



ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM ON THE GROUND: Small Green and Indigenous Organizing

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ISBN 978-1-77385-005-4

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From Social Movement to Environmental Behemoth: How Greenpeace Got Big

Frank Zelko

Three decades after he helped found Greenpeace, the countercultural journalist and charismatic environmentalist Bob Hunter had this to say about the organization: “It’s big, but nowhere near big enough.”¹ Hunter had hoped that Greenpeace would bring about a dramatic change in human consciousness in which a holistic ecological worldview would inform all politics and guide people’s interactions with the rest of nature. Only by this measure could a Greenpeace founder be disappointed by the fact that the organization—created by a handful of American and Canadian activists in Vancouver’s countercultural ghetto—had become a high-profile global NGO with offices in fifty countries and an annual budget of over 200 million dollars. But size, of course, is a relative concept. An environmental justice group toiling away on a toxics campaign in Louisiana could only dream of having the influence and resources of an NGO like Greenpeace. On the other hand, compared to global corporations and governments, Greenpeace looks positively puny. In terms of global political and economic influence, entities such as the US military and Exxon are the elephants. Greenpeace is just an annoying insect on their rump.

Nevertheless, among environmental NGOs, Greenpeace is clearly a whale. How did a small band of Vancouver-based anti-nuclear

protestors—many of whom could be considered social misfits—create such a high-profile organization? In broad terms, the answer is simple: it was a combination of hard work, fortunate timing, and a willingness to compromise some of their core principles. However, a closer look at Greenpeace's history reveals a more complex story, one involving a good deal of contingency and many unexpected twists. Based on the vision and actions of its founders, Greenpeace could just as easily have become a social movement as a professional organization. For that matter, it could easily have disappeared after its first campaign. This chapter will examine some of the key moments in Greenpeace's growth in order to explain how the organization "got big." Unlike many small environmental groups that focused on local or regional issues, Greenpeace's founders set goals for themselves that could never be achieved merely through cultivating local renown and political influence. Entering the arena of what political scientist Paul Wapner calls "world civic politics" requires an ability to mobilize resources around the planet and attain recognition on a global scale.² Thus the imperative to get big was in a sense built into Greenpeace from the moment its founders decided to launch their first transnational protest campaign on the high seas.

Unlike, say, Friends of the Earth, which sprung fully formed from the mind of David Brower, Greenpeace's founding was more of a free-form process than an act of creation.³ I have told this story in great detail elsewhere, but the short version goes something like this: In the late 1960s, numerous Americans found themselves living in Canada because of, in one way or another, various disagreements with their government's foreign policy. In addition to young draft evaders, there were older immigrants from the Second World War generation who wanted to ensure that their sons would not get drafted into the US military once they came of age. Others left because they found US preparations for nuclear war to be unconscionable. Quite a few were Quakers. In Vancouver, a fertile centre of the Canadian counterculture, these older Americans came into contact with numerous hippies and radical activists who shared their misgivings about issues such as nuclear warfare and the malign influence of the US military-industrial complex. Many were also concerned about issues such as pollution, while some of the Americans were Sierra Club members

who were appalled by the BC government's utilitarian attitude toward the province's spectacular wilderness areas.⁴

This disparate array of anti-war activists, environmentalists, and the politically disaffected members of the counterculture were galvanized by one issue in particular: the US decision to conduct a series of nuclear weapons tests on Amchitka Island, a tiny speck of tundra in the faraway Aleutians. Apart from their general opposition to nuclear weapons, many feared that the tests—conducted in a geologically unstable area—could set off earthquakes and a tsunami that would, in Bob Hunter's dramatic description, “slam the lips of the Pacific Rim like a series of karate chops.”⁵ Between 1969 and 1971, the tests inspired much opposition and numerous protests. In 1969, for example, thousands of protesters descended on the US-Canadian border, disrupting the smooth flow of people and goods for the day. It was at one such protest on the BC-Washington border that the nucleus of the Greenpeace coalition was formed. It was here that two older American activists—Irving Stowe from Rhode Island and Jim Bohlen from Pennsylvania—met up with various student radicals and other young protest groups and decided to form an organization that would try to stop the next major nuclear test, scheduled for late 1971. They gave themselves the rather vivid, if somewhat clumsy moniker, the Don't Make a Wave Committee (DMWC), and began meeting regularly at Stowe's house in Vancouver. After many fruitless discussions, Bohlen came up with a plan: they would charter a boat and sail it into the nuclear test zone, thereby bearing witness to the ecological crime and putting political pressure on both the US and Canadian governments.

Bob Hunter, at the time a columnist for the *Vancouver Sun*, attended many of the meetings, as did Ben Metcalfe, a well-known CBC personality and journalist. Patrick Moore, a doctoral student in ecology at the University of British Columbia, was also a regular participant, and Paul Watson, at the time still a teenager, was also an active member of the group. At one point, as Irving Stowe was leaving a meeting, he flashed his usual V-sign and said “peace.” Bill Darnell, a social worker and local activist, spontaneously replied, “Make it a green peace!” The group liked the sound of those two words together and decided that they would call their boat the *Greenpeace*. Thus the first Greenpeace action, in which a dozen activists tried to sail an old halibut seiner to Amchitka to protest the nuclear blast,

was officially conducted by the DMWC. Only after this first campaign (the boat never made it to Amchitka but nonetheless garnered a lot of publicity in the attempt) did the group's members decide to officially register the "Greenpeace Foundation" (Hunter suggested the title) as a non-profit corporation in British Columbia in early 1972.

Although they were united in their overall environmental goals, there was considerable tension among the activists. The most obvious of these was the split between the older generation of peace movement protestors, who were inclined toward a sober and respectable form of scientific rationalism, and the younger activists, who embraced various counter-cultural beliefs and values. The participants labelled this dichotomy the "mechanics versus the mystics," and it would remain a fundamental cleavage within the organization throughout the 1970s. Regardless of their differences in lifestyle and outlook, however, those on board the *Greenpeace* recognized that their campaign had generated the embryonic stirrings of a broad international trans-political alliance. All agreed that such a possibility was too important to abandon, regardless of how amorphous the alliance or how difficult the task of mobilizing it might prove. And such feelings were not without justification. Despite their failure to reach their destination and the flakiness that characterized some aspects of the campaign, it was nonetheless a substantial achievement. Unlike the case with similar voyages of the past, such as the Quaker anti-nuclear protests of the 1950s, the *Greenpeace* managed to attract considerable media attention, in large part because of the presence of several experienced journalists among the crew. Furthermore, as well as employing the direct-action tactics of its predecessors, the campaign, which was almost two years in the making, made a genuine effort to unite two of the major social movements of the twentieth century—environmentalism and the peace movement. The DMWC managed to lay the groundwork for such an alliance in a deliberate and thoroughgoing way. Whereas previously the two movements had merely overlapped, now, at least among a certain segment of the Canadian population, the values and tactics of the peace and environmental movements, as well as their respective critiques of modernity, were on the way to being integrated.

The question for the DMWC, then, was what shape should the organization take in order to help give such an alliance a more concrete form?

According to Hunter, who from the beginning had possessed the grandest vision for the DMWC, the new organization needed to abandon the traditional revolutionary goal of replacing one political regime with another, which would only result in illusory change. Instead, it would have to focus all of its energy on bringing about a consciousness revolution on a world scale, using cameras, rather than guns, to fight a McLuhanesque war for the hearts and minds of the masses. The ultimate goal should be nothing less than the creation of a green version of the United Nations.⁶ How exactly such an organization should be structured and managed was not precisely clear, but then again, organizational matters were never Hunter's strong suit.

CBC journalist Ben Metcalfe also had an essentially McLuhanesque vision for any new organization that might emerge from the DMWC, but it was one that was unencumbered by the kind of utopianism that characterized Hunter's thinking. Instead, the more cynical, elitist, and conspiratorial Metcalfe felt that the most useful thing that they could accomplish would be to create an organization that would do for ecology what Madison Avenue had done for corporate America. If brainwashing was the only way to save the earth from humanity, then so be it.⁷ Bohlen, who had never really given much thought to the creation of an ongoing organization, was essentially satisfied with the DMWC as it stood, feeling that with some minor structural tinkering, it could be set up to run multiple campaigns based on direct action, scientific research, educational outreach, and solid media work.⁸ For Irving Stowe, the DMWC had the potential to empower various disenfranchised social groups by acting as an organizer, facilitator, and funder of progressive social and political movements. The committee, he told the *Georgia Straight*, could use "its funds and influence, and speaking and organizing abilities [to help] those groups in the community which have a base for action to actually translate that concern into action." Students and women, Stowe felt, were particularly aware of the systemic problems of modern industrial societies, since they were among its victims. "My feeling is that the best expenditure that the people in the Don't Make a Wave Committee can do [*sic*] is to help these groups in whatever way they call upon us to become politically active, politically motivated, and take action."⁹

Clearly, right from the beginning, the founders were giving a good deal of thought to issues such as organizational form and growth. What was just as clear was that there were substantial differences between them on such questions, with the strongest cleavage represented by Bohlen's earnest Quakerism on one side and Hunter's grand countercultural vision on the other. In fact, the name "Greenpeace Foundation" was itself emblematic of the antagonism between Hunter and Bohlen and the world-views they represented. For Bohlen, the word "foundation" described a non-profit organization interested in promoting research and funding campaigns and was synonymous with professionalism and respectability. Hunter, however, had specifically chosen the term as a reference to his all-time favorite work of science fiction, Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy. Asimov's novels described a Galactic Empire that, though corrupt and in decline, still clung to power at the expense of all the other creatures in the galaxy. Dissidents within the galaxy organized an oppositional force, called the Foundation, whose task would be to hasten the collapse of the Empire so that its brutal and destructive reign would only last another thousand years instead of the expected thirty thousand. In more than one sense, then, Hunter and Bohlen's conceptions of the new organization were worlds apart.¹⁰

The Greenpeace Foundation's first campaign was directed at French nuclear testing in the South Pacific. While the United States at least had the decency to explode its hydrogen bombs deep underground, the French were still detonating them in the air above coral atolls not too far from Tahiti. Jim Bohlen and Irving Stowe, the two Americans in their fifties, were exhausted after two years of working on the Amchitka campaign and were ready to pass the leadership baton to someone else. Bob Hunter was eager to grasp it, but Bohlen in particular found Hunter's countercultural proclivities difficult to stomach. Instead, they allowed Ben Metcalfe, who was also a Second World War vet, to take charge. Unlike the democratic, consensus-oriented approach favoured by Bohlen, Stowe, and Hunter, Metcalfe chose a kind of Wizard of Oz strategy to run the new organization, creating the impression that Greenpeace was a large movement when it was mostly just Metcalfe pressing buttons and pulling levers behind the curtain. Metcalfe's extensive experience with the media in the post-Second World War era had led him in the same intellectual direction as it had

led Marshall McLuhan, who had been the first to articulate the concept of the “global village” in a systematic manner, creating a theory of media that resonated deeply with Metcalfe’s experience. The idea of a world temporally and spatially compressed by a global media, combined with his Machiavellian view of society, led Metcalfe to adopt a condescending and cynical attitude. The media, he argued, was “fundamentally stupid.” A hard-working, well-read reporter with common sense and a good nose for a story could easily manipulate the mass media and create pseudo-events virtually out of thin air. The secret was in the packaging of the stories as much as their content. So long as the clever journalist was able to manufacture a compelling narrative with the appropriate element of conflict, particularly of the David versus Goliath variety, the mass media would rise to it like a trout to a mayfly, regardless of the event’s actual significance.¹¹

According to Metcalfe, the Amchitka campaign could be characterized as “naïve bourgeois” because its organizers had announced its schedule and its limitations—the fact that they could only afford to stay on the boat for six weeks, for example—thereby providing the “enemy” with a huge tactical advantage.¹² Furthermore, they had been very distant from the centre of power in Washington, DC, which greatly reduced their visibility in the US media and their commensurate influence on American public opinion. To avoid a similar fate, the Mururoa campaign would need to be more cunning in order to keep the French guessing. It would also have to take the protest to France by conducting a direct action and a media event in Paris in order to alert the French population to the impact the nuclear tests were having in the South Pacific and to demonstrate the strength of international opinion against the *force de frappe*.¹³

Unlike the more open, consensus-oriented approach that had characterized the DMWC, the first Greenpeace Foundation campaign was planned and run as a virtual one-man show. Metcalfe would sit up late at night in his upstairs home office, which he self-mockingly referred to as the “Ego’s Nest,” developing ideas and strategies. To maintain an element of secrecy, he never informed anyone of more than part of his overall plan so that only he was aware of the big picture. When he needed something ratified by other members of the group he would “call meetings backwards;” that is, he would reach a decision unilaterally and then run the meeting in such a way that the majority would agree with him. Many of

the meetings were held in Gastown, the funky, dilapidated countercultural quarter in inner city Vancouver, and were attended by dozens of hippies, street kids, and various social outcasts. This, Metcalfe knew, would alienate some of the older, “straighter” activists, such as the Stowes and the Bohlens, who would otherwise have been in a better position to challenge Metcalfe’s authority.¹⁴ Although Hunter, who had hoped to be the first Greenpeace leader, resented Metcalfe, he nevertheless admired the way he ran the campaign from his “media ivory tower” like a “beautiful one man, McLuhanesque show.” Others, however, were alienated by his aloof and conspiratorial style, and Stowe in particular grew suspicious of Metcalfe and backed away from the campaign.¹⁵

Much to his subsequent regret, Metcalfe drafted a boom-and-bust Canadian businessman named David McTaggart into the organization. McTaggart, who had never so much as contemplated political activism in his forty years of life on the planet, was an unlikely candidate to lead a Greenpeace protest. Yet he would go on to exert greater influence over the organization than any other individual in its four-decade history. The scion of a conservative Vancouver family, McTaggart spent two tumultuous decades as a builder and developer of high-profile resorts. By 1971, he was in the midst of his third divorce, and his most recent venture—a ski resort and nightclub in California—had rendered him bankrupt and owing considerable debts. Without telling a soul, McTaggart took what little cash he had and boarded a plane for Tahiti, where he purchased a small yacht and spent the next several months aimlessly sailing around the South Pacific. By early 1972 he was in Auckland, where his new nineteen-year-old girlfriend alerted him to the fact that a group from his hometown was looking for a volunteer to sail a boat into the French nuclear test zone.¹⁶

McTaggart had never heard of Greenpeace and didn’t have much interest in nuclear policy, or for that matter, politics in general. Nevertheless, with some helpful persuasion from his enthusiastic young girlfriend, he came to see the idea of such a voyage as an interesting adventure and a worthy challenge to his seamanship. He also grew increasingly irritated with the way the French were treating the South Pacific. So, in the southern winter of 1972, McTaggart led a small crew—including Metcalfe for part of the voyage—to Mururoa Atoll, where he attempted to enter the French nuclear testing zone and was rammed by a French destroyer for

his troubles. He repeated the voyage in 1973. By this time, the French were thoroughly sick of him, and a group of commandos boarded his yacht and beat him to a pulp, almost blinding him in the process.¹⁷

While McTaggart was sailing across the South Pacific, Jim Bohlen and Patrick Moore were in New York, trying to raise awareness of Greenpeace's campaign at the United Nations. Other Greenpeace activists had flown to London and Paris to help organize marches and demonstrations. Without letting McTaggart or anyone else know, Metcalfe had arranged for a "decoy" boat to sail from Peru in order to keep the French navy on their toes.¹⁸ He left McTaggart, who by then was well and truly fed up with his imperiousness and secretiveness, in Rarotonga, before flying on to Mexico City and then Rome, where he organized an audience with the Pope. The result was that Greenpeace became an increasing source of irritation to the French, particularly once photographs of McTaggart's beating and injuries appeared in newspapers throughout the world. In addition, McTaggart initiated a drawn-out legal case against the French military which kept the issue in the spotlight for several more years.

All of this frenzied campaigning by a few Vancouver-based activists helped make Greenpeace an increasingly household name in activist circles throughout Western Europe and Australasia. In Paris, for example, about 200 English and French Greenpeace supporters marched toward the Elysée Palace, leafleting along the way, before being rounded up by police and taken to the Opera police station.¹⁹ In Bonn, a small group of West German peace activists and environmentalists gathered under a Greenpeace banner and marched through the capital's streets to the French Embassy to protest French nuclear testing in the South Pacific.²⁰ Another group of people using the Greenpeace label presented an anti-nuclear petition to the French government. Several Australians and New Zealanders among them demanded sanctuary in France, claiming that their own countries were being poisoned by radiation from the French tests.²¹ In New Zealand, from where Greenpeace launched its protests against the French for three years in a row, a nascent Greenpeace group was formed.

At this stage the term "Greenpeace" could be used by anyone who supported the cause, without needing to ask the Vancouver Greenpeace Foundation for permission. While such a laissez-faire position had the advantage of encouraging widespread protest among like-minded activists,

its results could sometimes be less than professional. For example, the efforts of a group of London activists to protest at the French tourist office in Piccadilly did not go quite to plan. "Sadly," the *Guardian* reported, "the demonstrators chose the wrong office for their demonstration and invaded and leafleted the Ceylon Airlines and Air Afrique offices by mistake. The French tourist office was next door. The man from Ceylon Airlines said: 'I quite agree with them.' The policemen outside the embassy applauded after the performance and said they had enjoyed the show. 'It gets chilly out here and this sort of thing passes the time.'"²² It was a harmless enough farce, but too many such incidents would not do much for Greenpeace's credibility.

Unsurprisingly, all of this frenetic campaigning on a shoestring budget took its toll. By late 1973, less than two years after Ben Metcalfe had officially registered it as a legal non-profit group under the British Columbia Societies Act, the Greenpeace Foundation was in disarray. Fragmented, disorganized, and effectively leaderless, it was in danger of collapsing altogether. Metcalfe, despite being the group's official leader, was barely involved any more, and the group's meetings were poorly attended. McTaggart, who felt betrayed by Greenpeace's refusal (or rather, inability) to sue the French government for damages for ramming his boat and then boarding it and beating him, moved to Paris to fight the case on his own.²³ The divide between the older Quakers and peace activists on the one hand, and the countercultural ecology freaks on the other, was wider than ever, with each faction sometimes unaware of what the other was doing in the name of Greenpeace. In February 1973, for example, a group led by Hunter, Paul Watson, and a young activist named Rod Marining staged a protest against a pair of visiting French warships, an action that turned into something of a fiasco. The captain of the ship they had hired for the protest changed his mind at the last minute, prompting Hunter and Watson to rush off to Hunter's little yacht, which they sailed rather pathetically toward the approaching warships, while Marining stood atop a bridge dropping mushrooms and marshmallows on the bemused sailors, before being arrested for his troubles.²⁴ Marining's description of how the protest was conceived reflects the group's fragmentation and haphazard planning style: "There were six of us in a living room trying to figure out what to do about these French warships. That was two days before. It was

just a little Greenpeace meeting. I had called everybody together but only six came.”²⁵

Despite the confusion and lack of planning, or perhaps because of it, the event still managed to attract plenty of local media attention. Even at this early stage, however, Marining was somewhat ambivalent about what press coverage alone could achieve: “The press picks up on all the sensational things. They say Greenpeace did this, Greenpeace did that. They make it look like there’s thousands of people caring and bringing on the revolution, when there was really only about six of us. The rest is all myth. . . . All that Greenpeace Power is illusory. It looks like there’s a lot of people worried about what’s happening thousands of miles away in the South Pacific but they would really only be worried if it were happening in Squamish.”²⁶

As Marining’s comments indicate, the number of committed Greenpeace activists was small. Despite this, the name had by this stage become quite recognizable throughout Canada and New Zealand, as well as among peace and environmental activists in numerous countries. Apart from denoting a Vancouver-based environmental organization, the term was also used to connote a particular form of non-violent direct action. It could be used as a noun or a verb (we “greenpeaced them”). And anyone who wanted to form a Greenpeace group was free to do so.²⁷ None of the Vancouver founders had any problems with this in 1973. In fact, given the organization’s precarious state, most were happy that it seemed to be spreading without too much additional effort on their part. However, a few years later, as Greenpeace began to “get big,” this loose, ad hoc model began to cause significant problems.

By 1974, Hunter still had high hopes for his original grand vision of Greenpeace. Nonetheless, he was beginning to grow weary of the anti-nuclear voyages, feeling that Greenpeace had gained all they could from them for now. Instead, he had become excited about a possible campaign against whaling. Over the previous year, Hunter had gotten to know Paul Spong, a scientist studying killer whales at the Vancouver Aquarium. Spong had come to the conclusion that whales were extraordinarily intelligent, complex, and wondrous animals, and was horrified by the fact that tens of thousands continued to be slaughtered each year. If any organization had the expertise to challenge whalers on the high seas, Spong felt,

it was Greenpeace. Hunter needed little convincing, and the two of them came up with a plan that eventually led to the famous images of Greenpeace activists positioning their zodiac boats between harpoon guns and the whales.²⁸

Despite several years of enthusiastic commitment to Greenpeace, Hunter was still perceived by the older Quakers and peaceniks—most of whom were Americans—as too unstable and eccentric for a leadership role. But the situation changed rapidly in mid-1974. Sadly, Irving Stowe died of stomach cancer, an unjust death for a teetotalling, non-smoking vegetarian. Jim Bohlen and his wife moved to an island off the coast of Vancouver Island, where they started the Greenpeace Experimental Farm, which they hoped would become a replicable model for sustainable living. And Ben Metcalfe had returned to his full-time career as a journalist. With nobody else desperate to take on the task—and Bohlen no longer in a position to stop him—Hunter finally became Greenpeace's leader. The torch, as Hunter saw it, passed from the mechanics to the mystics:

There was no one left to resist any further Greenpeace's transformation from nuclear vigilantism to whale saving. And there was no one left to prevent us from dropping the hard brick-by-brick logic of the normal political world completely, seizing our *I Chings* and allowing signs and visions to determine our course.²⁹

Initially under Hunter's leadership, Greenpeace looked like a combination of a social movement, hippie commune, and insane asylum. Anyone, including some people with obvious mental illnesses, was welcome to join in and put in their two cents worth.³⁰ The meetings were now characterized by a tone of joyous celebration and chaotic good humour, a marked contrast to the "heavy atmosphere of moralistic purity," which, according to Hunter, had pervaded earlier Greenpeace meetings. As Patrick Moore recalled, the "sober suffering" of the Stowes and Bohlens was replaced by a *joie de vivre*, a fact that could partially be explained by the positive nature of the campaign. As long as Greenpeace's *raison d'être* had been to oppose nuclear weapons, there was little to celebrate. But now, in Hunter's words, "instead of fighting death, we were embracing life. It was not just that we

wanted to save whales, we wanted to meet them, we wanted to engage them, encounter them, touch them, discover them. For the first time there was a transcendent element lying at the centre of the undertaking.”³¹

By early 1975, Greenpeace still had no offices or employees. Far from operating as a professional organization, it straddled the line between a formal NGO and a social movement. Fundraising tended to be ad hoc and opportunistic rather than systematic. Hundreds of volunteers donated various amounts of time and goodwill to help prepare for the anti-whaling voyage, while the more committed activists, such as Hunter, Moore, Spong, and Watson, devoted their lives to the cause. In mid-1975, against all odds, Greenpeace’s dilapidated old halibut seiner—the same boat that had tried to reach Amchitka in 1971—managed to track down the Soviet whaling fleet around 100 miles off the coast of northern California.³² Activists leapt into their zodiacs and began harassing the whalers, while cameramen and photographers recorded the dramatic images. Two days later, they arrived in San Francisco to find a throng of reporters lined up along the Embarcadero to greet them. Immigration officials had to restrain the clamouring journalists, who leaned across the boat’s gunwale with their cameras and microphones, impatient to talk to the heroic, if somewhat fanatical, environmentalists who had risked their lives to save the whales from the Soviet hunters. Hunter talked to virtually every TV and radio station in the Bay area, and the story, complete with dramatic photos and film footage, was printed and broadcast throughout the United States and the world. According to one study, the first whale campaign garnered more media coverage in the United States than all of Greenpeace’s previous four years of anti-nuclear actions combined.³³ Walter Cronkite, the doyen of American newsreaders, introduced them to a massive TV audience on the CBS Evening News. The *New York Times* published a lengthy and overwhelmingly positive feature on the organization. As well as describing the clash with the whalers, the *Times* cited Spong’s experiments with killer whales as proof of whales’ unique intelligence, thereby adding scientific credibility to Greenpeace’s list of virtues. As a media event, the campaign was successful beyond Hunter’s wildest dreams.³⁴

The crew spent a total of nine days in San Francisco, during which they were wined, dined, and generally celebrated by the local media and, to a lesser extent, local environmental organizations. After being cooped up in

the claustrophobic confines of a fishing boat for the previous two months, the glamour and polish of the San Francisco media world, and the opulent houses of many of the city's environmentalists, proved to be something of a culture shock. A somewhat jaded Hunter recalled one of Ben Metcalfe's favorite aphorisms: "Fear success."³⁵ It was not long before the meaning of Metcalfe's words became clear. Less than twenty-four hours after their arrival, Hunter was contacted by the New York-based movie production company, Artists Entertainment Complex, the maker of such blockbuster films as *Earthquake* and *The Godfather, Part II*. The next day, an AEC agent, Amy Ephron (sister of Nora), and a scriptwriter flew into San Francisco to meet with the crew in order to discuss a multi-million dollar movie about Greenpeace's exploits. Whatever tensions had existed on the halibut seiner paled into insignificance compared to the schism created by Ephron's visit. Her brusque New York style put most of the Greenpeaceers off right from the start. She was prepared, she said, to offer them \$25,000 for the movie rights to their story, with 10 percent down and a promise for the rest once the film was made. Although Hunter was no entrepreneur, he nonetheless knew the \$25,000 was peanuts compared to the amount that Ephron's company stood to make from a successful film. Still, as far as Hunter was concerned, the objective was to raise "whale consciousness" around the world. The film, he felt, would contribute to this goal, as well as providing Greenpeace with a great deal of free publicity. Others, however, were deeply suspicious. Paul Watson was particularly upset and accused Hunter of being a "sell out." The contract required every crewmember to sign a release, giving the movie company the right to portray them as it saw fit. Watson refused to sign, which infuriated Hunter and Moore, who accused him of grandstanding. The division over the movie contract, according to Hunter, "was never to fully heal itself and was to lead to divisions that would plague us for years."³⁶

The mixed feelings that emerged in San Francisco reflected the classical dilemma that many successful activist groups face: Should their progressive politics be reflected in their organizational structure or should ideology take a backseat to professionalization and efficiency? The anti-whaling campaign—which some of the older Quakers viewed as "soft" compared to the prospect of nuclear warfare—prompted numerous sympathetic environmentalists to set up Greenpeace groups throughout North America.

In addition to this spontaneous growth, Hunter also embarked on a deliberate campaign to foster the spread of the organization in Canada. In the fall of 1975, he and his wife Bobbi travelled throughout the country, visiting virtually every major university campus. Hunter would present a slide show and lecture about the Greenpeace whale campaign, while Bobbi would sit at the back selling T-shirts and buttons and signing people up for membership. After each show, they would be approached by at least a dozen volunteers interested in setting up a Greenpeace group. By Christmas of that year, there were approximately a dozen Greenpeace branches throughout Canada. Some of these were made up of merely a handful of people selling T-shirts, while others, such as those in Toronto and Montreal, were more substantial organizations that were soon contributing to Vancouver's campaigns, as well as mounting their own.³⁷

The most important office outside Vancouver, however, was undoubtedly the one established in San Francisco in the fall of 1975. This was to be Greenpeace's American beachhead. While the various Canadian branches were largely left to themselves, Hunter and his cohorts set up the San Francisco office in a more deliberate fashion. It would be the focal point for Greenpeace activity in the United States, providing them with access to the American media and an ideal base from which to plan further whale campaigns, as well as placing them at the centre of California's lucrative fundraising market. While some locals would help to run the branch, it was clear to Hunter, Moore, and the others in Vancouver, that San Francisco was a subordinate office rather than an independent operation.³⁸

Paradoxically, despite the fact that it was now run by unreconstructed hippies like Bob Hunter, Greenpeace was becoming more organized than it had been at any other stage in its five-year history and began to take on all the trappings of a traditionally run non-profit organization. The first, and perhaps most important step, was setting up an office in a small building on Fourth Avenue in the heart of Kitsilano. Such an apparently trivial event was a vital stage in Greenpeace's evolution. At last, there was an actual address where people could reach the organization, rather than having to contact individual members at their homes. Furthermore, there was a comforting sense of bourgeois legitimacy in the act of leaving home and going to an office. And despite the countercultural values adhered to by Greenpeace's inner circle, most of them came from backgrounds that

were thoroughly middle class. Setting up an office also led to the adoption of the paraphernalia that one normally associates with offices: bookkeeping procedures, mailing lists, organized filing systems, in- and out-boxes, and letterhead stationery. The “buzz” created by groups of people working together in a shared space contributed to a general sense of comradeship and to a more inspired and efficient work ethic. Malingerers could be politely escorted from the premises.

Opening an office was the first—largely unintentional—step on the road to professionalization. Hunter and his fellow countercultural activists were ideologically committed to a grassroots structure with an openness that encouraged as much discussion and participation as possible. However, the months of unstructured meetings and consensus-based decision making that had preceded the first whale campaign had taken some of the shine off the grassroots model.³⁹ Although such a broad-based participatory structure had given everyone a voice, thereby encouraging goodwill and creativity, it had also led to endless and exhausting meetings and bureaucratic inefficiency. Furthermore, it tended to attract characters who were wacky even by Greenpeace’s tolerant hippie standards. The 1975 save-the-whales campaign, while relying on a considerable amount of what could only be described as good luck, had also entailed a great deal of detailed planning and organization, as well as a level of secrecy and surreptitious research that would not have been out of place in the military. It became clear to Hunter that if Greenpeace was going to continue to carry out similar campaigns, they could no longer rely on the happy-go-lucky approach that had got them through so far. Paradoxically, therefore, the trappings of the traditional non-profit organization—Robert’s Rules of Order, an executive, a board of directors, sensible financial planning—began to appear positively liberating. In short, the demands and pressures of running an outfit such as Greenpeace dictated a greater degree of professionalization.⁴⁰

Not everyone, however, was entirely pleased with such developments. Some of the hard-core mystics and radicals began to worry that Greenpeace might become just another mainstream environmental organization rather than the fluid, unstructured social movement they envisioned. Just as they had refused to sign the film contract in San Francisco, several of these people grumbled about such unheroic notions as cash flows

and bookkeeping. From their perspective, it was hard to see what the “eco-revolution” had to do with contracting T-shirts out to a distributor. Despite these murmurings of discontent, the situation remained, in Hunter’s words, “within the bounds of acceptable comedy, because one of the worst of the flipped-out mystics—namely myself—was now the chief advocate of organization, fiscal responsibility, and the budget system itself.”⁴¹

In 1976, Greenpeace embarked upon its next campaign, protesting the slaughter of harp seals in Newfoundland. Protecting adorable seal pups drew at least as much media interest and public sympathy as saving whales, and Greenpeace’s fame continued to spread further afield, particularly in western Europe. David McTaggart, who was still in France while his case dawdled through the French court system, took advantage of this publicity to set up Greenpeace offices in Paris, London, and Amsterdam. McTaggart’s attitude toward Greenpeace remained ambivalent: he was still embittered by the organization’s refusal to adequately support his legal actions in France and, despite getting along well with Bob Hunter, had little respect for the rest of the countercultural crowd in Vancouver. Nevertheless, he was gradually coming around to the view that the core idea of Greenpeace—an international organization that relied on non-violent action and was not attached to any political party or ideology—had considerable potential if it could be run by hard-nosed professionals rather than hippies.⁴² In other words, if *he* were at the helm, it might be possible to create a genuinely international organization that could effectively influence world opinion. It was not long before McTaggart had convinced most of the new European recruits that he had founded Greenpeace and that the Vancouver hippies were a bunch of incompetent fools who were destroying the organization he had fought so hard to establish.⁴³

McTaggart, however, was not the only one who had visions of a more organized, professional international outfit. By late 1977, Bob Hunter, Patrick Moore, and others within the Vancouver group were beginning to see the need to establish a more formal set of ties between the various affiliates, as well as developing a chain of command that would facilitate a greater degree of efficiency in the decision-making process. With this in mind, Moore, who by then had succeeded Hunter as president, sent a letter headed “Greenpeace: Where Are We Going?” to the various groups

scattered throughout North America. "We are faced with a problem," Moore began,

that has baffled the best philosophers and politicians since the first federation of cave-people communities. Simply stated the problem is how can we achieve unity and cohesiveness as one organization and yet provide the individual and group autonomy necessary for creativity and initiative? Somehow we must be both centralized and decentralized at the same time. . . . Under the present structure, further growth is not possible without further confusion. There is a pressing and demanding need for organization.⁴⁴

Moore suggested several organizational models, including General Motors, the United Nations, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the Sierra Club. However, he was particularly taken with the idea of a structure that was based on an ecosystem model. Diversity in ecosystems, he noted, in what many would now consider to be an outmoded theory, "tends to result in stability." While this was an argument for a decentralized structure, it was also important to remember that "each species has a well-defined niche or function that it must keep to in order to maintain that stability. . . . We must stick to those functions and we must demonstrate the capacity to carry them out."⁴⁵

There was no doubt in Moore's mind that, hippie ideals aside, some degree of centralization would be necessary in order to ensure the smooth running of the organization, as well as preventing people from conducting unauthorized actions under the Greenpeace banner. To accomplish this, he drafted a document he called the "Declaration and Charter." It was a contract that carefully outlined the responsibilities that all the branches had to the Vancouver office in exchange for the use of the Greenpeace trademark. From mid-1978 onward, all new Greenpeace branches would have to sign this document. Moore also tried, with varying degrees of success, to force all the existing North American groups to sign the contract. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most obstreperous affiliate was also the richest: Greenpeace San Francisco, a well-oiled fundraising machine, was not

too keen to surrender its autonomy. In the process, it emboldened some of the smaller groups in the United States to take a similar stand.

Moore, Hunter, and others within the original Vancouver group spent over a year trying to convince the San Francisco group to sign the Declaration and Charter, but without success. So, in May 1979, with all other options exhausted, they filed a lawsuit. When word of this reached David McTaggart in Europe, he immediately boarded a plane and headed to San Francisco. If Vancouver won the suit, as they probably would, then McTaggart had no doubt that they would turn their attentions to the budding Greenpeace groups in Europe. Given McTaggart's fractious relationship with Vancouver, he was not about to sit quietly by while they tried to gain control of the promising European offices. The Americans and Europeans, he told the San Francisco board, "must come out unanimously to fight, and must work towards a democratic Greenpeace U.S." He suggested that the Americans offer Vancouver a settlement: in exchange for San Francisco paying off Vancouver's considerable debts, Vancouver would relinquish the rights to the name "Greenpeace" outside Canada. Prior to McTaggart's visit, the San Francisco board, pessimistic about its chances of winning, had been prepared to bow to Vancouver's demands. However, McTaggart managed to stiffen their resolve, and they decided they would fight Vancouver to the bitter end.⁴⁶

Having accomplished what he set out to achieve in San Francisco, McTaggart then flew to Vancouver. He immediately organized a meeting with Hunter, the only person on the Vancouver board whom he respected. Patrick Moore, McTaggart insisted, was leading Greenpeace down the path to ruin. He also reported that the wealthy San Francisco office would fight Vancouver for as long as it took them to win their independence, though he failed to mention that he himself had played a large part in this decision. Couldn't Hunter convince Moore and the rest of the board to drop the lawsuit? Hunter replied that, although he was in general agreement with Moore's position, he might be able to talk him into toning down some of his inflammatory rhetoric, thereby creating a better environment for any potential compromise. Moore, however, was in no mood for compromise. When Hunter tried to talk him into examining possible settlement options, Moore felt he was being lectured by Greenpeace's elder statesman. In a fit of alcohol-induced pique, he told Hunter that he was

a “washed up” environmentalist whose days of leading Greenpeace were well and truly over. He should butt out of the matter and allow Moore to run things as he saw fit. Deeply wounded by his old comrade’s outburst, Hunter began to think that perhaps McTaggart was right. Maybe Moore was power-hungry and out of control.⁴⁷

A few days later, McTaggart organized a meeting with the Vancouver board and their lawyers. With Hunter backing him up, McTaggart described his vision for the future of Greenpeace. Vancouver, he insisted, would have to drop the lawsuit and relinquish its rights to the Greenpeace name outside Canada. In exchange, a newly formed Greenpeace International would pay off Vancouver’s debts. Once Moore realized that Hunter and several other board members were supporting McTaggart’s plan, he eventually gave in. McTaggart’s proposal, it was clear to Moore, was not so different from what he himself had had in mind. The main difference—though it was a significant one—was that Moore would clearly not be at the helm of McTaggart’s new organization. Remarkably, in just a few short days, McTaggart had not only solved what had seemed an intractable problem but had succeeded in convincing Greenpeace’s founders to effectively turn the organization over to him.⁴⁸

With Vancouver’s surrender notice in his hand, McTaggart flew triumphantly back to San Francisco, where he received a hero’s welcome. The various American branches were so relieved and grateful that the lawsuit had been avoided that it became, in McTaggart’s words, “an easy day’s work to pull the twenty or so American offices together into Greenpeace USA. Somebody produces a map, and I draw nine different regions onto it. That’s about it.”⁴⁹ For McTaggart, the entire business was reminiscent of the kind of wheeling and dealing he had done on a weekly basis during his years in the building industry.

Several months later, McTaggart convened a meeting of Greenpeace delegates from around the world. At that meeting—held in Amsterdam—Greenpeace Europe agreed to change its name to “Greenpeace Council,” and invited others to join the new organization. Greenpeace USA and Greenpeace Canada were immediately accepted as members but, in the process, had to accept the bylaws of Greenpeace Europe. All the national groups signed the Greenpeace Council accord, ceding their rights to the name “Greenpeace” in exchange for voting membership on the council.

Virtually overnight, the various Greenpeace tribes were merged together to create a European-dominated international organization with a large bureaucracy, a hierarchical, centralized structure, and with its headquarters based in Amsterdam. Not surprisingly, David McTaggart was voted in as the first chairman of the new international Greenpeace organization.⁵⁰

Within a few months of the Amsterdam meeting, McTaggart's Greenpeace International developed a sophisticated management structure, with various legal, administrative, financial, and communications arms scattered throughout the world. It was not long before these offices were staffed by professionals with degrees in human resources, marketing, and accounting. In a short time, the organization's structure bore a remarkable similarity to the mainstream environmental organizations from which Greenpeace had differentiated itself in the early 1970s. The baton of radical environmentalism was soon passed to groups such as Earth First!, Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, and the Rainforest Action Network.

Despite its success, Greenpeace never became as big as Hunter had hoped it would: in other words, it did not become the leading apostle of a secular religion based on ecology.⁵¹ It also did not develop into the kind of grassroots, participatory movement that Irving Stowe had hoped to build. Various aspects of Greenpeace's style and tactics—such as its inability to combine spectacular direct action protest with mass participation—compromised the development of such a movement. In contrast, we can look at groups such as the Clamshell Alliance and its west coast counterpart, the Abalone Alliance, as examples of 1970s movements that engaged in direct action environmentalism, such as protesting outside nuclear power plants and carrying out peaceful “invasions” of nuclear facilities, while also embodying their intensely progressive politics in their organizational structure. The Clamshell Alliance, unlike Greenpeace, remained decentralized, unhierarchical, participatory, and consensus-driven. It engaged in what Barbara Epstein calls “prefigurative politics”: an attempt to convey their vision of an ecologically sustainable and egalitarian society not just through their rhetoric and protests but also in the structure of their organization and its day-to-day operations.⁵²

Certain people within Greenpeace, such as Irving Stowe, may have wanted the organization to go in this direction. Their influence by the late 1970s, however, was not as paramount as that of Hunter, Moore, and

McTaggart. To one degree or another, these influential figures had come to accept the need for hierarchy and professionalism as a by-product of Greenpeace's *modus operandi*. However, we must beware of the false construction of purity: Greenpeace should not necessarily feel that it is incumbent upon it to develop organizational structures that reflect some distant, idealized future society. And while the Clamshell Alliance may have gone a considerable way toward achieving this, it did so only by renouncing the kind of political influence that groups such as Greenpeace have attained.

Naturally, Greenpeace, like any organization, was not entirely responsible for its own rapid growth. Opportunity structures are constantly shifting, often in unpredictable ways, and success always entails an element of good fortune—of being in the right place at the right time. Another structural factor that frequently affects organizational development is path dependency. The fact that Greenpeace's early campaigns involved sailing to difficult-to-reach areas in order to protest nuclear testing meant that it had the expertise and experience to protest against whaling, nuclear waste dumping, and other questionable activities on the high seas.⁵³ Thus in a sense, Greenpeace, if it was going to succeed, had to get big. Compare this to the Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (SPEC) discussed by Jonathan Clapperton in the previous chapter of this volume. SPEC sprung up in Vancouver at almost exactly the same time as Greenpeace and with overlapping membership. It was created in order to tackle local—and to a lesser extent regional—environmental problems, particularly urban pollution in Vancouver. Its self-conscious “localism” contrasts starkly with Greenpeace's “globalism.” For SPEC, therefore, success could be measured by the degree of name recognition and policy influence the organization was able to achieve in Vancouver. Given the terms that Greenpeace set for itself, however, success required achieving such recognition and influence on a global scale, thereby engaging in Wapner's “world civic politics.” Getting big was thus an organizational and existential imperative.⁵⁴

To the extent that Greenpeace was in control of its own fate, its success was in no small part due to a willingness to compromise the grassroots democratic principles held by many of its founders and supporters. Professionalization enabled the organization to maintain tight control over

its campaigns and fundraising throughout the world. However, the most efficient and logical means of achieving such control on a global scale was the rapid development of a centralized and hierarchical organization with a corporate-like structure. It is not, perhaps, what its founders envisioned, but in retrospect, it appears to have been the most likely path to realizing the goals they set for themselves. To paraphrase E. F. Schumacher, small can certainly be beautiful, and for many environmental organizations it makes sense to prioritize their commitment to a democratic participatory structure rather than growth. But given Greenpeace's global outlook, its frequent need for secrecy and detailed planning, and its desire to protest environmental crimes in some of the remotest parts of the planet, staying small was never a viable option.

Notes

- 1 Bob Hunter, interview by author, Toronto, ON, June 2000.
- 2 Paul Wapner, *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- 3 Tom Turner, *David Brower: The Making of the Environmental Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).
- 4 Frank Zelko, *Make It a Green Peace! The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For the history of Greenpeace from the perspective of an insider, see Rex Weyler, *Greenpeace: How a Group of Ecologists, Journalists, and Visionaries Changed the World* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004).
- 5 Bob Hunter, *Vancouver Sun*, 24 September 1969. Hunter had a regular column in the *Sun*.
- 6 Hunter interview.
- 7 Ben Metcalfe, interview by author, Shawnigan Lake, BC, June 2000. For an analysis of McLuhan's influence on Greenpeace, see Stephen Dale, *McLuhan's Children: The Greenpeace Message and the Media* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1996).
- 8 Jim Bohlen, interview by author, Denman Island, BC, June 2000
- 9 *Georgia Straight*, 11–18 November 1971, 12
- 10 Bohlen and Hunter interviews.
- 11 Metcalfe interview.
- 12 *Vancouver Sun*, 4 January 1972.
- 13 Metcalfe interview.

- 14 Metcalfe interview.
- 15 Hunter and Bohlen interviews.
- 16 David McTaggart with Helen Slinger, *Shadow Warrior: The Autobiography of Greenpeace International Founder David McTaggart* (London: Orion, 2002).
- 17 David McTaggart, *Outrage! The Ordeal of Greenpeace III* (Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1973).
- 18 Metcalfe interview.
- 19 *Peace News*, 6 August 1973.
- 20 *Times* (London), 2 June 1973.
- 21 *Vancouver Sun*, 11 July 1973.
- 22 *Guardian*, 3 February 1973.
- 23 McTaggart and Slinger, *Shadow Warrior*.
- 24 *Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 1973.
- 25 Quoted in Brian Fortune, "Media Mellows Greenpeace," *Terminal City Express*, 23 February 1973, 5.
- 26 Fortune, "Media Mellows."
- 27 The British pacifist publication, *Peace News* (5 May 1973), for example, simply announced that there would be a "Greenpeace activity" in Dundee. Clearly, the editors felt no need to elaborate; their readers understood that this meant an anti-nuclear protest with an environmental focus. It did not imply that the action would be carried out by Greenpeace but, rather, in the style of Greenpeace.
- 28 Rex Weyler, *Song of the Whale: The Dramatic Story of Dr. Paul Spong—Founder of the Greenpeace Save-the-Wales Movement—and His Startling Discoveries About Whale Intelligence* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1986).
- 29 Bob Hunter, *Warriors of the Rainbow: A Chronicle of the Greenpeace Movement* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979), 149.
- 30 Hunter, *Warriors*, 150–51.
- 31 Patrick Moore, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, May 2000; Hunter, *Warriors*, 150.
- 32 For more details about how they managed this, see Weyler, *Song of the Whale*.
- 33 Sean Cassidy, *Mind Bombs and Whale Songs: Greenpeace and the News* (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1992), 117
- 34 Charles Flowers, "Between the Harpoon and the Whale," *New York Times Magazine*, 24 August 1975; Weyler, *Song of the Whale*, 170; Hunter, *Warriors*, 231–32. In a letter to Hunter, Farley Mowat conveyed what was probably a widespread sense of surprise at the campaign's success: "I must frankly admit that, when you first announced your plans, I didn't give them a chance of success. Well, I was wrong. Happily wrong, I might add." Mowat to Hunter, 14 October 1975, file 1, box, 1R4377, Greenpeace fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

- 35 Hunter, *Warriors*, 232–33.
- 36 Weyler, *Song of the Whale*, 170; Hunter, *Warriors*, 233–34
- 37 Hunter, *Warriors*, 245–46; Hunter interview.
- 38 Hunter and Moore interviews.
- 39 Hunter interview.
- 40 Hunter interview.
- 41 Hunter, *Warriors*, 244.
- 42 McTaggart interview, Paciano, Italy, October 1999.
- 43 Remi Parmentier, interview by author, Amsterdam, NL, October 2000. Numerous people I interviewed corroborated Parmentier’s story of how McTaggart tried to convince people that he was the true founder of Greenpeace. Some even thought that McTaggart had convinced himself that this was the case.
- 44 Moore to various Greenpeace offices, undated (though clearly late 1977). Patrick Moore’s personal papers.
- 45 Moore to various Greenpeace offices, undated.
- 46 Greenpeace San Francisco, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, 25 July 1979. David Tussman’s personal papers.
- 47 McTaggart interview; Hunter interview.
- 48 McTaggart and Slinger, *Shadow Warrior*, 148–49; McTaggart interview; Hunter, Weyler, and Moore interviews
- 49 McTaggart and Slinger, *Shadow Warrior*, 149.
- 50 Minutes of the Greenpeace Council International Meeting, 16–20 November 1979, Amsterdam. Copy from Moore’s personal papers.
- 51 Hunter interview
- 52 Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- 53 For more on this, see Frank Zelko, “Scaling Greenpeace: From Local Activism to Global Governance,” *Historical Social Research*, 42, no. 2 (2017): 318–42.
- 54 Wapner, *Environmental Activism*.

