bennett was able to forge a stable electoral majority based on the support of big business, rural conservatives, petit-bourgeois shopkeepers, and the anti-socialist middle classes in Vancouver and Victoria. Nor did Social Credit's major opponents – the province's powerful labour unions – have a more benign view of humankind's relationship with the natural world. They sought a more equitable distribution of the province's resource wealth rather than resource conservation or wilderness preservation. Moreover, the distant federal government had little influence upon British Columbia's management of its public land. Even if Ottawa had possessed powers akin to those of Washington, DC, over its vast western hinterland, there is little in the history of Canadian conservation to suggest that things would have been substantially different. Finally, until the late 1960s, there were no influential environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club, active in the province.

Yet hardy plants sometimes spring forth from barren soils, and soils are sometimes less infertile than they seem. By the late 1960s, a series of events, many of them distant and having no direct connection to life in British Columbia, had helped prepare a small patch of ground that gave root to a new movement combining ecology, radical pacifism, and non-

violent direct action. These events included the Vietnam War, American nuclear testing in the Aleutian Islands, the rise of the counterculture, and a growing anti-Americanism on the part of many Canadians. These developments, along with various demographic and social changes that increasingly differentiated Vancouver from the province's hinterland, led to the emergence, in the city in particular, of a vibrant oppositional subculture. Many of those influential in the creation of the subculture were instrumental in the founding of Greenpeace, one of the earliest, most long-lived and influential direct action environmental organizations.

The ideological and social origins of Greenpeace lay well beyond the city of its formation. The American peace movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a crucial influence. The New Left, the counterculture, and popular ecology – all primarily American phenomena – were also vital to the development of Greenpeace's unique form of environmental activism. This is not to suggest, however, that Vancouver was merely a stage for the playing out of American ideas and movements; rather, the particular socio-political conditions in Vancouver – and in British Columbia and Canada as a whole – supplemented and reshaped these American phenomena, in the process creating new forms of protest and communicative action. Before we can examine the cultural ferment of Vancouver in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, we need to turn our attention to the location from which many of Greenpeace's ideas – and, indeed, several of its founders – emerged.

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Much of the twentieth-century peace movement in the United States was inspired, if not directly organized, by various groups of Quakers. Pacifism is one of the fundamental tenets of Quakers, who stemmed from a group of seventeenth-century religious dissenters in Elizabethan England. Because Quakers believe that every person has direct access to God, everyone is a potential channel of truth, no matter how misguided they may seem at any given moment. By stifling this potential, violence and warfare only serve to suppress love, truth, and freedom. This testimony led the Friends, as Quakers called themselves, to oppose all wars and preparations for wars. Many refused to pay war taxes or to be conscripted, actions that frequently incurred the wrath of non-Quakers during wartime. Another form of protest was the notion of "bearing witness," which involved registering one's disapproval of an activity and putting moral pressure on the perpetrators simply through one's presence at the scene. When the United States entered the First

World War in 1917, several prominent Quakers, including Rufus Jones and the chocolate manufacturer Henry Cadbury, formed the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in an effort to bring greater organizational focus to Quaker pacifism. The AFSC aimed to harness traditional Quaker sentiments and to direct them into specific channels, where they could be useful in promoting peace and justice. In the interwar years, the AFSC broadened its social activism, feeding the children of striking Appalachian miners and helping to organize agricultural and craft cooperatives among sharecroppers and workers who were victims of the Great Depression. Although its critique of poverty, corporate concentration, and militarism placed the AFSC in the camp of the ideological left, it went to great lengths to ensure that it remained politically non-partisan. During the Spanish Civil War, for example, it sent relief aid to both the Republicans and the Loyalists.¹

It was the Quakers who were largely responsible for introducing Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent protest, or *Satyagraha*, to the US. *Satyagraha*, which derived from the Hindi term for "truth-seeking," evolved from Gandhi's long struggle for Indian independence from British rule and became the foundation for most of the non-violent direct action movements of the twentieth century. 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. From these precepts Gandhi derived an escalating program of non-violent protest measures, from negotiation and arbitration through to agitation, strikes, civil disobedience, usurping the functions of government, and, finally, setting up a parallel government. In the late 1940s and 1950s, pacifist organizations such as Peacemakers and the War Resisters League employed various *Satyagraha* tactics to protest the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In 1955 the American Friends Service Committee published a short book entitled *Speak Truth to Power*, which offered a pacifist critique of US foreign and domestic policy and sketched out a path to a peaceful society based on non-violent principles. The root cause of the malaise afflicting the modern world, according to the AFSC, was not some illusory clash of ideologies between East and West but, rather, the effort to master nature and the "glorification of material things" that had come to characterize modern industrial societies, regardless of their political underpinnings. Humankind's conquest of nature, "far from giving [us] mastery over

¹ Margaret H. Bacon, *The Quiet Rebels: The Story of the Quakers in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 9-17, 182; Robert Cooney and Helen Michalowski, eds., *The Power of the People: Active Nonviolence in the United States* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), 130-1.

[our] world ... has apparently brought with it only the fulfillment of terrifying prophecy" in the form of a potential Armageddon. And "Man's ... failure to set any limits on his material needs" was a form of "idolatry lead[ing] him to lust for power, to disregard human personality, to ignore God, and to accept violence or any other means of achieving his ends."² For many pacifists and those who had perhaps flirted with the idea of embracing a non-violent philosophy, *Speak Truth to Power* tied together many of the loose ends of pacifist thought and appeared to offer a trenchant critique of US militarism as well as an attractive solution to the nation's political and social ills. Admittedly, it preached mostly to the converted, but it galvanized the Quaker and pacifist communities. It is no coincidence that when it was published more radical forms of non-violent direct action began to flourish. Furthermore, its critique of humankind's drive to dominate nature and of the crass materialism that was a hallmark of 1950s America presaged the values that would characterize the modern environmental movement and pointed towards the links between unfettered industrial and military development and environmental destruction.

While *Speak Truth to Power* provided radical pacifists with a guiding text, the Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA) became the conduit for their actions. Founded in 1957 by a group of Quakers who were looking for a more dynamic form of protest than the AFSC was willing to risk, CNVA brought together representatives of all the major pacifist groups, such as the War Resisters League and Peacemakers, with the purpose of conducting non-violent direct actions that local groups could not conduct on their own. Their first action was a civil disobedience campaign at a Nevada nuclear weapons testing facility in 1957 in which eleven pacifists crossed over into a prohibited area and were placed under arrest.³ The *New York Times* commented that this action "marked the unusual employment in this country of the 'civil disobedience' tactics made famous by M.K. Gandhi."⁴ According to Gene Sharp, a scholar who has written extensively on non-violent action, such protests, which he refers to as "non-violent invasions," constitute a significant step in the evolution of a more radical form of non-violent protest, entailing civil disobedience and the risk of severe repression.⁵

² AFSC, *Speak Truth to Power: A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence* (Philadelphia: AFSC, 1955), 1-2, 28.

³ Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels against War: The American Peace Movement, 1933-1983* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 246.

⁴ Quoted in Roger C. Peace III, *A Just and Lasting Peace: The US Peace Movement from the Cold War to Desert Storm* (Chicago: Noble Press, 1991), 27.

⁵ Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Extending Horizons Books, Porter Sargent, 1973), 382.

In 1958 CNVA initiated one of its most innovative and, in retrospect, influential actions when it organized a yacht, the *Golden Rule*, to sail into the Eniwetok nuclear testing zone in the Pacific. The voyage was led by Albert Bigelow, the former captain of a navy destroyer who had become a devout Quaker. He and his crew hoped that the action would act like "a magnifying glass to focus the rays of conscience" on the immorality of nuclear weapons.⁶ Bigelow and his crew of three set sail from California in their thirty-foot ketch and made it to Hawaii before encountering resistance from the US Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). At the time, there were no laws that specifically barred people from entering the atomic proving grounds. It was simply assumed that military warnings and the threat of radiation sickness would keep people from deliberately sailing into the site. However, once it became clear that the crew of the *Golden Rule* was determined to sail from Hawaii toward the Marshall Islands, the AEC employed a tactic, which a US Court of Appeals would later deem illegal, to prevent the boat from leaving Honolulu. They issued, without public hearing, a regulation that made it a crime for US citizens to enter the test area and then arrested Bigelow and his crew for their stated intention of violating that regulation. The crew members of the *Golden Rule* refused bail on principle and were kept in a Honolulu prison for most of the summer while awaiting trial.⁷ The *Golden Rule* inspired several imitators, including the *Phoenix*, a yacht captained by Earle Reynolds, a physical anthropologist who had worked in Hiroshima for the AEC. Reynolds and his family managed to sail into the test zone near Bikini Atoll before being arrested by the coast guard and flown back to Hawaii.⁸

In 1959, CNVA sponsored Omaha Action, a campaign against the ICBM plant near Omaha, Nebraska. For seven days and nights, pacifists held a vigil outside the gates of the plant hoping to draw attention to the new nuclear weapons delivery system, which, they felt, would escalate the threat of war. After being denied access to the meeting rooms and churches in the nearby town, being ignored by the mass media, and being refused permission to talk to workers in the plant, the pacifists decided to engage in a non-violent invasion. So, in front of the townspeople and journalists, the seventy-four-year-old dapperly dressed paterfamilias of the peace movement, A.J. Muste, painfully but determinedly climbed over the fence and was arrested. Others soon followed and were also arrested and given six-month suspended sentences and \$500 fines.

⁶ Albert Bigelow, *The Voyage of the Golden Rule: An Experiment with Truth* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1959), 36-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 112 and passim.

⁸ Earle Reynolds, *The Forbidden Voyage* (New York: David McKay Company, 1961).

Omaha Action was followed in 1960 by Polaris Action, in which a group of CNVA activists in New London, Connecticut, organized a series of protests over several months at the docks where the nuclear-armed Polaris submarines were being constructed. The activists repeatedly tried to enter the docks and paddled boats bearing peace messages into the path of launching vessels. On several occasions protestors also attempted to board a submarine, and two of them managed to succeed by swimming through the cold November waters and climbing up the vessel's guide ropes. This event garnered considerable media attention but also earned the activists a stiff nineteen-month jail term. Such innovative and daring direct action tactics, which strikingly foreshadowed Greenpeace's actions in the 1970s, were supplemented by an educational campaign aimed at dissuading locals from participating in the manufacture of the submarines.⁹

The most direct connection between the American radical pacifism of the 1950s and 1960s, and the founding of Greenpeace in Vancouver a decade later, was a Jewish couple from Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁰ Irving Stowe, a Yale-educated lawyer, was an intelligent, articulate, and highly opinionated man who was active in an array of progressive movements after the Second World War. His wife, Dorothy, who worked as a social worker, shared Irving's commitment to the peace movement and civil rights, and the two of them were members of the local AFSC branch in Providence. Irving and Dorothy Stowe were certainly not among the leaders of the peace movement during the 1950s. Nonetheless, they participated in many of the protest activities that took place on the northeastern seaboard throughout the 1950s. They took part in CNVA's Polaris Action and were part of a group of anti-nuclear demonstrators picketing a speech by President Eisenhower at a military base at Fort Adams, Rhode Island. Irving protested against civil defence exercises in Providence by refusing to take shelter when the warning sirens sounded, and he and Dorothy were also active in the civil rights movement.¹¹

The Stowes were part of a small but significant element of the American population who questioned the path that their nation was

⁹ Wittner, *Rebels against War*, 262; Cooney and Michalowski, *Power of the People*, 140-1; Charles DeBenedetti, *The Peace Reform in American History* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), 161.

¹⁰ According to the Brown University Alumni Association, Stowe's original name was Irving Strasmich. He did not change it until his family moved to New Zealand in the 1960s, presumably so that they could better fit in to that nation's Anglo-centric culture. See <www.brown.edu/Administration/Brown_Alumni_Magazine/01/11-00/features/environment.html>. For the sake of consistency, and to minimize confusion, I will refer to him by his adopted name only.

¹¹ Author's interview with Dorothy Stowe, Vancouver, 4 November 2000.

taking and attempted to divert it. A 1959 poll of its readers by the radical pacifist *Liberation* magazine provides a profile of this group's social origins and political views. Most were middle-class intellectuals and highly educated professionals (the largest single occupational category was "teacher"), who were generally left wing in their social views. A majority were members of pacifist and civil rights organizations, with Peacemakers, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the AFSC being the most prominent among them. Their reading included such magazines and journals as *Peace News*, *The Nation*, *Dissent*, *The Progressive*, and *Peacemaker*, and they opposed loyalty oaths and the spanking of children while defending homosexuality and interracial marriage.¹² Clearly, such people constituted a very small minority of the American population, a fact that helps explain why radical pacifism never became the mass movement its architects had envisioned. Quakerism, democratic socialism, and *Satyagraha*, despite their philosophical compatibility with many core American values, held little appeal for postwar Americans in the thrall of consumerism and living in fear of a nuclear attack. Charles DeBenedetti, a historian of the US peace movement, cogently observed that, although the peace movement "lives in the application of certain symbols esteemed by the larger culture ... [it] stands as a minority reform in America because it constitutes a subculture opposed to the country's dominant power culture and power realities."¹³

The Stowes were not among the most radical members of the peace movement. Irving was a tax lawyer throughout the 1950s. Neither he nor Dorothy was ever arrested, and they never contemplated sailing a boat into a nuclear test zone (that would come later). In one respect, however, they were willing to go further than most. Deeply dismayed by their nation's military program, which they felt was leading the world inexorably towards nuclear war, Irving and Dorothy began to think about leaving the United States. This was a difficult, if not drastic, step for citizens of a nation that took pride in its tolerance and acceptance of oppressed peoples from around the world. The critical factor convincing the Stowes to leave the United States was the discovery, in the late 1950s, of radioactive strontium 90 in mother's milk and in human bone and tissue samples – a development that was directly attributable to atmospheric nuclear weapons testing.¹⁴

¹² From *Liberation*, vol. 4, November 1959, 14–16, summarized in Wittner, *Rebels against War*, 238–9.

¹³ DeBenedetti, *Peace Reform*, 197, 199.

¹⁴ For example, see L.Z. Reiss, "Strontium-90 Absorption by Deciduous Teeth" *Science* 134 (1961): 1669–73.

It is hard to imagine a more powerful symbol of impurity than the thought of innocent and helpless infants threatened by the insidious contamination of their mothers' milk. Scientists such as Barry Commoner began to investigate the potential health consequences of nuclear testing – consequences that had been downplayed and little discussed by the AEC. Along with Rachel Carson's investigation into the damage caused by the copious and indiscriminate use of modern pesticides, the threat of leukemia and long-term genetic damage posed by nuclear fallout were key elements in the emergence of the public concern about toxic chemicals in the environment. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, countless articles began to appear in the popular media dealing with the health effects of fallout, with scientists forecasting drastic increases in leukemia and genetic deformities as a direct consequence of this contamination.¹⁵ In short order, popular films and novels such as Neville Shute's *On the Beach* (1957), Helen Clarkson's *The Last Day* (1959), and Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1959) reflected and fanned these fears and helped to propagate an increasingly gloomy cultural mood in which the nightmare scenario of a nuclear world war began to seem increasingly inevitable, particularly to people such as the Stowes, who were predisposed towards such pessimistic predictions.¹⁶

Such fears led people to explore potential postnuclear holocaust survival strategies. One notion that gained some currency was that the inhabitants of the southern hemisphere stood a better chance than did those in the north. Because the Stowes were convinced that the United States would inevitably become involved in a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, and that children raised in the United States had a higher chance of contracting a deadly disease because of nuclear fallout, they decided, in 1960, to immigrate to New Zealand. This small, relatively remote country with less than three million people located some forty degrees south of the equator and 1,000 miles east of Australia, came closest to fulfilling their criteria of being an English-speaking nation in the southern hemisphere with a temperate climate and common law

¹⁵ For example, the *Saturday Evening Post*, edited by influential pacifist Norman Cousins, published an article by Steven Spencer entitled "Fallout: The Silent Killer," 29 August 1959, 26, 89; and 5 September 1959, 86; Bohlen interview; Ralph H. Lutts, "Chemical Fallout: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Radioactive Fallout, and the Environmental Movement," *Environmental Review* 9 (1985): 210–25.

¹⁶ Robert A. Divine, *Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate, 1954–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 262–80. For more on the doomsday literature of the era, see W. Warren Wager, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982). Jack G. Shaheen, ed., *Nuclear War Films* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978) analyzes the films of the period.

tradition. For many Americans, such drastic action would have been incomprehensible; others saw it as cowardly and unpatriotic. To those outside the radical pacifist community, the Stowes must have seemed, at best, stubborn idealists, at worst, chronic misfits. It took them some time to gain the New Zealand government's permission – apparently Dorothy's membership in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was a red flag for the immigration officials – but in 1961 the Stowes settled in Auckland, where they remained for the next five years. Neither Irving nor Dorothy would ever live in the United States again.¹⁷

In May of 1965, responding to US pressure to fulfill its obligation as part of the Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) alliance, the New Zealand government decided to send troops to Vietnam. The Stowes were outraged. The long tentacles of US militarism, they felt, had entangled them again, creating a morally intolerable situation. Once more they decided to uproot their family and search for a new home. Australia, which was also engaged in the Vietnam War effort, was out of the question, as was apartheid South Africa. Europe was regarded as a potential theatre of nuclear war. The only realistic option – though hardly an ideal one given its proximity to the United States – was Canada. Irving had stopped over in Vancouver once on a flight between New Zealand and the United States and was greatly impressed with the spectacular city nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the mountains. So, in 1966, the Stowes left New Zealand and settled in a city a few miles from the US border.¹⁸

A second activist couple, whose role in the founding of Greenpeace matched that of the Stowes, was Jim and Marie Bohlen, who moved to Vancouver from the Quaker stronghold of Philadelphia. Both, oddly enough, had been born on 4 July 1926. Despite this auspicious birthday, however, neither was a traditional American patriot. Jim had been raised in New York City, where his family had many friends who were members of the American Communist Party. While Bohlen admired certain aspects of communist ideology, he was never entirely convinced by it. He spent the Second World War as a navigator aboard a destroyer, before returning to his hometown to study engineering at New York University. Initially, he had set out to live the middle-class American dream, and his engineering skills eventually helped him land well remunerated jobs within the US military industrial complex. By the mid-1950s,

¹⁷ Stowe interview.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

however, Bohlen began to question the values that undergirded that lifestyle and that compelled him to strive for the trappings of middle-class success. According to Bohlen, the trigger for this reflection was neither the nuclear arms race nor McCarthyism but, rather, the works of the maverick American author, Henry Miller. While in Paris during the 1950s, Bohlen had picked up a copy of Miller's infamous *Tropic of Cancer*, which was banned in the United States due to its explicit sexual content, and smuggled it into the country by secreting it, appropriately enough, in his dirty laundry. Apart from the thrill of reading a forbidden novel, Bohlen was deeply persuaded by Miller's "vigorous denunciation of middle class values." Miller's thesis, according to Bohlen, was not merely that middle-class values produced a bland, self-satisfied, and uncritical society but that the rampant materialism they promoted, "if allowed to proliferate, [would] provoke the fracturing of the human community, and ultimately the extirpation of society." Bohlen read all Miller's work that he could get his hands on and became, in his own words, "a fanatical and devout Millerite."¹⁹

Although not exactly a beatnik, Bohlen followed a trail not entirely dissimilar from that on which Allen Ginsburg and Jack Kerouac were embarking during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Like the beatniks, Bohlen found the pursuit of the American dream of middle-class comfort and security to be an increasingly banal and meaningless experience. The feeling was probably intensified by the failure of his efforts to run his own business, as well as by his conviction that the pursuit of the bourgeois ideal was enmeshing him ever more deeply in America's burgeoning military-related industries. The search for a more meaningful life led Bohlen to the Zen Buddhist philosophy of the Japanese philosopher and monk Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966).²⁰ Zen, which became popular among the early beatniks and heavily influenced writers such as Ginsburg and Gary Snyder, teaches that subordinating one's life to the struggle for material success is counterproductive and leads to social anomie and spiritual emptiness. From Zen, Bohlen moved on to Gandhi and *Satyagraha* until, by the late 1950s, he was beginning to lead something of a double life. He continued to pursue a decidedly middle-class lifestyle, one made possible by the largess of the military

¹⁹ Jim Bohlen, *Making Waves: The Origins and Future of Greenpeace* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2001), 16; Author's interview with Jim Bohlen, 20 April 2000, Denman Island, British Columbia.

²⁰ For more on Suzuki's influence on Buddhism in America, see Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 60-1. For an example of Suzuki's work, see his *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider, 1983).

industrial complex, while devoting all his spare time to the task of integrating the anti-materialist and anti-militarist philosophical constructs of Miller, Suzuki, and Gandhi “into an action-oriented lifestyle.”²¹

Part of Bohlen’s search for an alternative set of values led him to the Quakers in his local Pennsylvania community. Like the Stowes, he found it difficult to identify with the more religious aspects of Quakerism. Yet he found the Quaker method of non-violent action and the anti-war and anti-materialist message in texts such as *Speak Truth to Power* very appealing. As when he had flirted with communists, Bohlen found he could admire and learn from the Quakers, even join in their protests, without having to subscribe to all their rituals and beliefs.²²

During the early 1960s Bohlen volunteered to attend a civil defence workshop in Florida. Here participants discussed various strategies of self-protection in the event of a nuclear attack. After being shown a horrific slide show of some of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the impact of which never left him, Bohlen and the other participants were told that the simple “duck-and-cover” strategies that the government and military had been advocating throughout the 1950s were still the best means that civil defence experts could come up with to protect people against a hydrogen bomb blast. All people needed to do, the experts optimistically promised, was dig a trench, climb in, and cover themselves with a door. Bohlen was furious that the United States was continuing to plan for a nuclear war while deluding its citizens that they could save themselves through such absurdly inadequate means. Whatever reticence he may have had about becoming a full-fledged anti-nuclear activist was eradicated by his experience at the workshop. He stormed out halfway through the proceedings, flew back to Pennsylvania, returned the funding he had received to attend and became “determined ... to actively oppose nuclear weapons of mass destruction until they were wiped off the face of the earth.”²³

The discovery of traces of the radioactive isotope strontium 90 in mother’s milk was an important event on Bohlen’s road to radicalism, much as it had been for the Stowes. This was also the case for Marie Nonnast, a woman Bohlen met at a Quaker-organized anti-nuclear testing protest in front of Philadelphia’s City Hall and who became his second wife. Jim and Marie found that they shared similar values and soon began to live their lives with fewer of the trappings of middle-class materialism. They strongly opposed US involvement in the Vietnam

²¹ Bohlen, *Making Waves*, 17.

²² Bohlen interview.

²³ Bohlen, *Making Waves*, 18.

War and attended many protests in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, DC. By their own accounts, they were “elated, both by the prospect of contributing to the anti-war effort, and by being in the company of like-minded souls.”²⁴ In 1965, as US involvement in Vietnam began to escalate, Bohlen’s employer, the Hercules Powder Company, put its civilian research on hold to concentrate on the development of an anti-personnel, shoulder-fired rocket. The warheads were to be filled with small pieces of razor blade designed to tear and penetrate human flesh, making treatment and recovery almost impossible. This was more than Bohlen could stomach, and he resigned from the company in mid-1965.²⁵

Until the early 1960s Jim Bohlen had not taken much interest in wilderness preservation. Most of his activist hours were devoted to the anti-nuclear cause. The only environmental problems that had concerned him were those, such as the discovery of strontium 90 in milk, that were a direct product of nuclear weapons. Marie, on the other hand, was an active Sierra Club member who had been interested in conservation issues, both locally and nationally, for many years. Her enthusiasm for the wilderness areas of the Mid-Atlantic states influenced Bohlen, whose views of nature had been shaped in large part by his career in scientific research and engineering. He began to gravitate towards biocentrism, a philosophy that granted the natural world intrinsic value rather than the utilitarian worth bestowed upon it by humans. It would be an exaggeration to say that Bohlen was suddenly seized by a passion for wild places. Still, he came to appreciate the wilderness for more than just its recreational or aesthetic potential. Biocentrism complemented his interest in Zen Buddhism and the values he had inherited from the Quakers and radical pacifists he counted among his friends. Given their activism in the peace movement, the Bohlens naturally gravitate, towards the more activist wing of the Sierra Club.²⁶

Founded in California in the late nineteenth century, the Sierra Club by the 1960s was one of the leading voices for wilderness preservation in the United States. Among its founders was John Muir, one of the greatest advocates of preservation in American history. After 1945 David Brower – another passionate and charismatic preservationist – helped lead the club in a more activist direction, complementing its traditional lobbying and petitioning efforts with innovative new campaigns. A critical turning point for wilderness protection occurred in the early

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁵ Bohlen interview.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

1950s when the Federal Bureau of Reclamation planned a series of dams along the Colorado River. One of these, the Echo Park Dam, would have flooded the Dinosaur National Monument, a remote 200,000-acre wilderness and recreation area on the Utah-Colorado border. Using Echo Park as a rallying point, prominent figures such as Brower, then the executive director of the Sierra Club, and his Wilderness Society counterpart, Howard Zahniser, injected wilderness preservation with a new sense of urgency and activism. In addition to its lobbying activities in Washington, Brower's Sierra Club bombarded the public with direct-mail pamphlets asking: "What Is Your Stake in Dinosaur?" and "Will you DAM the Scenic Wildlands of Our National Parks System?" The club published advertisements in the national press, encouraged the production of a pro-conservationist film on the issue, and published several impressive coffee-table books. In the end, the bureau bowed to the preservationists' pressure and the Echo Park Dam project was shelved.²⁷

The Sierra Club's drift towards activism was exemplified by its publication, in 1970, of *Ecotactics*, a "handbook for environment activists." Most articles recounted how various groups had handed out leaflets, organized seminars and teach-ins, lobbied governments, and used the media to publicize environmental issues. None of this promoted the kind of direct action used by the civil rights or anti-Vietnam War movements, but the club also discussed, and by implication advocated, various forms of street, or "guerrilla," theatre. Such tactics would become increasingly popular within the environmental movement in the 1970s. One article described how students in Minnesota performed a mock burial of an internal combustion engine to protest gasoline pollution as well as how a group of ecology activists donned gas masks while demonstrating outside an international automobile exhibition in Boston.²⁸

The Sierra Club's Atlantic chapter, of which the Bohlens were members through much of the 1960s, was among the most activist-oriented branches. It offered strong support for David Brower during the internal dispute that led to his resignation in 1968, seeing him as a heroic figure who was attempting to convert a conservative, tradition-bound organization into a progressive and politically ag-

²⁷ The quotes are from Hal Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 41. Capitalization in original. The most comprehensive analysis of the Echo Park Dam affair is in Mark W.T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

²⁸ Peter R. Janssen, "The Age of Ecology," in *Ecotactics: The Sierra Club Handbook for Environmental Activists*, ed. John G. Mitchell (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 58.

gressive force for environmental protection.²⁹ The Bohlens' first taste of environmental activism came during a Sierra Club campaign to halt a flood control project on the Delaware River. The river was subject to periodic flooding, causing damage to farms and factories along its banks. In response, the Army Corps of Engineers developed a plan to pump water upstream into an enormous artificial lake, thereby allowing them to control the river's flow. The lake would inundate thousands of acres of fertile agricultural land and eastern hardwood forest, and – the Sierra Club insisted – disturb fish breeding and the general ecological well-being of the river and its watershed. Through a concerted petition- and letter-writing campaign, the club's Atlantic chapter raised enough public opposition to defeat the plan. This success whetted the Bohlens' appetites for other environmental battles and prompted them to think about how the tactics of the anti-nuclear and anti-Vietnam War movements might be employed in environmental protests.³⁰

Just as the atom bomb catalyzed the development of a radical pacifist movement in the postwar era, so it played a leading role in the emergence of an increasingly activist form of environmentalism. The bomb symbolized the hubris of modern science, and the proliferation and testing of nuclear weapons injected a greater sense of urgency into the environmental movement. The development of nuclear weapons was also an important factor in the popularization of ecology by scientists such as Rachel Carson. This once-obscure academic discipline rapidly assumed an iconic status among environmentalists. Picking up the anti-modernist sentiments of influential nature writers such as John Muir and Aldo Leopold, while raising critical questions about the costs of unfettered scientific and economic "progress" and calling for a more respectful, humble, and holistic view of nature and the place of humans within it, popular ecology merged easily with other anti-modernist discourses such as Eastern religion, the New Left, and the counterculture of the 1960s. This provided an important common denominator for dissenting groups of various political and cultural stripes.³¹

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. This was an unusual development for a branch of biology that evolved mostly in the rarefied air of university science departments. As Donald Worster

²⁹ Michael P. Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 429.

³⁰ Bohlen interview.

³¹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

notes in his history of ecology, few other academic disciplines have entered the public lexicon as catchwords denoting a particular worldview or political party. No one has yet proclaimed himself or herself a "deep entomologist" in the same way that people have embraced deep ecology.³² According to Worster, ecology's rise from obscure academic science to popular worldview was largely the result of sudden scientific advances that accelerated environmental despoliation after the Second World War. The atomic bomb was the ultimate symbol of this advance in humankind's scientific and destructive potential. The bomb, according to Worster, "cast doubt on the entire project of the domination of nature that had been at the heart of modern history. It raised doubts about the moral legitimacy of science, about the tumultuous pace of technology, and about the Enlightenment dream of replacing religious faith with human rationality as a guide both to material welfare and to virtue." There had been no drastic changes in human behaviour, no radical alterations in the capitalist system that could otherwise explain ecology's sudden emergence as a discourse of environmental redemption.³³

Ecologists had been among the first group of scientists to question the unchecked growth of scientific power in its more destructive forms.³⁴ Their response may have been somewhat belated, but they played a vital role in educating people about the natural world and explaining to them the damage that humans were inflicting upon it. Through this critique of unrestrained science and economic growth, ecology became the wellspring from which environmentalism drew its core values.

The holistic philosophy of ecology was complemented by the growing fascination, on the part of some Americans, with various Eastern religions such as Taoism, Jainism, Shinto, and, most notably, Zen Buddhism. The conviction that Christianity viewed humankind as separate from, and superior to, nature, whereas Asian religions tended to view the world in a more unified, holistic fashion that paralleled the assumptions of ecology, gained wide currency.³⁵ In the new and

³² Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 360; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

³³ Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 343, 359.

³⁴ The term "ecologist" is used here in a general rather than a specific sense. There were very few ecology departments in universities in the pre-war era, and many of the scientists who contributed to the spread of ecological theory and its popularization were not ecologists in the strict sense of the term but, rather, were trained in disciplines such as plant or marine biology.

³⁵ The medievalist Lynn White Jr. argued that the West's Judeo-Christian heritage, with its exhortation to harness and tame nature, lay at the root of modern environmental problems. See "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 10 March 1967, 1204-8. The article, influential at the time, has subsequently been heavily criticized by environmental historians.

increasingly common view, everything in the world had a place and a purpose, and nature should be respected rather than objectified or desacralized. Nineteenth-century transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau were among the first Americans to take a serious interest in Eastern religions, which came to appeal to many people whose views were at odds with those of mainstream society. John Muir, for example, professed what the environmental historian Roderick Nash called a “sincere if untutored Buddhist philosophy.”³⁶ Much of what twentieth-century Americans learned about Zen Buddhism came from the Japanese scholar Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. His teachings were used by Alan Watts, a British writer who moved to the United States in 1938, to critique the Western view of nature. Among Watts’s many influential best-selling works are *The Way of Zen* (1957) and *Nature, Man and Woman* (1958), both of which make the case that the natural world, including humans, is part of a “seamless unity.”³⁷

Beatnik writers such as Jack Kerouac were also heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism, using it as a foundation for their critique of 1950s consumerism. Ironically, just as Japan entered an intense period of Western-style modernization, writers such as Watts and Kerouac found salvation in a religion that most Japanese people seemed to be abandoning. Even the renowned American poet Gary Snyder appeared to be unperturbed by this paradox, despite spending most of the 1950s in Japan. A close friend of Watts and Kerouac, Snyder returned to the United States in the late 1950s and fused his knowledge of Zen with the insights of popular ecology, the Native American respect for nature, and American natural rights philosophy. The result was a biocentric ethic that embedded humankind deep within the natural world. It insisted that all members of the natural community be treated with the respect that humans, and Westerners in particular, had traditionally reserved for other humans. To symbolize this ethical extension, Snyder rephrased the countercultural slogan, “Power to the people,” as “Power to all the people.” To achieve this, he wrote in 1970, humans would need to “incorporate the other people ... the creeping people, and the standing people, and the flying people and the swimming people ... into the councils of government.”³⁸ Such an environmental ethic, Snyder hoped, would “liberate” both humans and the natural world from the straightjackets of corporate capitalism and scientific rationalism, though whether the

³⁶ Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 113–14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 115.

majority of Americans agreed upon the need for such “liberation” was another matter.

Another intellectual stream that fed the river of radical environmentalism was the New Left. Inspired by neo-Marxist and anarchist social theorists, the New Left emerged during the 1960s from the campuses of some of America’s most elite universities, including Berkeley, Columbia, and Michigan. The main themes of writers such as Murray Bookchin, Paul Goodman, and Herbert Marcuse – a critique of consumerism, an emphasis on the role of science and technology in perpetuating it, and the emergence of new forms of domination over both human society and nature – helped a generation of students to articulate their confusing and inchoate feelings of dissatisfaction about living in a society that seemed blessed with abundance but marked by inequality and injustice. Groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society began to explore new values and utopian possibilities. With close links to the various social movements of the time, including the peace and anti-nuclear movements, the civil rights movement, and the free speech movement, the New Left began to concentrate on quality-of-life issues, particularly in American cities, and their critique focused increasingly on environmental problems. New Leftists were particularly critical of large-scale polluting industries such as oil and chemical corporations, whose drive for profits, they argued, encouraged them to take greater environmental risks by adopting ever more destructive and hazardous technologies. Many felt their criticisms were born out by a spate of high-profile environmental incidents, including the ignition of the polluted Cuyahoga River and the Santa Barbara oil spill, which were splashed across newspaper headlines in the late 1960s.³⁹

Another 1960s movement that was closely entwined with the New Left, and one that proved to be more durable, was the counterculture. In Robert Gottlieb’s concise definition, the counterculture was a “disparate collection of social movements, new forms of cultural expression, and

³⁹ Ibid., 96. For an example of the New Left critique of industrial society, see Martin Gellen, “The Making of a Pollution-Industrial Complex,” in *Eco-Catastrophe*, ed. Editors of Ramparts (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1970). For an analysis of the impact of the Santa Barbara oil spill, see Harvey Molotch, “Santa Barbara: Oil in the Velvet Playground,” in Ibid. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the publication of several other books with similarly apocalyptic titles, providing an indication of the general alarm many were feeling about the environment. Examples include, R.M. Linton, *Terracide: America’s Destruction of Her Living Environment* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970); O. Segerberg, *Where Have All the Flowers, Fishes, Birds, Trees, Water, and Air Gone?* (New York: David McKay Co., 1971); S. Mines, *The Last Days of Mankind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971); Francis Shaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Weaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970); Leslie J. Roos Jr., ed., *The Politics of Ecosuicide* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

semireligious groups and ideas [that] connected the New Left critique of consumer society and quality-of-life concerns with a desire to go 'back to the land,' or at least back to a simpler, more communal, more natural form of social life.⁴⁰ The counterculture and the New Left, therefore, were rooted in the same critique of American society but diverged in their approaches to dealing with the world's problems. Most New Left activists insisted that society could only be liberated through political action. The counterculture, on the other hand, saw personal transformation as the key to a "consciousness revolution" that would liberate the individual and radically transform society. Like their beatnik forebears, the counterculture advocated "dropping out" of mainstream society. To that end, countercultural dropouts built a variety of alternative institutions – from food cooperatives to the ubiquitous commune – where those disaffected with mainstream society could break free of its social and psychological constraints. Hippies, as members of the counterculture became known, took great delight in undermining the dominant values and institutions of mainstream society. They advocated psychedelic drugs, disparaged monogamy in favour of sexual liberation, and rejected traditional Western values (such as Christianity and scientific rationalism) in favour of Native American and Eastern religions or various forms of mysticism. These values were celebrated, often in outlandish style, at numerous "be-ins" and parties throughout the country, with some of the more famous examples taking place in the late 1960s in San Francisco, which had become the Mecca of the counterculture.⁴¹

Given its critique of industrialism, its commitment to "natural" foods, and its attraction to Eastern religions and simpler forms of life,

⁴⁰ Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993), 98.

⁴¹ Useful studies of the counterculture include: Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984). For a history of countercultural food cooperatives, see Warren J. Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry, 1966–1988* (New York: Pantheon, 1989). The classic work on the history of communes in America is Lawrence Veysey, *The Communal Experience: Anarchist and Mystical Counter-Cultures in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). A useful anthology on the subject is John Case and Rosemary C.R. Taylor, eds., *Co-ops, Communes, and Collectives: Experiments in Social Change in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Pantheon, 1979). For an analysis of the impact of psychedelic drugs on the counterculture, see Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987).

the counterculture was ecology's natural ally.⁴² In the late 1960s the term "green" became shorthand for a holistic ecological worldview, and the network of alternative newspapers throughout the US contributed significantly to the popularization of ecological concepts. Events such as the People's Park protest in Berkeley exemplified this new-found ecological consciousness. In 1969 hundreds of people took over a vacant lot belonging to the University of California and attempted to "liberate" the land by turning it into a public park. Gary Snyder, by then the counterculture's very own green poet laureate, called the action a guerrilla strike on behalf of the "non-negotiable demands of the Earth." The local underground newspaper, the *Berkeley Tribe*, described People's Park as the beginning of the Revolutionary Ecology Movement, arguing that it provided "a model of the struggle we are going to have to wage in the future if life is going to survive at all on this planet."⁴³ Charles Reich, a Yale law professor, wrote favourably of how the counterculture was "greening" America not through traditional methods of political reform but, rather, by changing its consciousness. Theodore Roszak praised hippies for their "healthy instincts" and for challenging the "technocratic society" and its "culture of expertise."⁴⁴ According to Robert Gottlieb, himself a former 1960s activist, the New Left and the counterculture represented "an interlude between the old conservationism with its search for a managed or protected wilderness and a hidden urban and industrial environmentalism that had not fully cohered into an organized movement." Both served "as a transition to a new environmental politics in which the question of Nature could no longer be separated from the question of society itself."⁴⁵

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In 1967, in order to ensure that their sons would not be drafted into the US military and sent to fight in the war in Vietnam, Jim and Marie Bohlen moved to Vancouver, where they soon met Irving and Dorothy Stowe and

⁴² Klaus Eder, "The Rise of Counter-Culture Movements against Modernity: Nature as a New Field of Class Struggle," *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 (1990): 22-4.

⁴³ Snyder and *Tribe* quotes are from Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 102 and 350, respectively. For an example of Gary Snyder's "green" poetry, see his *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (New York: New Directions, 1969).

⁴⁴ Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 5, 300. Roszak, quoted in Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 349. Similar thoughts are expressed in the essays in R. Disch, ed., *The Ecological Conscience* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970). For more on the alternative media of the 1960s, see Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

⁴⁵ Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 105.

other like-minded American immigrants. During these years, Vancouver was in the throes of a major transition: in the 1950s it was a conservative town on the west coast of Canada; by the late 1960s, however, it had begun to change. Like its American sister city, San Francisco, Vancouver had become a countercultural Mecca. Hippies, yuppies, New Leftists, and various alternative lifestyles from throughout Canada, as well as the United States, flocked there to enjoy its relatively mild climate, its spectacular surrounds, and its cheap and abundant stock of inner-city housing. For self-exiled American leftists such as the Stowes and Bohlens, the city was an activist's dream. While mainstream politicians tended towards conservatism, a vibrant youth culture, ignited by the influx of American draft evaders and countercultural youngsters from across Canada, held out the tantalizing prospect of providing experienced activists with an army of shock troops for their various progressive causes.

One of the first things the Bohlens noticed when they arrived in Vancouver was the number of restless and often directionless young American men drifting about town. Vancouver was the main destination of west coast draft resisters, but there was little in the way of a support network for them once they arrived. In response to this, the Bohlens, along with some other expatriate Americans, formed the Committee to Aid War Objectors. The organization developed a network of sympathetic contacts with whom draft resisters could stay when they first arrived in Canada, and it offered several other services, such as job and housing bulletins, a mailbox system, magazine and newspaper subscriptions, and counselling. For the next couple of years, the Bohlens hosted a continuous succession of newly arrived draft resisters.⁴⁶

Irving Stowe, meanwhile, was revelling in the role of full-time activist and helped establish a network of grassroots organizations throughout Vancouver, tackling everything from town planning to nuclear weapons testing. His friendship with Bohlen led him to take far more interest in environmental issues than he had before, though he remained committed to a plethora of other causes. He established the Take Back the Earth Committee, a group that pushed for a sensible approach to urban planning that would "avoid the rampant growth problems that have plagued so many American cities."⁴⁷ They organized demonstrations in downtown Vancouver in an effort to prevent the construction of a bridge from the city to Kitsilano, a development they felt would lead to further automobile traffic in the inner city. Another of Stowe's groups,

⁴⁶ Bohlen interview

⁴⁷ Stowe to William E. Graham, Director of Planning for the City of Vancouver, 1 August 1970, vol. 2, file 7, Greenpeace Foundations Fonds, Vancouver City Archive (hereafter GPF); Stowe interview.

United for Survival, was intended to be an umbrella organization for various progressive groups throughout British Columbia. Stowe's bitterness towards the United States largely dictated the tone of United for Survival's rhetoric. Canada, he argued, was being taken over by the United States and would soon effectively cease to exist as an independent nation. "The majority of voters," he declared, "still think of 'survival' in terms of KEEPING THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING." One way in which Canada could maintain the more desirable aspects of its high standard of living, while avoiding some of the ecological and cultural destruction emanating from the United States, was to promote the establishment of a new trading bloc, a "Common Market for National Survival," which would set strict regulations about trading with nations that possessed nuclear weapons or promoted ecologically destructive developments such as nuclear power plants and big dam projects. The Take Back the Earth Committee and United for Survival spanned both ends of Stowe's "think globally, act locally" philosophy while also displaying his more bombastic tendencies and his increasingly impractical and impassioned anti-Americanism.⁴⁸

When Jim and Marie Bohlen arrived in Vancouver in 1967 there was neither a local Sierra Club chapter, nor an equivalent Canadian organization. For middle-class Americans who had taken the existence of multiple wilderness preservation organizations for granted, the dearth of such groups in Canada came as a considerable disappointment. British Columbia in particular, with its cut-and-run timber industry, must have seemed like a throwback to the late nineteenth-century American West. In Canada, unlike in much of the United States, jurisdiction over natural resources lay largely in the hands of provincial governments. For American environmentalists, accustomed to a system in which the federal government curbed the more rapacious instincts of the western states, this was akin to allowing the state legislature in Laramie to determine the fate of all the trees in Wyoming. Terry Simmons, an American graduate student at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Vancouver and one of the founders of the BC chapter of the Sierra Club, wrote that being a conservationist in British Columbia was like "being a civil rights worker in Alabama." By contrast with the United States, where the Sierra Club could sue the Department of the Interior for failing to enforce conservation laws, people in British Columbia needed the permission of government itself before they could sue it. The result

⁴⁸ United for Survival petition printed in the *Georgia Straight*, 26 March 1969. Emphasis in original.

was a "conservationist's nightmare" with few legal impediments to exploitative economic development.⁴⁹

Jim Bohlen's first act of environmental direct action in Vancouver was entirely spontaneous. One spring day in 1969, he was sitting outside his office at a forest products laboratory near the UBC campus, where he worked as a research engineer. As he ate his lunch under a large western red cedar, a man wielding a chainsaw approached him. "He asked me to move," Bohlen recalled, because

he needed to cut down the tree in order to make way for a temporary trailer addition to the laboratory. I was appalled. Not knowing what else to do, I stood up and spread-eagled myself, with my back against the tree trunk. I told the logger, somewhat passionately, this tree will *not* be cut down. The logger was so startled by my behaviour that he retreated ... It gave me a new feeling and I liked it.⁵⁰

Bohlen's spur-of-the-moment "tree-hugging" episode was followed by a slightly more organized example of civil disobedience. A friend of Bohlen's, Bill Chalmers, had formed a group called the Wreck Beach Committee to prevent the construction of a four-lane highway along a pristine beach near the UBC campus. According to Bohlen, he, Chalmers, and three other respectable, middle-aged environmental activists turned up at the site on the morning that construction was due to begin, lay down in front of the bulldozers, and refused to move. The action was successful and the project was shelved.⁵¹ It was only a small protest dealing with an event of purely local significance, yet one should not underestimate its importance. The philosophy of *Satyagraha* and the tactics of radical pacifism and civil rights were now being used in British Columbia in the service of environmentalism. According to Gene Sharp's typology of non-violent action, environmentalists had hitherto largely operated at the lower level of the protest hierarchy, which he referred to as *non-violent protest and persuasion*. This consisted of actions such as letter writing, lobbying, disseminating information, and the occasional protest march. The Wreck Beach Committee's act of defiance, which Sharp would define as *non-violent obstruction*, was several rungs higher on the non-violent action ladder.⁵²

⁴⁹ Quoted in the *Georgia Straight*, 6-13 May 1970, 7. The Simmons article in the *Straight* is an edited version of a longer article that appeared in the journal of the Pacific Northwest chapter of the Sierra Club. See "Poverty of Plenty: Conservation in British Columbia," *Conifer* 16, 1 (1970): 8-17.

⁵⁰ Bohlen, *Making Waves*, 25; Bohlen Interview.

⁵¹ Bohlen, *Making Waves*, 25; Bohlen interview.

⁵² Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 387.

By the late 1960s, waves of ecological consciousness were spilling over the border into Canada from the United States. Many British Columbians had read such popular authors as Rachel Carson and Barry Commoner, and some became increasingly determined to address their government's lack of concern for environmental issues. In December 1968 a group of social activists, academics, and the leader of the local transit union met at the house of Gwen and Derrick Mallard, a middle-aged professional couple living in the Vancouver suburb of Coquitlam, in order to discuss their opposition to Premier Bennett's recent approval of strip mining in the Kootenay Valley in southeast British Columbia. The following month they held an open meeting at SFU. It drew over 200 academics, students, and members of the local counterculture. One of the participants, a thirty-four-year-old SFU engineer named John Stigant, opened the meeting by tipping a barrel of oily water from Vancouver's Burrard Inlet onto the floor and declaring, "We are the filthiest animals on the planet." The group went on to discuss various environmental problems that they saw plaguing the province. Urban pollution and health issues such as automobile emissions, pesticide use, and deteriorating water quality were to the fore. They decided to form a new "ecology" society to publicize environmental problems and to pressure governments and industry to abandon environmentally destructive practices.⁵³

One of those who took part in the group's early activities was Bob Hunter, a prominent journalist with the *Vancouver Sun* and the public voice of the counterculture in British Columbia. Hunter was developing his own ideas about ecology and society and was eager for the new group to become a vanguard for an ecological and social revolution. He suggested that they call themselves the Society for the Prevention of Environmental Collapse. There were "several reasons for supporting this group," he urged his readers. "The main reason is that our civilization has gone into a tail-spin and the human race appears to be heading for one of its periodic smash-ups – perhaps its last."⁵⁴ Hunter's exhortations were a little too dramatic for many of the academics and pragmatists among the group. They decided to keep the acronym, SPEC, but to replace it with

⁵³ Dianne Louise Draper, "Eco-Activism: Issues and Strategies of Environmental Interest Groups in British Columbia" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1972), 1-3. A detailed timeline of SPEC's history can be found at <www.vcn.bc.ca/spec/spec/Spectrum/spring1999/begframe/htm>. The Stigant quote is from this source.

⁵⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, 13 June 1969. Bob Hunter outlined his McLuhan-inspired vision of a global ecology movement in two books published in the early 1970s: *The Enemies of Anarchy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970) and *The Storming of the Mind* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971).

the more sober, though somewhat uninspired title, the Scientific Pollution and Environmental Control Society. They particularly opposed widespread pesticide use, offshore oil drilling, air and water pollution, and strip mining and tried to form an apolitical coalition aimed at “the preservation and development of a quality environment through the stimulation of public interest, and consultation and cooperation with industry, government, labour, and academic communities.”⁵⁵ SPEC groups rapidly spread to most major Canadian cities, where they concentrated primarily on the kind of urban-industrial issues – such as smog and water pollution – that were also the targets of various new American organizations, such as the Environmental Defense Fund, which emerged in the late 1960s.⁵⁶

Terry Simmons, who had been an active conservationist in his native California, watched SPEC’s emergence with great curiosity. For a time he flirted with the idea of joining the organization. But the group’s urban bias and disinclination to address traditional wilderness preservation and resource conservation issues led Simmons to conclude that it was not up to the task of restraining the province’s ad hoc and destructive pattern of natural resource exploitation. So he contacted the Sierra Club in California, of which he was still a member-at-large, and asked for a list of other members in the Vancouver area. Simmons invited as many of these as he could contact to a meeting at SFU in July 1969. Among them were Jim and Marie Bohlen, who brought along their friends, Irving and Dorothy Stowe. The participants, the majority of whom were Americans, were in full agreement with Simmons: only an organization such as the Sierra Club was capable of saving British Columbia from the grasping wastrels that were decimating its landscape. So, they decided to set up the BC Sierra Club, the first branch outside the United States, and registered themselves under the BC Society’s Act in September 1969.⁵⁷

From the outset it was clear that the new BC Sierra Club had a massive task on its hands. In broad terms, one could argue that the major difference between conservation in the United States and in British Columbia (and Canada in general) was that the latter lacked a strong preservationist movement. There was no Canadian equivalent of John

⁵⁵ Quote from SPEC Timeline at <www.vcn.bc.ca/spec/spec/Spectrum/spring1999/begframe/htm>.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Jennifer Read, “Let Us Heed the Voice of Youth’: Laundry Detergents, Phosphates and the Emergence of the Environmental Movement in Ontario,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 9 (1996): 227–50.

⁵⁷ Author’s correspondence with Simmons, August 2001. Simmons is listed as chairman of the BC Sierra Club branch in the appendix of *Ecotactics*, 284.

Muir, no elite, influential, and collective preservationist voice such as the Sierra Club. After conducting a detailed analysis of the history of Canadian forestry policy, Peter Gillis and Thomas Roach reached a similar, if somewhat over-simplified, conclusion. In the United States, they argued, the twentieth-century debate over natural resource conservation took place largely between wilderness preservationists on the left and utilitarian conservationists on the right. In Canada, utilitarian conservation occupied the left wing of the ideological spectrum, with laissez-faire resource exploitation on the right.⁵⁸ Despite the relatively early creation of national parks and contrary voices such as that of Roderick Haig-Brown, enthusiasm for wilderness preservation was less deep-rooted among Canadians than among Americans. The American environmental historian, Roderick Nash, certainly argued this. At a national parks conference in Calgary in 1967, he told his audience that Canada was fifty years behind the United States when it came to wilderness appreciation, a statement that says as much about American hubris as it does about any Canadian shortcomings.⁵⁹

One of the most enduring cleavages in the ways in which various people have thought about environmental issues has been between rural folk and those living in the cities. Generally, people living in the countryside have shown far less support for environmental issues than have their urban counterparts. There are several possible reasons for this: environmental degradation tends to be more noticeable in and around cities than in rural areas; rural communities are often directly dependent upon various resource extractive industries and are therefore likely to have a more utilitarian attitude towards the natural world; rural dwellers are more conscious of the fact that their prosperity is connected to resource exploitation and are therefore likely to be more tolerant of the environmental costs of such activities; and the higher percentage of left-leaning views among urban dwellers means that city people tend to be more favourably disposed towards government intervention in the amelioration and prevention of environmental problems.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Peter Gillis and Thomas R. Roach, *Lost Initiatives: Canada's Forest Industries, Forest Policy and Forest Conservation* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 259. For a comparative study of American and Canadian conservation, see Donald Worster, "Two Faces West: The Development Myth in Canada and the United States," in *Terra Pacifica: People and Place in the Northwest States and Western Canada*, ed. Paul Hirt (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ Quoted in Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 222. For a fine analysis of Haig-Brown's influence on BC conservation, see Arn Keeling, "Ecological Ideas in the British Columbian Conservation Movement, 1945-1970" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1999).

⁶⁰ George D. Lowe and T.K. Pinhey, "Rural-Urban Differences in Support for Environmental Protection," *Rural Sociology* 47, 1 (1982): 114. See also K.R. Tremblay and Riley E. Dunlap,

In British Columbia in the 1960s, this rural/urban divide was particularly stark. The timber and mining towns of the province's vast interior were Social Credit's heartland. Clear felling, strip mining, and building huge dams were seen as marks of progress and prosperity, providing rural dwellers with the material comforts that they, as much as their urban counterparts, viewed as essentials of modern life.⁶¹ Vancouver, on the other hand, was home to an increasing number of people who embodied what sociologist Ronald Inglehart has termed "postmaterialist values." According to Inglehart the growth of an economically secure and well-educated middle class was marked by an increasing concern with quality-of-life issues such as the state of the environment. This is not to suggest that a postmaterialist worldview always promotes a radical reevaluation of bourgeois values. Nevertheless, as Inglehart argues, such concerns make people more likely to support – or at least tolerate – unconventional politics and protest movements.⁶²

Vancouver was also a haven for various subcultures and alternative movements. In the late 1960s the most conspicuous of these were members of the counterculture who congregated around the inner-city quarters of Gastown and Kitsilano. With their proximity to the local beaches; their stock of old, cheap, and occasionally abandoned houses; and a multitude of cafés and stores catering to alternative lifestyles, these areas were magnets for dropouts, alternative stylers, and disaffected youth from across British Columbia and much of Canada. Vancouver soon became a Mecca for countercultural dissidents from throughout the country. It was the Canadian equivalent of San Francisco, and Kitsilano rapidly developed into a home-grown version of Haight-Ashbury.⁶³

The relatively sudden emergence of a counterculture ghetto provoked considerable alarm among the more conservative citizens of Vancouver, who tended to lump street gangs, vagrants, and Hippies together, and to see the worst of the former in the latter.⁶⁴ One government study,

"Rural-Urban Residence and a Concern with Environmental Quality: A Replication and Extension," *Rural Sociology* 43, 3 (1978): 474–91; Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?" in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

⁶¹ Edwin R. Black, "British Columbia: The Politics of Exploitation," in *A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings*, ed. Patricia E. Roy (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), 133.

⁶² Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). For essays on various aspects of Vancouver's social history, see Robert A.J. McDonald and Jean Barman, eds., *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986).

⁶³ Myrna Kostash, *Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980), 121–3.

⁶⁴ Letters of concern from the public regarding Hippies in Vancouver can be found in *Mayor's Office Fonds/General Correspondence*, 45-C-6, "Hippies and Georgia Straight," 1969, Vancouver City Archive.

however, estimated that genuine “lifestyle Hippies” constituted only 15 to 20 percent of the Kitsilano population, the rest being mostly school dropouts, runaway teenagers with family problems, people with mental illness, and university and high school students exploring the counterculture during their vacation. Although many people recognized that a heavy concentration of counterculture groups could cause severe social problems, few anticipated that any kind of political movement would emerge from this situation. One committee report in 1967 found “no concrete evidence to support the implication of Hippies in any political party or movement” and expected countercultural enthusiasms to fade rapidly. Even the most overtly political arm of the alternative scene, the Vancouver Liberation Front, described by a local official as a “cloak for an assortment of radical groups from Hippies and Yippies to Trotskyites, Marxists, and anarchists,” was regarded as too disorganized and immature to form any kind of serious political or social movement.⁶⁵

Those who dismissed the political potential of the local counterculture soon received a rude awakening. Despite the high proportion of transient youth and the often apolitical attitudes of members of the counterculture, small but significant groups of activists were politically engaged. They regularly organized and took part in protests and demonstrations. Frequently, these protests bore the stamp of the guerrilla theatre pioneered by a group of American activists who called themselves yippies, reflecting the unusual blending in Vancouver of the radicalism of the New Left with the symbols and lifestyle of the counterculture. The two most influential figures in the American yippie movement were Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman. Both came from middle-class Jewish families – Rubin from Cincinnati and Hoffman from Worcester, Massachusetts – and by the mid-1960s both had become disillusioned with the American left’s earnest and, in their eyes, rather staid radicalism. At an anti-war rally in March 1966, Rubin told the assembled crowd that, in order to reach people “who have never heard our ideas before[,] we are going to have to become specialists in propaganda and communication.” In other words, radicals needed to learn to manipulate the tools of mass communication and the symbols of mass society if they were serious about changing America. Mere language, Rubin insisted in 1968, “does not radicalize people – what changes people is the emotional involvement of action. What breaks through apathy and complacency are confrontation and actions.” Rubin, therefore, supported

⁶⁵ “Report from the Special Committee of Council Regarding Hippie Situation,” 10 October 1967, *Mayor’s Office Fonds*, 45-B-5 (10); Hank Vogel to Mayor, 29 June 1970, *Mayor’s Office Fonds*, 45-E-1 (34).

“everything which puts people into motion, which creates disruption and controversy, which creates chaos and rebirth ... people who burn draft cards ... burn dollar bills ... say FUCK on television ... freaky, crazy, irrational, sexy, angry, irreligious, childish, mad people.”⁶⁶ Inspired by Marshal McLuhan’s work on how mass media was changing society, Rubin and Hoffman felt that the most important role of the activist was to engage in activities that promoted consciousness change rather than agitating for political change via the standard protest repertoire of the left. Activists needed to realize that, for youth in particular, the understanding of reality came not through actual experiences with everyday life but, rather, from the images that television beamed en masse into people’s homes.⁶⁷

Rubin realized his call for action beyond words in Vancouver in 1968 when he spoke at the University of British Columbia (UBC) at the invitation of a left-wing student group that was attempting to publicize the university’s involvement in military-related research. After a rousing speech, Rubin incited a large group of students and sundry radicals, accompanied by a pig, to invade the faculty club. The “occupation” spilled out onto the campus lawn, where some 200 people spent the night. The number swelled considerably over the next two days. The event was carried out in classic yippie fashion, with the protestors proclaiming the occupation a “Festival of Life North” (a reference to the “Yippie Festival of Life” that had taken place in Chicago that summer) and electing a “mayor” for their ephemeral shantytown. Musicians, street theatre actors, and a mime troop also joined the “festival,” which broke up after three days when protestors agreed to end their action peacefully if the university would drop all charges against the people involved.⁶⁸

Rod Marining, a nineteen-year-old hippie and street theatre activist from North Vancouver, was among the more influential protestors who were present for Rubin’s visit. A tall, gangly teenager with a mane of wavy chestnut hair and different-coloured eyes, Marining led a street theatre group called the Rocky Rococo Company, an itinerant band of amateur thespians who performed at protests in exchange for three gallons of wine. Marining’s mother had allowed the sons of American

⁶⁶ Quoted in David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 10–11, 20. Capitalization in original. See also Jerry Rubin, *Do It!* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970).

⁶⁷ Farber, *Chicago '68*, 14–15. Also see Hoffman’s autobiography, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1980). Although his books on the consciousness revolution devote little space to Yippie “philosophy,” Bob Hunter admits that Rubin and Hoffman had a considerable influence on both himself and other counterculture activists in Vancouver. Author’s interview with Bob Hunter, 24 July 2000, Toronto.

⁶⁸ Bob Hunter was among those present. Hunter interview; author’s interview with Rod Marining, 16 April 2000, North Vancouver.

friends who were evading the draft to stay at their house in North Vancouver, and Marining, not surprisingly, became highly critical of US involvement in the Vietnam War and any Canadian complicity with it. He had also developed a concern for environmental problems, an interest sparked in part by Vancouver's rapid expansion into its rural fringe. Marining grew up in such an area and was particularly incensed when his favourite childhood frog pond in East Vancouver was demolished in order to make way for a McDonald's restaurant. He was among those who gave a speech at the UBC "occupation," after which he was elected the "non-leader" of the Northern Lunatic Fringe of Yippies!⁶⁹

The Vancouver counterculture's most influential organ was the alternative newspaper the *Georgia Straight*. The *Straight* was founded by a group of beatnik writers in the mid-1960s as an effort to cater to Vancouver's emerging counterculture. One of the founders, Dan McLeod, who continues to run the paper to this day, recalls that it was modelled after the American alternative newspapers that were springing up throughout the United States and that were banding together under the umbrella of the Underground Press Syndicate. Whereas most of the American papers were either serious *Ramparts*-style political journals or more spiritual, psychedelic, Hippie publications, the *Georgia Straight*'s founders, feeling that Vancouver was too small to sustain a variety of alternative publications, decided to blend the two styles. This decision helped blur the line between countercultural and New Left-style activism and gave rise to a colourful, anarchic publication that dealt with a veritable potpourri of subjects. Columns by Vancouver Liberation Front activists arguing for the overthrow of the state appeared alongside articles about Hari Krishna or nude volleyball tournaments. In addition, the *Straight* had a strong commitment to ecology and regularly reported on environmental issues throughout the province and on the broader implications of adopting an ecologically centered lifestyle.⁷⁰

Vancouver's alternative culture met the city's mainstream society in Stanley Park, a magnificent urban green space adjacent to Vancouver's downtown. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the park's grassy hillocks and sandy beaches were gathering places for all manner of demonstrators, allowing old-time peaceniks to mingle with yuppies and

⁶⁹ Marining interview.

⁷⁰ Interview with Dan McLeod, 4 October 2000, Vancouver. A sampling of various *Straight* articles over the years can be found in Naomi Pauls and Charles Campbell, eds., *The Georgia Straight: What the Hell Happened?* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1997). The *Georgia Straight* is now a rather tepid version of its former self. Like so many underground papers throughout North America, it has metamorphosed into a "City Paper" primarily devoted to film and concert listings and personal ads.

providing newcomers with the opportunity to experience a rich array of protest cultures in a relaxed, almost picnic-like atmosphere. In the spring and summer of 1970, for example, the park was the site for Irving Stowe's Festival for Survival, a demonstration against urban development and pollution in Vancouver. The event was sponsored by the BC Sierra Club, SPEC, the Unitarian Church, and various student groups. A *Georgia Straight* journalist was struck by the similarity between the festival and various park protests in the United States and at the way in which many ordinary people, who had never demonstrated before, rubbed shoulders with Yippie pranksters and "oldtime disarmament marchers and protest type people."⁷¹

Early in 1970, Vancouver's city council gave the Four Seasons chain permission to construct a huge luxury hotel, replete with several towers, at the entrance to Stanley Park. Though technically private property, the area had always been accessible to the public, and the decision provoked a storm of controversy. Activists quickly framed it as a battle between private development and public space, and as an act of environmental vandalism. Rod Marining, who worked as the daily Horoscope editor at the *Vancouver Province*, one of the city's major newspapers, had read numerous wire stories about the People's Park protest in Berkeley the previous year and was inspired to imitate the action. Marining's street theatre group and several dozen friends set up a camp near the proposed Four Seasons construction site. They were joined by members of the more confrontational Vancouver Liberation Front, among whom was numbered Paul Watson, who would become an important Greenpeace activist during the 1970s. True to his impetuous nature, Watson used his burly strength to tear down a section of the fence around the site, an action that led to his arrest. Marining had a grander plan. He knew that the construction site would be abandoned over a long weekend during the spring and used the opportunity to lead an audacious and ultimately successful direct action. Borrowing equipment from various sympathizers – including a bulldozer from a construction company, sod and saplings from a nursery, and a wheelbarrow from Irving Stowe – Marining removed the bolts from the fence and with the help of 300 fellow protestors pulled the entire structure down in just a few minutes. The group then quickly covered the roads and construction areas with sod, into which they planted the saplings, before setting up their tents on the site and proclaiming it "All Seasons Park."⁷²

⁷¹ *Georgia Straight*, 25 March - 1 April 1970, 3.

⁷² Interviews with Rod Marining, Paul Watson, and Bob Hunter; Draft copy of Rex Weyler's memoir, used with permission. For coverage of the event, see *Vancouver Sun*, 6 January 1971, 11.

Using his contacts in the local media, Marining ensured that his version of events was released to the press before the Four Seasons' management or the city government could react. Before the weekend was over, thousands of street kids and hippies had flooded into the park from Kitsilano and Gastown. Vancouver's mayor, Tom Campbell, and his police chief arrived to find the construction site transformed and colonized by the very people whom they had long criticized for indolence and lack of organization. Campbell threatened to send in riot police and have the protestors arrested. "This is a breakdown of society," he fumed. "It is a complete disregard for authority."⁷³ Marining and his supporters refused to back down. For the next several weeks, there was a standoff between the police and the site's occupiers. Eventually, the father of one of the protestors agreed to purchase the property for \$4 million and promised not to develop it. For Marining and others, these events offered a salutary lesson in the efficacy of direct action – a lesson that helped galvanize members of the city's disparate and inchoate counterculture and its politically active radicals. In Vancouver Trotskyites dropped acid and Hippies went to protests, and people such as Rod Marining were entirely comfortable with a foot in each camp.⁷⁴

Vancouver's transformation from a conservative provincial town into a thriving hub of alternative politics and lifestyles was also facilitated by the Vietnam War. It provided an issue around which various radical groups could coalesce and brought to Vancouver a steady stream of Americans who refused to serve in the US military or to allow their sons to be drafted. Some of these were older men and their families, such as the Bohlens and the Stowes, but the vast majority were young men who were evading the draft. Furthermore, they were not just any young men. Until 1967 Canada's immigration regulations replicated the class and race biases of American draft laws. Just as poor, working-class black youths found it difficult to get a draft deferment, so they were hard-pressed to amass the necessary points for emigration to Canada. On the other hand, middle-class, college-educated, and mostly white men who were unable to obtain a deferment could quite easily qualify for immigrant status. Inadvertently, therefore, Canadian immigration regulations prior to 1967 allowed the immigration of a large number of well educated middle-class white men who were firmly opposed to American involvement in the Vietnam War. Many aligned themselves with the more radical elements in the body politic. Not surprisingly,

⁷³ Quoted in the *Georgia Straight*, 1-4 June 1971, 11-12.

⁷⁴ Marining interview.

several became leaders in the Canadian anti-war movement. Furthermore, many Canadian activists tended to venerate the incoming Americans, whose experiences in the United States tended to trivialize their own.⁷⁵

Many of the most radical Americans to cross the border had been associated with the American New Left and found it easy to fit in with its Canadian counterpart, which was similar, in demographic make-up and the causes it espoused, to the movement they had left behind. There was, however, one significant difference between the two groups: since Americans were opposed to the actions of their government, they tended to abjure nationalism in all its guises and, instead, embraced the internationalist perspective traditionally adhered to by the Old Left. By contrast, members of the New Left in Canada espoused Canadian nationalism as a defence against the perceived dominance of the rampantly capitalist and militarist United States over their nation. A certain degree of fear and resentment of their immensely powerful, though generally friendly, neighbour had long existed in Canada. Such sentiments rose to new heights during the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly as the United States became more deeply involved in the war in Vietnam. The alarm bells began to ring in 1965 when sociologist John Porter argued that a small number of American-based firms were controlling an increasing share of Canada's economic activity. At the same time, George Grant was convinced that Canada was being absorbed into the United States with the complicity of Canada's elites: "The power of the American government to control Canada," he wrote in *Lament for a Nation*, "does not lie primarily in its ability to exert direct pressure; the power lies in the fact that the dominant classes in Canada see themselves at one with [their American counterparts] on all essential matters."⁷⁶

George Grant was a "Red Tory" – a conservative nationalist with a paternalistic streak that was not entirely incompatible with socialism – but his views were not so different from those on the left of Canadian politics. Socialists such as Gad Horowitz, for example, linked the New Left's embrace of Canadian nationalism to what he viewed as the "un-American" characteristic of Canadian society. Canada, he argued, was "incipiently socialist." If the possibilities of building a socialist society were brighter in the United States than in Canada, he continued, "we would not be terrified by the prospect of absorption. We are nationalists

⁷⁵ Kostash, *Long Way from Home*, 63–5.

⁷⁶ John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965); George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1965), 96.

because, as socialists, we do not want our country to be utterly absorbed by the *citadel of world capitalism*.”⁷⁷ The Vietnam War, according to the Canadian New Left political scientist Phillip Resnick, was the ultimate manifestation of the dangers that the United States posed to Canada and the rest of the world:

We saw that there was a world imperial system, the US was at its centre, and the Vietnamese were resisting, not only for themselves but for all the people who were in the process of becoming aware of that imperialism. Canadians were at the beginning point of this process, just starting to distance ourselves from the idea of Canada as an *American* nation.⁷⁸

As an analysis of the Vietnam War, this was somewhat simplistic, offering little more than caricatures of both the Americans and the Vietnamese. Resnick and others tended to ignore the fact that the conflict was part of a broader Cold War struggle that involved other world powers, such as the Chinese, whose motives, it could be argued, were no nobler than those of the United States.

Fears that Canada was being absorbed into the vortex of American imperialism reached their pinnacle with the publication of Kari Levitt's *Silent Surrender* in 1970. Levitt's work summarized the concerns of the left, and of a fair number of mainstream Canadians, arguing that effective economic decision making was being transferred beyond the reach of the Canadian government and electorate and into the hands of American multinational corporations. Canada, Levitt feared, was being “de-industrialized” and turned into an extractive economy, its resources plundered at will by rapacious US corporations.⁷⁹ Concerns about the excessive US control of Canadian economic activity were compounded by fears that Americans were also coming to dominate the nation's intellectual life. Between 1961 and 1968, for example, the University of Alberta faculty went from being 60 percent Canadian to only 47 percent Canadian, with an increasing number of Americans being appointed to high positions and, in turn, hiring other Americans to fill new vacancies. Many students and faculty members were also

⁷⁷ Gad Horowitz, “On the Fear of Nationalism,” *Canadian Dimension* 5, 6 (1967): 8-9 (italics in original); Horowitz, “Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism: An Interpretation,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 32, 2 (1966). Reprinted in R.S. Blair and J.T. McLeod, eds., *The Canadian Political Tradition: Basic Readings*, 2nd ed. (Scarborough: Nelson, 1992), 172-94.

⁷⁸ Phillip Resnick, *The Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945-1975* (Vancouver: New Star, 1977), 41.

⁷⁹ Kari Levitt, *Silent Surrender: The Multinational Corporation in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970).

concerned that university curricula were being increasingly dominated by American content. Such fears were reflected by a teach-in entitled "The American Domination of Canada" that was organized by the student council at the University of Alberta in November 1969.⁸⁰

Canadians across a broad political spectrum, therefore, were growing increasingly wary of the prospect of their nation becoming an outpost of the United States – something like an expanded version of Alaska. In the early 1960s the United States began to pressure the Canadian government to install nuclear warheads on its missiles, a move that was greatly resented by Conservative prime minister John Diefenbaker and by many ordinary Canadians. The Conservatives ran on a strongly anti-American platform in the 1963 election, and although they lost narrowly to the Liberals, they still managed to fan the flames of anti-US sentiment. Pearson's Liberal government agreed to purchase the American warheads but also embarked on a program of economic nationalism.⁸¹ According to historians John Thompson and Stephen Randall, the 1960s "stand out as the decade of greatest Canadian domestic divergence from the United States." While the Johnson administration's efforts to build a Great Society were being sacrificed on the altar of Vietnam, Canadians were building an extensive welfare system, which included universal health care. Also, the emergence of the New Democratic Party in the 1960s gave the Canadian Left a viable parliamentary presence for which there was no equivalent in the United States. Little wonder, then, that many Canadians felt that their society was heading in a different direction from that of the United States or that they resented any actions that smacked of American imperialism. Even the election in 1968 of Pierre Trudeau, a man with no fondness for nationalism and a distaste for populist rhetoric, did little to counter the growing antipathy that many Canadians felt towards their neighbour.⁸²

The wave of anti-Americanism in Canada – and particularly in British Columbia – peaked in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the American military began a series of underground nuclear tests on a remote island in the Aleutian chain that extends like a disjointed tail from the Alaskan Peninsula to the Kamchatka Peninsula in northeast Russia. The indigenous Aleuts had occupied the islands for over 9,000

⁸⁰ Kostash, *Long Way from Home*, 199–200. Kostash, who was a student at the University of Alberta in the 1960s, feels that there was also a positive side to the growing number of American faculty members on the campus. Many of her most inspiring and innovative teachers, she recalled, were Americans who brought radical ideas into the classroom. See *ibid.*, 201.

⁸¹ John Thompson and Stephen Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*, 2nd ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 224–9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 240, 248.

years before Russian colonists invaded the area in the early nineteenth century, killing many Aleuts and hunting the previously abundant sea otters almost to extinction. A lush, spongy carpet of maritime tundra covers the rocky, treeless islands, and they are home to a rich variety of birds and marine animals. In the early twentieth century, President Taft established one of the islands, Amchitka, as part of his country's national wildlife refuge system to protect native birds and fur-bearing animals, with the caveat that the reservation "should not interfere with the use of the islands for lighthouse, military, or naval purposes." Amchitka was occupied by over 15,000 US troops during the Second World War, when it was used as a fighter bomber base, and in 1951 plans were drawn up to conduct two twenty-kiloton nuclear tests on the island, one on the surface, the other in a shallow shaft. The island was momentarily spared this fate, however, when the tests were shifted to Nevada.⁸³

The reprieve was short. In 1964 Amchitka was examined by the Department of Defense and the AEC as a potential site for large underground tests deemed too dangerous for the Nevada proving grounds, with their proximity to the burgeoning casinos and high-rise buildings of Las Vegas. The first blast, *Longshot*, occurred on 29 October 1965 and was designed primarily to gauge the ability of the US military to detect Soviet tests in the Far East. There was virtually no publicity about the eighty-kiloton blast and protest was non-existent. The next bomb, *Milrow*, was a one-megaton "calibration test" designed to determine if the island could withstand an even larger device that the AEC was planning to explode as part of its Spartan anti-ballistic missile development program. Unlike *Longshot*, however, *Milrow*, which was scheduled to take place on 2 October 1969, provoked a storm of outrage across Canada and particularly in Vancouver, the closest major Canadian city to the blast site. Amchitka Island, though rich in marine wildlife, was exceedingly remote and certainly no closer to British Columbia than Nevada, where the United States had been exploding bombs routinely for the previous decade. Nevertheless, British Columbians had long considered this part of the North Pacific to be an extension of their backyard. In reality, of course, Canada could do little to prevent the tests from going ahead since the United States was operating within its

⁸³ William S. Laughlin, *Aleuts: Survivors of the Bering Land Bridge* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 141; Dean Kohlhoff, *When the Wind Was a River: Aleut Evacuation During World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 4; Pam Miller and Norman Buske, *Nuclear Flashback: Report of a Greenpeace Scientific Expedition to Amchitka Island, Alaska - Site of the Largest Underground Nuclear Test in US History* (Greenpeace USA, 30 October 1996), also available on-line at: <www.greenpeaceusa.org/media/publications/nuclear_flashback.htm>.

territorial boundaries. But this only angered people all the more. There were very real fears that radioactive particles might be borne across the Pacific on the prevailing westerly winds to be deposited in the forests and lakes of British Columbia, and in the fatty tissues of its people. There was also anxiety that the explosion might trigger an earthquake, causing a huge wall of water, as Bob Hunter put it, to "slam the lips of the Pacific Rim like a series of karate chops."⁸⁴ Something similar had occurred in 1964, when an earthquake centred in the Aleutians unleashed a huge tidal wave that battered the west coast of Vancouver Island, causing over a hundred deaths and millions of dollars worth of destruction.⁸⁵ The fear and outrage prompted by the Amchitka tests was shared by the *Sun's* editorial writers:

The AEC is playing with our marbles. How dare it! Who says that Canadians, or anybody else, are prepared to pay this price for an advancement in nuclear overkill? The AEC may not be responsive to consensus, but an alerted North American community undoubtedly will do its utmost to see that it doesn't get away with its gambles as easily in the future as it has in the past.⁸⁶

The detonation of a nuclear bomb on 2 October 1969 managed to bring together, at least for a day, a spontaneous coalition of students, peace activists, environmentalists, hippies, yippies, Maoists, Trotskyites, anarchists, and various citizens groups. The crowd, which represented Vancouver's diffuse counterculture as well as older peaceniks and elements of the postmaterialist middle class, converged on the Douglas Border Crossing between British Columbia and Washington State and, for the first time since the War of 1812, closed down a section of the US-Canadian border. Bob Hunter turned up and gave a "ranting and raging" speech.⁸⁷ Rod Marining brought his street theatre company along and Paul Watson arrived with some of his radical friends. Irving and Dorothy Stowe were there, holding up the Quaker banner and representing Irving's various citizens groups. Jim and Marie Bohlen were also present, along with other members of the recently formed BC Sierra Club. Like a flash flood, the protest receded as fast as it had arrived, the various elements of the coalition flowing back into their respective pools. The editors of the UBC student newspaper, while full of admiration for the way student leaders

⁸⁴ Hunter, *Vancouver Sun*, 24 October 1969.

⁸⁵ Paul Jacobs, "The Coming Atomic Blast in Alaska," *New York Review*, 22 July 1971, 34-5.

⁸⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, Editorial, 10 March 1969.

⁸⁷ Robert Hunter, *Warriors of the Rainbow: A Chronicle of the Greenpeace Movement* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 6.

had organized transport to the border crossing for 6,000 students, were nonetheless critical of the inability of activist groups to forge some sort of lasting coalition that could focus attention on US imperialism and the nuclear arms race in a more enduring and rigorous fashion.⁸⁸

Irving Stowe and Jim Bohlen were convinced that the protest represented an opportunity to form such a coalition. Seeing students as the key ground troops in any such alliance, Bohlen, in his capacity as conservation chairman of the BC Sierra Club, contacted Paul Coté, a twenty-seven-year-old law student at UBC and one of those who had helped organize the border protest. Coté was one of nine children from a wealthy, conservative, West Vancouver family. He had little interest in radical politics or social activism until he went to Paris in 1968 to spend a year as an exchange student at the Sorbonne. There, while minding his own business at a student bistro, an over-zealous policeman whacked him in the eye with his truncheon while trying to break up one of the many student demonstrations that occurred during that tumultuous summer in Paris. The incident radicalized Coté, at least temporarily, and he returned to UBC a little less innocent than when he had left. Like Bohlen and Stowe, he saw the potential of harnessing the somewhat chaotic energy of the border protest and concentrating it into a more effective political weapon. The three of them decided to mount a campaign that would draw support from a wide range of groups and spend the following two years focusing attention on, and building up a strong opposition to, the next US detonation on Amchitka, planned for October 1971. Although not yet sure of the details, they agreed that the campaign would require a combination of direct action, media mobilization, political lobbying, and solid scientific research. It would need to emphasize the political folly of the arms race as well as the environmental destructiveness of nuclear weapons testing. And it would not hurt, as far as Bohlen and Stowe were concerned, if it played on the latent anti-Americanism that was pervasive throughout Canada.⁸⁹

Initially, Bohlen thought that the protest could be conducted as a Sierra Club action. The club, after all, had the name recognition and the resources to launch a high-profile campaign and, as a highly respected American organization, might have been able to provoke a greater degree of concern about the nuclear tests in the United States. The first Amchitka blast, in 1965, had aroused little public interest or media coverage in either Canada or the United States. The second, in

⁸⁸ *Ubysey*, 3 October 1969, 1.

⁸⁹ Bohlen and Stowe interviews.

October 1969, drew considerably more attention in Canada but, again, caused almost no interest in the United States. Perhaps the Sierra Club, which had trumpeted its intentions of turning wilderness preservation into an international crusade, could stir the American public out of its lethargy.⁹⁰ But 1969 was a turbulent year for the club, with its executive director, David Brower, clashing with the board over various managerial and policy issues. After a failed attempt to elect his own slate of candidates to the board, Brower had no option but to resign as the club's executive director. He immediately went on to found Friends of the Earth, an organization that better expressed his growing concern with international environmental issues and his belief in adopting more activist tactics. It was not a good time to try to persuade the club to back a Canadian-based campaign against nuclear testing in the Aleutians. Therefore, Bohlen, Stowe, and Coté, with the backing of Terry Simmons and others within the BC Sierra Club, decided to form an independent group to organize the protest against *Cannikin*, as the next bomb blast was to be called. They remembered the words on one of the picket signs they had seen at the border protest, "Don't Make A Wave," which, unbeknownst to them, had been written by Bob Hunter, and decided to call themselves the Don't Make a Wave Committee (DMWC).⁹¹

For several weeks thereafter, the DMWC held meetings at the Stowes' or Bohlen's residence, trying to come up with a plan that would give the next Amchitka blast as much exposure as possible. They all agreed that it was, in Hunter's words, "a potent symbol of war craziness and environmental degradation wrapped up into one," but they struggled to find a method of protest or action that could encapsulate the issue in a powerful and symbolic way. The media were not particularly interested in an event that was almost two years away, and Coté doubted that a significant number of students could once again be mobilized to block the border – an action that would in any case be difficult to repeat now that the authorities were expecting it. At this early stage the committee was mostly made up of Sierra Club members, Quakers, and some of the students from Coté's circle, and the meetings tended to be dominated

⁹⁰ Sierra Club executive director David Brower published an ad in the *New York Times* in January 1969, urging Americans to adopt "an international program, before it is too late, to preserve Earth as a 'conservation district' within the universe, a sort of ... EARTH NATIONAL PARK." Quoted in Cohen, *History of the Sierra Club*, 424.

⁹¹ Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1981), 321-2; Hunter interview. According to Bohlen, 28 November 1969 was the exact date on which the group decided to call themselves the Don't Make a Wave Committee. See Bohlen, *Making Waves*, 27-8.

by Stowe's endless monologues, many of which degenerated into rants against US imperialism and various other issues that were on his mind. After one such meeting the Bohlen's were sitting in their kitchen, Jim pouring out his frustrations, when Marie came up with an idea that was so obvious it almost beggars belief that, after two months of campaign planning, nobody else had thought of it. Why not simply sail a boat up to Amchitka and confront the bomb? Hardly a revelation for experienced peaceniks and Quakers such as the Stowes and Bohlen's, who were very familiar with the exploits of the *Golden Rule* and various other vessels that had attempted exactly such an action only a decade before. Nevertheless, it took Jim completely by surprise, and he immediately became excited by the possibilities.⁹²

By some strange coincidence, at that very moment, a reporter from the *Sun* rang Bohlen to ask him about various Sierra Club campaigns that were taking place at the time. When he asked him if the club had any plans to protest the next Amchitka blast, Bohlen took a deep breath, glanced quickly at Marie, and told the reporter that they were planning to sail a protest boat to the Aleutians to bear witness to the blast. The next day, before most of the DMWC members had heard anything about Bohlen's idea, it was reported in the *Sun* and was effectively a fait accompli. Mistakenly reporting the plan as a Sierra Club campaign, the *Sun* wrote that the group intended to sail a boat to the edge of Amchitka's twelve-mile limit (the area under US jurisdiction) before the blast. "If the Americans want to go ahead with the test," Bohlen defiantly proclaimed, "they'll have to tow us out," an action that would constitute an act of international piracy. "Something must be done to stop the Americans from their insane ecological vandalism," continued Bohlen. In addition to the voyage, it was imperative that Canadians be given access to the relevant data on the ecological impact of the first two blasts, something which the United States had so far refused to do. Bohlen promised that his group would mount a scientific campaign that would expose the ecological effects of nuclear testing to public scrutiny: "We will try to mount the most massive campaign ever, against this mad venture, and we'll make sure the American public is aware of how Canadians think about this matter." Fortunately for Bohlen, all the other members of the DMWC agreed that it was an excellent idea.⁹³

Once the members of the DMWC had decided to follow in the wake of the *Golden Rule* and *Phoenix* in order to protest the *Cannikin* blast, they

⁹² Hunter, *Warriors*, 7; Bohlen, *Making Waves*, 28; Bohlen interview.

⁹³ Bohlen interview; *Vancouver Sun*, 2 September 1970.

had to formulate a strategy that would allow them to avoid the mistakes of their predecessors. The Stowes and Bohlen immediately realized that one of the main flaws of the earlier campaigns was their lack of well formulated media strategies. Bigelow and Reynolds, the captains of the two earlier voyages, had naively assumed that the free and unfettered US media would accurately and fairly report their protest, without fully understanding the structural constraints within which it operated. If it was going to have a greater impact, the DMWC would need to develop strategies to ensure that the media could not ignore its protest. One possibility was to take journalists along on the voyage. Another problem with the earlier voyages was that they involved US citizens protesting against their own government, which made it relatively easy for the AEC to harass and, ultimately, stop them. The DMWC would have to ensure that its boat would not sail under the American flag and that its crew included a large number of non-Americans.

By February 1970 Bohlen and Coté were spending most of their spare time searching for a boat, while Stowe set about fundraising and beating up support and publicity. Several meetings were devoted to deciding upon a name for the eventual boat, one that would express the group's ideology and intentions. The "Don't Make a Wave Committee," though a vivid name that conveyed many people's fears about *Cannikin*, was a rather clunky moniker for a campaign that intended to rely so heavily on the media (not to mention being an awkward name for a boat). After several frustrating meetings, it was a young social worker, Bill Darnell, who put together the magic words. Darnell was a member of the Company of Young Canadians, a kind of youth corps created by the Canadian government to enlist, "the energies and talents of youth ... for economic and social development in Canada and abroad." A more cynical interpretation might be that the government was trying to channel the energies and talents of youth into more manageable, less critical and less disruptive, activities. The creation of the company caused a split within the Canadian New Left, with many activists tempted by the lure of steady work and a regular income, while others viewed it as a sellout.⁹⁴ For Darnell, who was twenty-three years old and married, the company suited his needs, allowing him to pursue his activist interests in the peace and environmental movements (he was also involved in SPEC and the BC Sierra Club) while living a relatively stable middle-class life.

⁹⁴ Kostash, *Long Way from Home*, 20.

Accounts vary as to how Darnell first enunciated the potent combination of the words “green” and “peace.” According to Hunter, as Irving Stowe was leaving a meeting one night, he flashed his usual V sign and said “peace,” to which Darnell responded, “Make it a green peace.” Bohlen disputes this rather pat version, claiming that the name emerged only after a lengthy discussion in which the words “green” and “peace” were bandied about in combination with various other words before Darnell unified them. Whatever the case, none of the founders disputes that it was Darnell who first uttered the two words together. According to Dorothy Stowe, Darnell’s words “lit up the room,” and there was an almost instant agreement that, when they eventually found a boat for their protest, they would name it the “Green Peace.” Soon thereafter, the words “green peace” became the single and singular term “Greenpeace.” Marie Bohlen’s son, Paul, a graphic artist, designed a one-inch button that consisted of the ecology symbol above the peace symbol, with the words “green peace” in between. Finding that he was unable to fit the two words in the confined space, he asked his stepfather what he should do, whereupon Jim Bohlen suggested he simply put the two words together as one.⁹⁵

Over the course of the next year, the DMWC continued to garner support throughout Canada and the United States before setting sail, in September 1971, for Amchitka. They sailed aboard an eighty-foot halibut seiner – which they renamed the *Greenpeace* – but only made it to within 700 miles of the test site before rough weather and the AEC’s delaying tactics forced them back to Vancouver. Despite failing to reach its goal, the *Greenpeace* nonetheless attracted considerable media attention. This was due in no small part to the presence of two well-known journalists – the *Sun*’s Bob Hunter and CBC commentator Ben Metcalfe – among the crew as well as the clearly defined media strategy that was at the crux of the campaign. The voyage also convinced several of the crew that the DMWC had the potential to evolve into a uniquely international direct action organization that could combine the tactics and concerns of the peace and environmental movements with the “global village” theories of Marshall McLuhan. Soon after returning from their maiden voyage, Jim Bohlen, at Bob Hunter’s urging, changed the DMWC’s name to the Greenpeace Foundation, which was registered as a non-profit organization under the BC Society’s Act.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Hunter, *Warriors*, 7–8; Bohlen, *Making Waves*, 30–1; Bohlen and Stowe interviews.

⁹⁶ Interviews with Hunter and Bohlen. The voyage is described in detail in Hunter, *Warriors*, 55–120. For a pictorial account of the journey, see Robert Keziere and Robert Hunter, *Greenpeace* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972).

This, then, is the story of how an organization whose cultural and intellectual roots lie in the American peace and environmental movements came into existence in a Canadian province where both those traditions were notably absent. Despite this absence, however, Vancouver in the late 1960s and early 1970s offered a set of political and social opportunity structures that encouraged the growth of an organization such as Greenpeace. These included a strong subculture that drew on an influx of radicals and hippies from all over Canada and the west coast of the United States; a synergistic overlap between New Leftist radicals and the counterculture, which spawned a predilection for direct action; a particularly deep divide between a rural hinterland with an unreconstructed frontier mindset and an urban centre with an increasingly cosmopolitan population, many of whom embraced postmaterialist values; a provincial government that represented the most rapacious instincts of the former group and that had the power and jurisdictional authority to carry out its development-at-all-costs philosophy; and the growing anti-American sentiments that, because of the city's proximity to the American nuclear tests on Amchitka, were especially acute in Vancouver. This final factor, in particular, precluded the likelihood of an organization such as Greenpeace emerging from the United States.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Vancouver's geographic location made the idea of a protest voyage far more feasible than would have been the case in any other major Canadian city.

The importance of Greenpeace's maritime origins should not be underestimated. Had they begun life as a land-based organization in Toronto or Calgary, it is almost inconceivable that they would have embarked on the anti-whaling and sealing campaigns of the mid-1970s. Clearly, Greenpeace's early association with ocean-based protests shaped the development of its tactics and helped to determine the type of campaigns in which it was likely to be involved. This predilection for the high seas also predisposed the organization towards campaigns that transcended the boundaries of the nation-state. Thus Greenpeace's major actions throughout the 1970s – against French nuclear testing on Mururoa, Soviet whaling in the Pacific, and the harp seal hunt in eastern Canada – had a decidedly international flavour, a fact that helped contribute to the rapid spread of the organization throughout North America, Australasia, and Western Europe. In fact, the organization's

⁹⁷ While anti-Americanism was a vital ingredient in Greenpeace's emergence, it was not one that was required to sustain it. By 1972 it had ceased to be a factor in Greenpeace's campaigns and was certainly not in evidence by the mid-1970s, when Greenpeace first started to make inroads in the United States.

growth was so rapid that it soon outgrew its BC origins. By the end of the 1970s, Greenpeace's power base had shifted, first to the United States and then to the countries of Northern Europe, which remain Greenpeace's strongest base of support to the present day. Although the organization has certainly had its shortcomings – critics have accused it of sloppy scientific analysis and excessively emotional campaigns – there is no doubt that it has highlighted environmental problems in ways that no other group has managed. In the process, it has revealed some of the cracks and fissures in the broad structural constraints – such as global capitalism and Cartesian dualism – that have dominated the ways in which people think and act in the modern world. As some of the organization's founders have quipped during their more optimistic moments, it was quite an achievement for a bunch of peaceniks and hippies from a provincial city on the west coast of Canada.

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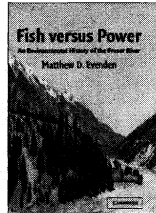
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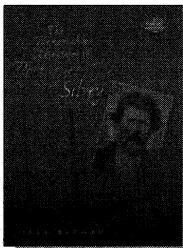
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