

From *The Times Online* (UK):

Blunt Warning About Greens Under The Bed

Once the lure of communism seduced the idealistic. Today's environmental ideologues risk becoming just as dangerous.

By Antonia Senior
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Britain is, thankfully, an ideologically barren land. The split between Right and Left is no longer ideological, but tribal. Are you a nice social liberal who believes in markets, or a nasty social liberal who believes in markets? Anthony Blunt's memoirs, published this week, reveal a different age, one in which fascism and communism were locked in a seemingly definitive battle for souls.

Blunt talks of the religious quality of the enthusiasm for the Left among the students of Cambridge. There is only one ideology in today's developed world that exercises a similar grip. If Blunt were young today, he would not be red; he would be green.

His band of angry young men would find Gore where once they found Marx. Blunt evokes a febrile atmosphere in which each student felt his own decision had the power to shape the future. Where once they raged about the fleecing of the proletariat and quaked at the march of fascism, Blunt and his circle, transposed to today's college bar, would rage about the fleecing of the planet and quake at its imminent destruction. If you squint, red and green look disarmingly similar.

Both identify an end utopia that is difficult to dispute. The diktat from each according to his ability, to each according to his means sounds lovely on paper. Greens promise a world in which we actually survive a coming ecological apocalypse. A desirable outcome, undoubtedly.

But the means to these ends seem similarly insurmountable. Both routes demand an immediate suspension of human nature.

Ideologies often credit man with either more nobility or more venality than he deserves. In reality he is a mundane creature. He wants a home for himself and those he loves, stocked with food. And he wants to have the right to control his own destiny, own his own stuff, and to acquire more if he can without interference or fear of imminent death. Such low-level acquisitive desires support high concepts: property rights and the rule of law, without which there would be no foundation for democracy.

My desire to live a free, mundane life is a fundamental cog in our messy, glorious, capitalist democracy. It is built on millions of such small entrenched positions. Red-filtered, my desires are despicable and bourgeois and must be beaten out of me with indoctrination or force. Green-filtered, my small desires are despicable acts of ecological vandalism. My

house is a carbon factory. My desire to travel, to own stuff, to eat meat, to procreate, to heat my house, to shower for a really, really long time; all are evil.

The word evil is used advisedly. Both the green and red positions are infused with overpowering religiosity. Dissenters from the consensus are shunned apostates. Professor Ian Pilmer, the Australian geologist and climate change sceptic, could not find a publisher for his book *Heaven and Earth*, which questions the orthodoxy about global warming. He is the subject of hate mail and demonstrations. It is entirely immaterial whether he is right or wrong. An environment that stifles his right to a voice is worse than one that is overheating.

Even within the convinced camp, dissent from certain party lines is frowned upon. Nuclear power is the cheapest, greenest alternative to fossil fuels that we possess, yet it is anathema to advocate its proliferation at the expense of wind and sun. Fans of nuclear are the Trotskys of the movement, subject to batterings by verbal ice pick.

The great ecological timebomb is population growth. By 2050 the United Nations demographers expect the world's population to reach 9.2 billion, compared with 6.8 billion today. That's 2.4 billion extra carbon footprints. Half measures seem futile. We all hope for some new technology to rescue us. But what if it never materialises? The logical position is to be a cheerleader for swine flu, but not in my backyard. Do we have to pray for swine flu to ravage foreign children, to save our own from frying in the future?

We are at the early stage of the green movement. A time akin to pre-Bolshevik socialism, when all believed in the destruction of the capitalist system, but were still relatively moderate about the means of getting there. We are at the stage of naive dreamers and fantasists. Russia was home to the late 19th-century Narodnik movement, in which rich sons of the aristocracy headed into the countryside to tell the peasants it was their moral imperative to become a revolutionary class. They retreated, baffled, to their riches when the patronised peasants didn't want to revolt. Zac Goldsmith and Prince Charles look like modern Narodniks, talking glib green from the safety of their gilded lives.

Indulge me in some historical determinism. We, the peasants, are failing to rise up and embrace the need to change. We will not choose to give up modern life, with all its polluting seductions. Our intransigent refusal to choose green will be met by a new militancy from those who believe we must be saved from ourselves. Ultra-green states cannot arise without some form of forced switch to autocracy; the dictatorship of the environmentalists.

The old two-cow analogy is a useful one. You have two cows. The communist steals both your cows, and may give you some milk, if you're not bourgeois scum. The fascist lets you keep the cows but seizes the milk and sells it back to you. Today's Green says you can keep the cows, but should choose to give them up as their methane-rich farts will unleash hell at some unspecified point in the future. You say, sod it, I'll keep my cows thanks. Tomorrow's green, the Bolshevik green, shoots the cows and makes you forage for nuts.

If the choice is between ecological meltdown, or a more immediate curtailment of our freedom, where do those of us who are neither red nor green, but a recalcitrant grey, turn? Back to those

small desires, and a blinkered hope that the choice never becomes so stark. If it does, I ll take my chances with Armageddon.