

Heresy and the green inquisition

In any sect the worst sinner is the heretic: the one who once knew the “truth” but now has rejected it. Bjørn Lomborg is such a man. By his own admission he is a man of the political left. He refuses to eat meat because of his views regarding animals. He was formerly a member of Greenpeace. Just 36 years old, Lomborg is a professor of statistics; he’s Danish, attractive, and gay. He could almost be a poster boy for political correctness – if it weren’t for his damnable book: *The Skeptical Environmentalist*.

Lomborg’s descent into Green apostasy began in February 1997 while he was in Los Angeles. There he picked up a copy of *Wired* magazine and read an interview with the economist Julian Simon. In it Simon outlined his reasons for maintaining that the Green left was wrong on almost all the major issues. Lomborg was shocked that anyone disputed the common wisdom.

When he returned to the University of Aarhus he organised a project for the students in his statistics course. They would analyse the claims made by Simon, check them against the available data and prove him wrong. As he now admits, he set out to debunk Simon and got debunked himself instead. The evidence did not support the doomsday theories of the Green movement and Lomborg made a big mistake by writing a book on what he discovered.

Since then it has been open war with Lomborg as the major target. The World Wildlife Fund and the World Resources Institute sent out an attack on Lomborg to journalists hoping to limit his publicity. They argued that he “has no professional training – and has done no professional research – in ecology, climate science, resource economics, environmental policy, or other fields covered by his new book.” Presumably Lomborg’s credentials in statistics don’t qualify him to analyse the numbers and see if they add up.

But when did the Greens suddenly start worrying about credentials? When the National Resources Defence Council started a phoney scare about the preservative alar – which they erroneously called a pesticide – they brought out actress Meryl Streep for media appearances.

One of the Greens’ favourite books was Al Gore’s *Earth in the Balance*, which they never tired of praising. Gore briefly worked as a journalist many years ago but since then has been a professional politician. He picked up his views on the environment while studying theology, not science. No one seemed to worry about credentials then.

When the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) abandoned its campaign to disarm the United States, after the cold war ended with socialism’s collapse, it turned to environmentalism. A major UCS representative was Helen Caldicott, a paediatrician. Her limited credentials didn’t stop her campaigning against nuclear energy. Nor did they prevent her from condemning capitalism and praising the Castro regime. In her case they weren’t concerned about credentials.

At one point the UCS put Chris Riddiough in charge of their global warming project. She studied astronomy at university but was primarily a full-time activist for the Democratic Socialists of America. Before that she worked for the National Organisation of Women. None of these studies or activities seemed to qualify her to run a global warming project. This also did not bother the Greens.

Paul Ehrlich is easily the father of the modern Green movement. His panic-ridden book *The Population Explosion* inspired many an activist to join the movement. He wrote about population and food-production problems. Yet his speciality was butterflies - not demographics, economics or agriculture.

Ralph Nader has been so popular in his Green campaigns that the Green Party nominated him to run for President. He was an attorney with no environmental research experience, but this lack of credentials apparently did not disqualify him from speaking on their behalf concerning scientific matters.

Lomborg's knowledge of statistics qualifies him perfectly for precisely the subject he covers in his book – the analysis and evaluation of data. Had that number-crunching turned up results that corresponded with the doomsday scenarios of the Greens, it is doubtful whether they would be questioning his credentials. Unfortunately, this new-found fondness for credentials seems to be applied only to Green opponents.

Further reading

Ehrlich, P (1990) *The Population Explosion*, Simon and Schuster, New York.

Lomborg, B (2001) *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Simon, J (1996) *The Ultimate Resource 2*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

This Briefing Paper was written by Jim Peron, a freelance researcher and writer, and first appeared on the FMF's website: www.freemarketfoundation.com.