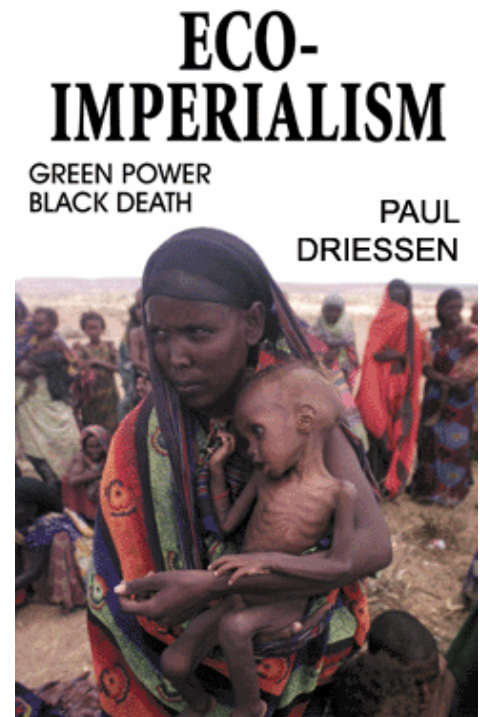




Q & A with Paul Driessen:

A Long-Time Environmental Researcher and Activist on How the Modern Environmental Movement Places Ideology and Its Own Interests above the Needs of the World's Poor

Paul Driessen, a senior fellow with the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow and Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise, recently spoke with CEI about his new book, Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death. During a 25-year career that has included staff tenures with the U.S. Senate, Department of the Interior, and an energy trade association, he has spoken and written frequently on energy and environmental policy, global climate change, corporate social responsibility, and other topics. Driessen holds a B.A. in geology and field ecology from Lawrence University and a J.D. from the University of Denver College of Law.



CEI: You used to be a member of the Sierra Club and Zero Population Growth. What prompted you to leave the environmental movement?

Driessen: I'm still an environmentalist. But ideological environmentalism has become a crisis creation industry that ignores our progress and feels justified in using lies, intimidation, and even terror to advance its interests and agendas. It's anti-technology and anti-business, except for its own multi-billion-dollar, high-tech international operations, and the large foundations that fund it.

Worst of all, it's anti-human. Eco-radicals insist that the world's poor remain "indigenous"—and miserable—while they enjoy the nutrition, electricity, clean water, and health care available in the developed world.

CEI: Citing ecological claims, European Union regulators and environmental extremists oppose genetically engineered crops and the use of DDT to combat malaria. Why do you think they are more interested in preventing developing countries from getting these products—neither of which has been shown to cause harm—than in saving lives?

Driessen: First, they can afford to have purist, utopian viewpoints about pesticides and biotechnology. They live in healthy, wealthy, well-fed countries that once used DDT and other pesticides to eliminate malaria, and now use biotechnology to improve crop yields, reduce erosion, fortify plants with vitamins, and reduce the need for fertilizers. Their policy prescriptions bring them fortune and fame, while all the costs fall on poor Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans, who die in droves from malaria, malnutrition, and other maladies.

Second, eco-radicals have an uncanny ability to ignore or deny the horrendous misery and death toll their attitudes impose on the world's poor. They simply cite their standard pseudo-theological dogma: "We're saving the planet from big business, bad technology, and rampant overpopulation. We're protecting birds from pesticides." To which my Ugandan friend Fiona Kobusingye replies: "I lost two sisters, two nephews, and my son to malaria. Don't talk to me about birds."

Former USAID official Edwin Cohn illustrated the radical green mindset when he stated that, "better some people should be sick with malaria and spread the job opportunities around. In fact, people in the Third World would be much better off dead than alive, and riotously reproducing" (quoted by Robert Desowitz in *The Malaria Capers*).

CEI: Bio-engineered seeds reduce both pesticide use and the amount of land used for agriculture—two environmentally desirable outcomes. Why, then, are most environmental activists so adamantly opposed to using this technology?

Driessen: They're not starving. They're also not getting investigated, hauled up on fraud charges, or even rapped across the knuckles for hypocrisy, so opposing technologies that can benefit nature and save lives doesn't much bother them.

Their position also reflects what they do best: prey on people's fear of the unknown or anxieties about science run



amok, á la Mary Shelley and Stephen King. It also ensures greater power and influence, and lavish funding. It brought them over \$500 million between 1995 and 2001 from wealthy foundations—like Pew, Ford, Joyce, MacArthur, and Turner—organic food companies, and the European Union.

CEI: In your book, *Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death*, you discuss green activists' desire to find alternatives to petroleum for our energy needs. Two alternatives that excite them are wind and solar power. Could either source prove practical? Why do environmentalists tout them as a panacea?

Driessen: There's no way they're practical—even if subsidized via taxes, subsidies, and requirements that 20 percent of electricity come from renewable sources (excluding hydroelectric power). For instance, just one 555-megawatt gas-fired power plant in California generates more electricity every year than do all 13,000 of the state's enormous bird-killing wind turbines. The fossil fuel plant impacts 15 acres. The turbines impact 106,000 acres and destroy scenic vistas for miles.

Of course, the radical greens' real goal is to force America to slash electricity consumption to "sustainable" levels—circa 1950 or 1920—and force developing countries to remain indigenous and poor. So facts and practicality are largely irrelevant.

CEI: Alarmist green groups have grown immensely over the last few years. What do you believe has led to this growth? Can anything be done to check their influence?

Driessen: Environmentalism has become a multi-billion-dollar growth industry because activists know how to generate money, power, and fame by creating a new crisis every week. Scientists make careers out of studying and promoting new dangers. Journalists get famous. The media sells ads. And politicians, bureaucrats, and lawyers ride to rescue, getting rich or reelected for saving people and planet from exaggerated, imaginary, or fraudulent

threats. So the crisis charlatans con us over and over—from DDT to Alar and phthalates, to biotech, global warming, and wind power. What can be done? We have to do more to hold these groups to the same standards of transparency and accountability—including fines and jail terms for fraudulent claims—that we impose on individuals and corporations. Go after the organizations, their officers, and the foundations that finance them. We're finally starting to see some overdue efforts on this. The Internal Revenue Service is investigating The Nature Conservancy for illegally rewarding directors with prime lands for homes, improperly pressuring people into selling, and engaging in other unethical behavior—thanks largely to an in-depth

Washington Post exposé published last year.

Tort reform is essential, but may have to come via individual states, since pressure groups and trial lawyers have Washington in their grip.

Public shame, pressure, and litigation can be powerful weapons—especially if combined with real-life examples of people who have been victimized, like children who've been made blind because they couldn't get golden rice or died from malaria because their homes couldn't be sprayed with DDT.

That's what *Eco-Imperialism* is really all about: pressure groups that violate people's most basic human rights in furtherance of their own political agendas. It's morally reprehensible, it's lethal, and it has to end.

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