

## Breaking Up with Miss Ann Thropy

By Richard Evanoff

A while back the American TV program *60 Minutes* aired a segment on the Wise Use Movement and violence against environmentalists. I almost never watch television but this was different. Despite the environmental-sounding name, the Wise Use Movement is actually a new anti-environmental group that advocates opening protected wilderness areas to mining, lumbering, and other forms of resource extraction. Destroying wilderness areas for profit rather than preserving them for future generations is what constitutes the "wise use" of our natural resources in the minds of these people. They are openly hostile to environmentalists and darkly warn of a second civil war in America between pro- and anti-environmentalists. One like-minded group, calling itself the "Sahara Club," barely conceals its support for violence against environmentalists and refers to its members as "Sahara Clubbers."

The *60 Minutes* program also documented intimidation and violence against activists, primarily women, who tried to force factories in their neighborhoods to comply with environmental standards. One woman was hit with a stone, had her dog killed, and her house set on fire for organizing opposition to a company responsible for air pollution in Cincinnati. A Florida activist was cut with a knife, burned with a cigar, and raped for her membership in an environmental group which accused a local factory of polluting the drinking water. The company at first denied responsibility for the yellow-brown water coming out of neighborhood taps, then threatened to close down its factory and take its jobs elsewhere, undoubtedly to a place, perhaps overseas, where there are minimal environmental regulations and a docile, politically disempowered citizenry.

Personally I would classify all of the above actions as anti-human and misanthropic, but it's interesting how, in typical Newspeak fashion, the Wise Use Movement and fellow travelers have managed to reverse the labels and accuse environmentalists of being anti-

human and misanthropic. Radical environmentalists may spike trees and decommission bulldozers but their actions are directed against machines, not people. Their goal is to protect life from machines designed to destroy life. We've got a pretty mixed up sense of values when clearcutting thousands of acres of forest is legally protected and blocking logging roads is regarded as a criminal offense. It's pretty obvious that the real misanthropes and anti-humanists are the logging companies and developers who, in the name of higher profits, are willing to mow down both the forests and any humans who stand in their way. As Brian Tokar noted in a recent interview (see the September and October 1993 issues of *JEM*), ordinary laborers at logging companies are progressively coming to the realization that "the companies treat them the same way they treat the forests."

The argument that the unlimited exploitation of wilderness areas constitutes the "wise use" of our resources undoubtedly needs to be refuted, but I think most of the people who read (and write for) *Japan Environment Monitor* would find it a bit unchallenging and not worth spilling even soy-based ink on recycled paper over. For something more sophisticated and a bit more challenging let's take on the claim made by one of the anti-environmentalists on the show: "The environmental movement is a new paganism that sacrifices humans and worships trees." This statement, while ugly in intentions, is so beautifully phrased that if I were an anti-environmentalist I wish I would have said it myself. I can also imagine millions of people being taken in by its elegant, if flawed, logic — say, a factory worker who has just lost his job because his company decided to move operations overseas rather than accept environmental responsibility here at home.

Before tackling the argument itself, however, I think we should do a bit of housecleaning, because there have in fact been misanthropic currents within the environmental movement. Misunderstanding the distinction made in deep ecology between "anthropocentrism" and "biocentrism," some activists drew the fallacious conclusion that humans are inherently bad and nature is inherently good. A widely-publicized letter to the *Earth First! Journal*, signed by one "Miss Ann Thropy," suggested in Neo-Malthusian terms that famines in Africa and the AIDS virus were simply nature's way of dealing with overpopulation. There were reports that activists trying to save old-growth forests in the far west had been jumping up and down around campfires shouting "Down with humans, up with nature!"

A pest is defined as any species which attempts to establish its own primacy at the expense of all other species, and given this definition I can certainly see how some people might reach the conclusion that human beings are one of the most voracious pests the earth has ever known. But although I'm an

environmentalist, I'm certainly not a misanthropic one (and neither in fact are the vast majority of deep ecologists or Earth Firsters). I believe that it is possible for human beings to have a symbiotic relationship with the earth based on sustainable economies that are geared towards satisfying genuine humans needs rather than towards "economic growth" simply for the purpose of improving corporate profit margins. I am not a Neanderthal who wants us all to go back to living in caves. Instead, as I have frequently written in this column, I believe that our overall quality of life can actually be improved by *decreasing* economic growth, specifically by cutting back on things like overpackaging, planned obsolescence, and development projects that bolster the national G.N.P. but add absolutely nothing to our real enjoyment of life. By eliminating unnecessary consumption we will not only be "saving the earth," but will also be able to focus our attention again on the things that really matter — relationships with other people, natural landscapes, our inner selves — instead of merely the toys and distractions of our modern consumer culture.

There are those who say, however, that we must choose between economic growth or a healthy environment, that is, between culture or nature. Pro-growth advocates threaten total economic collapse if we follow the advice of environmentalists and don't give free reign to the profitmongers of capitalism. The environmental misanthropes for their part warn of impending ecological disaster if we don't either immediately go back to the Stone Age or commit suicide as a species. Both sides are misguided. True ecological thinking emphasizes wholeness and balance. Diversity is preferable to a deadening monoculture in which either "nature" or "culture" prevails, and there is a place for both in the grand ecological scheme of things. We need to create an ecologically sustainable world order in which everyone on the planet has the basic necessities of life, meaningful work, opportunities for creative personal development, *and* a sound environment to live in.

The propaganda being promulgated by the Wise Use Movement that all environmentalists are pro-nature and anti-human is simply wrong. By casting the issue as a choice between humans or the environment the Wise Use Movement is only creating a false dilemma. It's not an *either-or* situation, but a *both-and* situation — both humans *and* nature, both jobs *and* the environment. Despite the fact that the Wise Use Movement claims to be "pro-human," it shouldn't be too difficult to see that its call for increased resource exploitation and economic growth is going to lead us to a very "anti-human" situation. Despite the warnings of the Wise Use Movement that economic collapse will result if economic growth is hindered in any way, it

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is far more likely that economic collapse will be hastened if economic growth is *not* hindered in any way. Reducing economic activity to truly sustainable levels (rather than trying to develop it *up* to "sustainable" levels we passed long ago as implied by the oxymoronic concept of "sustainable development") is our best hope for harmonizing an egalitarian human society with a livable environment. Much better I think than the kind of misanthropy that advocates keeping environmentalists in their place with intimidation and violence while the anti-environmentalists go out and loot nature's storehouses.

So don't put me down [1] on the side of those who worship trees and sacrifice humans (what misguided environmentalists think environmentalism is all about); nor [2] on the side of those who worship humans and sacrifice trees (what misguided anti-environmentalists think anti-environmentalism is all about); nor [3] on the side of those who sacrifice both humans and trees (what anti-environmentalism is really all about); but rather [4] on the side of those who revere — if not worship — *both* humans *and* trees (which is what I understand genuine environmentalism to be really all about). □

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continues. Many homeless live off discarded food and soup kitchens. Some restaurants, trying to discourage scavenging, are waiting to throw out food until they know the garbage trucks have arrived. Many homeless say they are going days without food. Shinjuku Ward office offers free noodle lunches every day. In June over 1,600 meals were served up. Other organizations around the city are also offering free lunches and other help. (DY Jul 16)

\*About 120 homeless and their supporters marched on city hall in Kawasaki recently. They demanded relief from harassment. Water in parks has been turned off, cardboard boxes they sleep in have been burned or stolen, they have been thrown out of train stations, etc. (DY Jun 24)

**Brown bear** — The brown bear population continues to decline rapidly, primarily due to habitat loss. Officials in Hokkaido, the bear's main habitat, have been carrying out a campaign to change citizen attitudes about killing "nuisance" bears and learning to co-exist with the bears. However, development in prime habitat continues apace, so it seems that hope is fading among realists. (DY Jul 21)

**Fishing kills** — Concerned bird lovers and anglers are getting together to clean up popu-

lar fishing areas where careless anglers have left behind line, hooks, and other paraphernalia which has subsequently caused injuries to wild birds. A recent cleanup along the Tama River in Tokyo brought in 16 km of fishing line, 160 fishhooks, and 58 lead sinkers. Many fishing groups nationwide are signing up to do annual cleanups and promote better fishing manners. (DY Jul 21)

**Environmental impact** — I must recommend that you try to get a copy of this issue of the *Daily Yomiuri* and turn to page 8 for an illuminating essay on the environmental assessment process here in Japan. It's too long to do justice here in this column, but the gist is that a development that will affect the water supply for a whole village is under inspection. The prefectural government has held several meetings with developers, experts, and the press in attendance but has barred repeated requests by villagers and their local elected officials to even attend the meetings let alone participate. (DY Jul 21)

**Tobacco** — The sole owner of stock in Japan Tobacco, the Finance Ministry, is planning to put about one-third of its holdings on the market beginning in August. (IHT Jul 29)

\*A man who kicked and accidentally killed another man who was smoking on a no-smoking train platform received a three-year suspended jail sentence. The victim fell and fractured his skull. (IHT Jul 14) □