

Gore-y Legerdemain

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If one is prone to watching the news or reading the major news media, one is bound sooner or later, to be scared literally witless. In my short lifetime (though I age with each passing day having two teenaged daughters to accelerate the process) I have been warned against the insalubrious effects of asbestos, saccharine, Nutra-sweet, cholesterol, butter, margarine, alar, radon, first-hand smoke, second-hand smoke, food with fat, various foods with a high percentage of fat, polyunsaturated fats, nuclear war, nuclear winter, the second ice age, global warming, the green house effect, famine, the ozone, Corvairs, portable phones, telephone transformers, microwave ovens, charcoal grills, smog, acid rain, mercury-laden fish ... whew! You get the picture, and this is only column A. What would be risible if it were not also so intellectually staggering is that, with the exception of first-hand smoking, all the others in the list are so many bogey-men meant to frighten grown-up children. No wonder they call us *Baby-boomers*. We're a generation of *enfants terribles* afraid of things that go bump in the light!

The Clinton-Gore Administration has, of course, done little but blow hard about these things. That's the good news. The bad news is that slowly, they will eventually begin to do some serious damage unless we can get them out of office. Vice-President Gore is like a small child in a china store. Even if you're holding the little tyke by the hand, pretty soon the dazzling sparkles will get the best of him and you'll pay through the nose. Meanwhile, Gore and his Earth First! cronies continue on the scare rampage. Only a handful of anti-eco-terrorists are fighting the good fight. Ronald Bailey is one such warrior.

Ronald Bailey should get a Pulitzer Prize for this book, but there's no way in the hot place, with or without global warming, that he will even be considered. It may be politically incorrect to call a gorgeous woman a "Babe", but it political suicide to argue against the received texts of the eco-hierophants who tell us, for our own good, mind you, that WE ARE ALL DYING OF VARIOUS AND SUNDRY THINGS AND ALL OF THEM ARE OUR FAULT!, just like that, in screaming uncials. These are the new

puritans, a group of busybodies without compassion, Victorians without a good reason, or Victorians gone mad—no, make that hornmad.

If you are the least bit happy with any practice in life, something is wrong. And these people will make sure you don't ever have that feeling again. Enjoy a cigar after dinner? You're killing small salamanders in Third World countries (you figure it out), not to mention yourself and those around you. Want to smell like something other than stale? That aerosol can you're using is killing birds in the Galapagos, while increasing the temperature in the Antarctica by fifteen degrees. And so it goes.

These new puritans are not ready for prime time, but they are going prime time every chance they get; and a pandering, fawning press is giving them virtually every chance they want. The problem is, they're out for blood, your blood *and* your money, and they intend to get both. These Ecopuritans hate humanity in all its forms. Now some will think this hyperbole, but EarthFirst! founder, David Foreman, a few years back told us that western society was “rotten to the core”. He called for a virus that would infect mostly White Americans in large urban cities. He wanted something, so he said, on the order of aids, to help thin out the population. Okay, you first, David. He failed to see that eliminating his own hot air would make the world a much cleaner and better place to live.

Bailey examines about a half dozen of these scares, ranging from ozone depletion to recombinant dna. The Luddites are everywhere in these pages, and the news is that the sky is falling, is falling. No kidding, really! The upshot of all of these claims and aims seems to be to provide Third World countries with as much money as they want. Agenda 21, the hare-brained idea arising out of the Earth Summit, would, if fully implemented, provide Third World countries with \$125 billion annually—enough to usher in the Kingdom according to the Gospel of Green Marx. The Earth Summit, showcased by none other than the tree-hugging vice-president, Gore, proved a comedy of errors, not the least of which proved to be the squabble of some groups not housed in air-conditioned hotels, but in recreations of their ancestors' habitats, proving, once and for all, that you *can* take the country out of the boy, so long as the boy is on the payroll of some environmentalist group.

The first scamscare Bailey uncovers is the nuclear war scenario. The atomic bomb exploding over a New Mexico site in 1945 led Robert J. Oppenheimer, later revealed in *Special Tasks* as a mole, to declare, “I am become Death, the Shatterer of worlds.” This gave him instant liberal credentials, and *carte blanche* to speak on any topic in perpetuity. Of course the nuclear arsenal is dangerous; a mere fraction of it could blow up the world. But its presence prevented the world from being blown to bits by someone like Hussein, a fact that the nuclear-terrorists have yet to admit. Yes, it did siphon off money from education. But after \$2.2 trillion education dollars spent during the decade of the eighties, look what we have to show for it: a generation of students who will not surpass their peers for the first time ever. I'll take a billion dollar Stealth wing over a million dollar chalkboard any day.

Bailey's point here is that for all the scare, from the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* famous clock to wars and rumors of wars, there has been no real threat. Even the tragedy of Chernobyl proved far less apocalyptic than anything predicted by anyone on the left. The only places where these disasters have actually come true are in movies the left's counterparts in Hollywood produce.

Next comes hunger, one of the four horsemen. Here again, we have been treated to lies, damned lies and statistics. From Malthus to *Population Bomb* author Paul Ehrlich, to the late homeless advocate, Mitch Snyder, we have been outright lied to at every turn. I can remember reading Ehrlich's book as a junior in high school. For days we all walked around wishing and hoping that we didn't live in such a world, and that there ought to be some way to curb our parents' libidos. Oh, it never once occurred to any of us that we were part of the population bomb, but never mind. I remember being relieved when abortions became available, and when The Pill finally appeared. I was young and foolish then, and missed the ruse being pulled on me. The two worked together: teach young people that world is over-populated and then tell them about abortions and birth control pills.

Perhaps the best story is the one Bailey repeats about Ehrlich and cornucopian Julian Simon. Following President Carter's Club of Rome group, Ehrlich made the claim that we were permanently depleting our natural resources. Simon asked Ehrlich to put his money where his mouth was. He bet Ehrlich that the real price of any raw material would indefinitely decline, proving that such materials were becoming more abundant, not less. Ehrlich took the bait and the two drew up a contract in 1980 wherein if the combined prices of any five metals exceeded \$1,000 in a ten year period, Simon would pay; if they fell, Ehrlich would. In 1990, Ehrlich sent a check to Simon; prices had fallen by more than 50%.

Other chapters include the hysterically funny claims that the earth was entering an ice age in the seventies, followed, hardly a decade later, by the claims that we were entering a green-house effect. What made the claims even funnier was that they were brought by the *same scientists!* Eventually these men and women will get it right, but don't hold your breath.

What all these chapters illustrate is the sheer ignorance these pseudo-scientists possess, and how often they are wrong. From Ehrlich to Sagan to Rifkin and beyond, every scare-theorist has not merely been proven to have been inaccurate, but has been proven to be a jack ass. And yet, turn on the nightly news on almost any given weekday and you will see Sagan or Rifkin or some other nincompoop making some outlandish claim. Witness Sagan's claim that the Iraqi fires from the Gulf War would result in massive destruction, a lowering of temperatures and worldwide famine. Moreover, they would take forever to put out. Sagan was wrong on all counts. After the initial destruction of the fire and the understandable noxious sequela experienced by those who breathed the air of the flames for long periods, nature has all but repaired itself.

Nature also defied Sagan and his cronies about the recrudescence of Prince William Sound following the Exxon oil spill. Though the Sound was never to be the same again, nature, ignoring the expert advice of Sagan and others, repaired herself *better* without help, than the areas which received billions of dollars of expert cleanup. But only this past Sunday (I'm writing this in June 1994) there is Sagan in the Parade section of our *conservative* newspaper, making bold claims and spewing out yet more flapdoodle. Even when Dan Quayle was right the left mocked him as wrong. But Sagan and his know-nothings, whose averages are worst than stopped clocks, are still showcased as know-it-alls.

Bailey's book does not claim that there are not potential disasters. Nor does he claim that we may live as we please and forget bothering to take care of the planet. What he does call for, however, is sanity in the approach to these problems. The only way to solve the pollution problem is to eliminate humanity, a solution apparently Earth First! is ready to implement. But short of such radical solutions, these issues must be examined carefully, cogently, and we must opt for solutions that will curtail, if not solve outright the problem, while still allowing both humans and capitalism to flourish.

In Aesop's fable, the boy who cried wolf was finally eaten by the fear he pretended pursued him. Ecoterrorists stand in the same place. By frightening us about everything, they will, in the end, be believed about nothing. This serves no one. If Vice-President Gore wants to do something useful while he serves us, he would do well to call his children in and give them a good, old-fashion spanking. He could begin by slapping himself a few times so we could all say, "Thanks, you needed that!"