

## Al Gore's Trendy Environmentalism in Barcelona

*By Pablo Ouziel*

On the 23 of June I had the opportunity to attend the Friends of Trees Conference in Barcelona. It has taken me a few weeks to digest all the information, which I, together with about 900 other people managed to inhale: The fumes of change, the organic revolution, the climate crisis, the need for solidarity and action. It was a most overwhelming task: and Al Gore's redundant joke of: "I used to be the next president of the United States," has hardly helped ease the intensity of the situation.

The crowds clapped at every comment made by the speakers, who endlessly praised each other for their wonderful efforts in shaping the future of our environment. Yet my impressions of the entire event were so off-putting, that is until I listened to a most articulate and powerful Indian woman with a soothing voice and right hook dialogue, called Vandana Shiva. Her genuine commitment to the preservation of the planet, her emotional personal descriptions of the non-violent Chipko movement during the 1970s in the Uttarakhand region of India, where women adopted the tactic of hugging trees to prevent them from being cut down, her open dialogue about corrupt multinationals and unjust wars, and her undeniable leadership abilities should serve as an example to the rest of the world.

'Saving the environment' has become the latest trend in western societies, the new toy of the rich and privileged; this is something I would certainly not object to, if the consequences were not so devastating for those who have fought for environmental values for decades with the social stigma of being labelled with all kind of degrading labels, tree huggers and the likes. I am not a 'tree hugger' myself, however over the years I have spent a lot of time with many who are, people who have that characteristic innate in their nature, in their love for humanity, the environment; frankly, Al Gore hardly qualifies as one.

One can never be too sure about making the right judgment about a particular individual and the motives driving him or her into carrying out a particular action, however in the case of Al Gore, the whole staging of his persona as a born-again conscientious human being, who waits about half a minute into his discourse to remind the public that the proceeds of his efforts will be heading to a non for profit foundation of his choice, seems a little opportunistic in the global game of personal positioning. One would undoubtedly argue after listening to his eloquent speech, which he repeats word for word in every country to which he is invited, that he represents the true values of western democracy. Quotes from Genesis, respect for nature, concern for the people suffering due to the drastic changes affecting our climate, and added to that, the fact that he does this in representation of altruistic values.

I agree. Indeed, Al Gore's efforts to save us all from the melting glaciers, the raising water levels, increasing number of tornados and stronger Tsunamis, together with his quotes from Genesis, are a true representation of western democratic values; however, for me, these western democratic values are represented in the double standards, and

strategic omission of relevant information. In fact, I would argue that there is a very much probable imperialistic agenda hidden behind the façade of these 'humanitarian' initiative.

Al Gore represents the birth of the 21st Century altruist; he is a man who has no time to waste for the world is collapsing and there is no time to accumulate wealth; indeed it's time to 'give back' to humanity, to make change, now, and to affective drastic action; thus, we are all expected to listen to him, count our "carbon footprint" and then plant a tree.

But to make it a tad more interesting, maybe it would be motivating for the public in the next theatrical event which he stages, to be informed of the fact that him and his crew can only travel first class, and only sleep in top-tier hotels. Equally, maybe it would be interesting for the public to know, that a list of the cities dignitaries presiding the event has to be presented in advance, in order for him to evaluate whether it is worth his time to speak to the rest of us, the ones paying for the event.

Then perhaps he could've discussed his own "carbon foot print" during his 2000 United States presidential campaign in which, according to publicly accessible information during the period between January of 1999 and January of 2000, he reimbursed five groups and corporations for 16 flights on private jets. After all, flying around in a private jets does more than four times the carbon emission damage to the environment than flying a regular commercial jet. Speaking of his political career, it's rather telling that Al Gore did very little for the environment when he served as Clinton's vice President for 8 years; it's bewildering that we are expected to believe that the man who failed to contribute much to this pressing global concern as, presumably, the second most powerful man in the world, can do much now as a predictable speaker and a redundant joke.

Finally to end his future speeches he could perhaps mention something about the launch in late 2004 of the investment firm Generation Investment Management LLP, which he chairs, and seeks out companies taking a 'responsible' view on big global issues like climate change. Al Gore's environmentalism is the most fashionable trend in today's investment world and the man knows well that a lot of money can be reaped from his trendy humanism.

I don't claim that Al Gore tells any lies, or that there isn't some good coming out of his efforts, but I guess all that I am asking for is just a bit of respect. The next time I sit in a hall to listen to someone who is championing, building and capitalising on a new and hip industry, I would like to know his true intentions in advance. I am truly glad, that Vandana Shiva as a 'less prominent' speaker holding the 1994 alternative Nobel price, was there to remind us of the fact that although planting a tree is always a good thing, the real environmental change will only take place when greed, extortion and theft are eradicated from human behaviour.

Without her speech I would not discard asking for reimbursement.

***Pablo Ouziel,***

Pablo Ouziel has international experience in Business Development and Corporate Communications having worked from London and New York, developing communications strategies and dealing with investor relations for companies such as Daimler-Chrysler, MCI Worldcom, Texas Instruments, Barclays Bank, Banco Santander, Terra Networks, Askit Systems, Golin Harris y Stanton Crenshaw. He was also co-founder of Latinia Corporation and Appareo Corporation, and currently is CEO of Can Poeti SL, a branding communications company which he runs together with his wife, and focuses on supporting projects around the globe in the areas of sustainability, ecology and health. Pablo also sits on the Board of Directors of Mas Claperol, the oldest organic dairy farm in Catalunya, Spain, his work has appeared on ZNet, the Palestine Chronicle and the Atlantic Free Press among many other progressive publication.

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