

Interview with Patrick Moore

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Patrick Moore was one of the founders of Greenpeace. Today he sees the organization as a major problem and is committed to the approval of genetically modified Golden Rice.

NOVO science department head Thilo Spahl spoke with him.

(Translation Klaus Ammann and Patrick Moore ed.)

***Thilo Spahl:** 40 years ago you founded Greenpeace, today you fight Greenpeace. What went wrong in the meantime, when and why?*

Patrick Moore: Much has gone wrong over the years. In summary: When Greenpeace started, it was not just about the environment, but also about the people. "Green" stood for the environment and "Peace" for ending the threat of global nuclear war, and the destruction of human civilization. Over the years, Greenpeace drifted to where the organization now characterizes people as the enemy of the earth. This is a very different approach and not one I wanted to join. Human beings are part of the earth. We are unique with our big brains and our technology in the living world. We have a great responsibility to each other and to the environment. And we are conscious about it. There is indeed the element of self-interest. If we destroy the environment, we can no longer use it. But there is also a love for nature that people feel, that goes beyond our own needs.

I was lucky enough to be born in northern Vancouver Island in the pristine nature of the forests. My great love for nature led me to study ecology by the end of the 1960s. In 1971 I joined the "Don't Make a Wave Committee" to protest against the US nuclear tests in Alaska. Since I practically grew up on boats, I was already trained for these early actions, which we carried out in a small group. The first two campaigns were against nuclear tests and the whole focus was against war. In the beginning we named our boat the "Greenpeace". In 1972, we transferred the name to the organization: the Greenpeace Foundation. There were two factions in Greenpeace: the Peaceniks and the Eco-Freaks. When we launched the 'Save the Whales campaign', the Peacenik people asked: What is this about? With the campaigns to save the whales and against the slaughter of baby seals, we moved away from the focus on people and focused entirely on environmental topics. That was probably the decisive turning point for Greenpeace towards a purely eco-centric orientation. This would be okay if campaigns were justified rationally and constructively. But the opposite was becoming true.

In the 1970s, Greenpeace grew rapidly and disorderly. Everywhere they opened more or less autonomous Greenpeace offices, because the name was not properly protected. In order not to lose control altogether, we founded Greenpeace International in 1979 and I became one of the directors -

the only one with a scientific training. The headquarters was moved from Vancouver to Amsterdam, since most of the money could be raised in Europe. Meanwhile, we were now supported by the majority of the public: Nuclear disarmament, save the whales, stop toxic waste - by the mid-1980s all this was no longer controversial. Greenpeace was established, influential and rich.

"Business success, steadily improving living conditions, and environmental protection are by no means contradictory topics"

What did this mean for the re-alignment of action?

Now that a majority agreed with all the reasonable demands, the only way to preserve the confrontational anti-establishment attitude that was part of their nature was to become ever more extreme. So eventually any claim to science and logic was abandoned in favour of zero-tolerance campaigns. Genetic engineering and nuclear power became the prime topics for unilateral uncompromising demonization including the demand for total bans. At the same time the Cold War ended, and the peace movement lost its purpose. The peace movement was basically a leftist, anti-American movement. I was part of the peace movement, but never pronounced on the political left. I have always been left in terms of social issues and right in terms of economic policy. Environmental protection cannot be classified in this simplistic left-right scheme, because I position it in the center, between those fronts. I think the absence of scientifically justifiable demands, combined with a left, anti-American and anti-market attitude led the environmental movement into the ideological impasse in which it lies today.

Although you left Greenpeace and became a vehement critic of the organization, you still see your-self as an environmentalist. What do you think is the right approach for sound environmental protection?

In 1982 I took part in a meeting of 85 leaders of international environmental protection organizations in Nairobi. I remember, as the head of Friends of the Earth UK - it was Tom Burke, who now works for Rio Tinto – used the term "sustainable development" for the first time. I had not heard of it, and if I did not know the term, it had to be very new. Greenpeace rejected the concept from the beginning. They did not want a "sustainable" development, because they opposed development altogether. But development is a good thing. If we really need something, then it must be developed. If there was no development, time would stand still. Today, the concept of sustainable development is often misinterpreted and abused. For me, it is still the right approach. I define sustainable development as the combination of economic, social and environmental objectives. It is about creating win-win-win situations. I do not see this as a theoretical concept, but a very practical task. Business success, steadily improving living conditions and protection of nature are not exclusive of each other. You must weigh each case, to find viable solutions that include all three priorities. Back then I thought: Wow, the next challenge is much bigger, much more important than to be concerned only about the environment. The challenge is to introduce the new environmental values into the existing economic and social development. Greenpeace was easy to convince. They all said: Yes, yes, that's what we want.

Or rather: what we do not want.

That's right, no nuclear power, no genetic engineering, no chemicals, etc.

What in your opinion are the biggest challenges for a conservationist?

If I am asked what is the biggest environmental problem - my answer is: poverty. Poor people cannot afford to clean wastewater, to clean the air, to plant new trees after cutting them down for fuel, etc. Poverty is a problem for the people and for the environment. To fight poverty helps both. There is no contradiction.

Why did you leave Greenpeace?

When I realized that the humanitarian philosophy had disappeared from Greenpeace, I understood that I had to leave. I wanted to shift from confrontation towards a consensus policy. If everyone agrees with you that the environment is important, you can stop beating them on the head, and sit down and talk about concrete solutions to concrete problems. And I wanted to get away from the anti-development stance towards a sustainable development approach. When my colleagues came up with the crazy idea of banning chlorine worldwide, it was enough for me to go permanently. I said: Dear God, guys, listen up! You cannot prohibit chemical elements. Chlorine is the most important element for health care. I know it's all about people, but we need chlorine. Chlorine is just so important, precisely because it is toxic - toxic to bacteria that want to kill us. We need toxic chemicals to live a healthy life. We can be against certain chlorine compounds for certain uses, but we cannot ask seriously: "Ban Chlorine Worldwide!" Because of this campaign, I finally left Greenpeace in 1986.

If Greenpeace has become so extremist, why is it so popular?

Because the environmental movement has basically become a religion, or rather a kind of hybrid between religion and political ideology. When people internalize new values, a desire to be environmentally conscious, to save the world, etc., and Greenpeace makes claims that fit this desire, then the organization indeed must enjoy great popularity. It apparently does not matter that any reference to reality is given up. Take the example of mining. Greenpeace is against mining, not only certain mining, but any. If one asks a green politician, to name a mine that is environmentally okay, you get no answer. That would be against the rule: no mining. But how do you get cell phones and bicycles and rapid transit, buildings and windmills? It is an absolute dream world. They call it idealism, but in reality it is a fairy-tale world.

An important aspect of this religion plays on fear and guilt. This works best when it comes to Global Warming. First, the problem needs to be a global one - they threaten you with the end of the world. Second, everyone is consuming energy and therefore must feel guilty. Therefore, the so-called climate change movement is extremely successful because it means that people are scared and feel bad and guilty and believe they should give money - at the Church of Greenpeace.

"Although it is obvious that modern technology is of great value, Greenpeace fights against it. But actually they cannot go without it for a single moment. "

Food is also a big issue.

Yes, of course. Nutrition keeps many people busy growing and distributing food. Since discontentment works very well, as with energy Greenpeace simply ignores the real needs of 7 billion people.

Greenpeace is fighting simultaneously against overfishing and aquaculture. Greenpeace is also against high-performance agricultural and for the preservation of biodiversity. But aquaculture is the only way to produce a lot of fish without endangering the natural resources. And intensive agriculture is the only way to feed humanity without turning the whole of nature into farmland. If you are against both, this means after all, that there are a few billion too many people on the planet and it's all about how to get rid of them or ignore them somehow.

The mechanization of agriculture is the key to fighting poverty. Modern agricultural methods also automatically lead to a decline in population growth. People move to the city, women receive more education, emancipate themselves and do not spend their entire lives barefoot and pregnant. The basis for this development is the mechanization of agriculture. I often argue about this topic. People say, more education for women is the key. But how do girls get education when they have to start working in the fields when they are eight years old ? People support all sorts of nonsense, such as the preservation of subsistence farming, which is romanticized as "peasant agriculture", but in reality this means only drudgery, grinding poverty, and a short life.

Although modern technology is so obviously useful, Greenpeace fights against it. But in fact they cannot do without it for a second. To demonstrate against fossil fuels, Greenpeace attacks a Russian oil rig in a big boat with diesel engines. I don't think that's exactly consistent. As we sailed to Alaska, to protest against nuclear testing, we had no atomic bomb on board. They also pretend to be on a sailing boat, but in reality their new \$ 32 million yacht has a 5000 hp diesel engine. I have nothing against diesel engines. I just want to clarify, in what kind of dream world these people live.

What do you think of the precautionary principle?

It is unfortunately almost always used in the wrong way. The key here is to weigh the risks of inaction against the risks of action. Golden rice is the classic example. What is the risk of the cultivation of Golden Rice, which could make a huge contribution to the terrible consequences of vitamin A deficiency? I do not know of any. Let's say that I agree in theory, that there might be some small risk, even though I can detect none so far and I cannot imagine what this could be. However, what I know exactly is the risk of non-approval of Golden Rice. And this is anything but hypothetical. Two million children die each year from diseases related to vitamin A deficiency. So if I take the precautionary principle seriously, I can only demand: allow golden rice immediately. If vitamin A deficiency was a disease such as malaria, and someone invented a drug that cured the disease, it would not take long before people could use it.

The now widespread interpretation of the precautionary principle is completely absurd. It reads: If using a technology, or anything, results in any conceivable risk, it should never be used. Then I can only say: Do not get up in the morning and just stay in bed. Or just put an end to your life, because that is the only way to avoid all risks. If you're dead, you cannot be in danger anymore.

"If a large company would fully support Golden Rice, this is exactly what opponents of GMOs like to criticize – but it would be very helpful for the Golden rice, because they would put a lot of money behind it."

Golden rice was invented 15 years ago. Why does it take so long until it can be grown?

For two reasons: first, the obstacles put up by organizations such as Greenpeace. Second - and here the irony is evident: because it is a humanitarian project. There is no Monsanto behind it with hundreds of millions of dollars. Exactly what opponents of genetic engineering GMOs like to criticize, would be very helpful for the Golden rice: if a large company would be behind it, they would support it with a lot of money. But from the outset it was clear to everyone that Golden Rice would be no big deal financially. You cannot expect big money from poor people who barely have enough to eat. It is a project that is supported by non-profit organizations. And so it is easier for the Greens to block it.

What claims do they have against the Golden Rice?

They say Golden Rice is a Trojan horse for GMOs. You have to understand that the Trojan horse had two sides. Those who were defeated by it, said it was unfair. But those who were in the horse were clever. When I hear this argument, so I say on the one hand: people, what is this? This is a humanitarian project! It's not about profit. On the other hand, I know of course that Golden Rice, when it is introduced and delivers what we promise, will contribute considerably to convince the people of the great benefits of genetic engineering.

If Greenpeace would concentrate on collecting money from wealthy Europeans in order to protect them from evil genetic engineering, one could live with it. Unfortunately, Greenpeace is not content to only scare the people in the Western countries. They have massively infiltrated Africa and Asia with help of their outposts and are financing people who support the anti-GMO agenda. The best example is the campaign against Golden Rice in the Philippines. Greenpeace operates on the political and legal level. They work to influence the Environment Minister who wants to present himself as environmentalist. But ultimately they cannot stop us. I think both the Philippines and Bangladesh will continue with the development of Golden Rice. I am very optimistic and just hope that Ingo Potrykus, the inventor of the Golden rice, lives to see it finally introduced to the people who need it.

5 Comments

Comment E. Moser 23. 4. 2014

"We are unique with our big brains and our technology in the living world."

This is true

"We have a great responsibility to each other and to the environment."

This is also true

„ And we also are conscious about it“

This is not always true. This man does not seem to perceive everything what happens on earth or he has now landed in another world.

There is indeed the element of self-interest. If we destroy the environment, we can no longer use it. But there is also a love for nature that people feel, that goes beyond their own needs.

You could not find better words for a greenwash leaflet

Comment Rotspoon 25. 4. 2014

It is fulfilling a septuagenarian with great joy to read here how he himself thinks and feels – and what is matching his own lifelong experience. What remains is the certainty that reason will triumph despite the reactionaries from left, right or green making.

Comment Klaus Ammann 26. 4. 2014

Dear E. Moser, your short citations provide a wrong impression about Patrick Moore: He does not advocate Greenwash, on the contrary: He is pleading for an effective and successful fight against environmental problems – one of the causes is indeed poverty. It is not enough to rant and strike fear into the heart of the people in order to get donations.

It could be nice to learn that Greenpeace spends some of the donation millions for fighting with concrete projects against poverty, as for example against the catastrophic deficiency of vitamins and food of poor people. This would enhance the own credibility. Why not come with their own solutions they propose, it does not need to be the Golden Rice, although this would be for sure the most low-cost and most effective solution, and it would even be SUSTAINABLE.

I recommend having a look at the website of our Campaign, which contains now also translations into German, French and Italian: www.allowgoldenricenow.org

(Twitter) Klaus 27. 4. 2014

@e.moser “Genetic engineering = environmental destruction? Or how do you explain your remark? Do your relate to any form of genetic engineering (green, white, second generation)

Comment E. Moser 28. 4. 2014

Foremost you have to consider, that after a short while of stunned shock after the Greenpeace campaign the industry started armament escalation following natural dynamics to nearly reach absurd limits, (labelling as terrorist group with organized crime), for Greenpeace becoming very costly, and therefore the financial resources were less and less available for essential projects and original goals. It cannot be ignored, that industry as a whole commands over much higher financial resources in order to generate counter-pressure, although they would have spent the money preferably to their shareholders and alike (avoiding taxes).

The approach with Golden Rice (approved only from the producers view) also is falling short, because it is proven multiple times that only a balanced diet with vegetables and fruits can eliminate best the deficiencies. The Golden Rice will cause a reduction to one single diet solution, leading into a total dependency with the well-known deficiencies and side effects. Ultimately, you can only support Golden Rice, if you ignore this side of the story.

Comment Klaus Ammann 29.4. 2014 (not yet approved)

Now, dear M. E. Moser, you are really playing hard the card of the evil industry, you seem to have lost other arguments. This is not very convincing and it is not related to our topic.

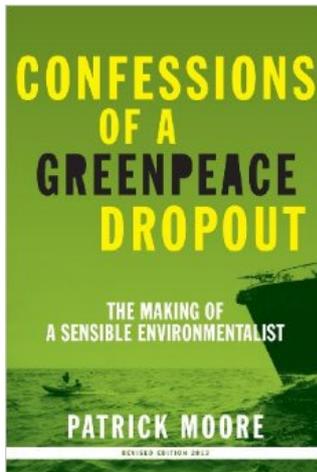
If the “balanced diet approved multiple times” would be really successful, one could really support it with good feelings. But the millions of dead children are still a sad fact since years.

Our campaign supports explicitly all projects for a better diet (on long terms) and for vitamin pill supplies (on short terms) as a first aid, this against your superficial statements. But you also have to realize that deficiencies and poverty are closely intertwined, and therefore it will be more difficult to find sustainable diet solutions in a reasonable time span.

These diet campaigns are, as well as the vitamin pill supplies, for the time being only of limited success, a breakthrough is not in sight since many years (the reasons for this are well documented in many good studies). And this is exactly where the Golden Rice comes in as the best and most sustainable option – and the industry does not earn a penny with it. The smallholders can freely reproduce the Golden Rice and the costs for the seeds are the same as for conventional rice.

More details under the following link, including lots of literature references

<http://www.ask-force.org/web/Golden-Rice/Ammann-Goldener-Reis-Nachhaltige-Loesung-20140421.pdf>



Patrick Albert Moore: *Confessions of a Greenpeace Dropout: The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist*, Beatty Street Publishing, Inc. (22. November 2010).

http://www.amazon.com/Confessions-Greenpeace-Dropout-Sensible-environmentalist/dp/0986480827/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398633693&sr=8-1&keywords=Moore+greenpeace