

Greenpeace scuttled in Halifax

by Paul Clark

Maybe it's a sign of the end of the seventies and environmental consciousness. Maybe it's a good riddance. Maybe, as many people think, it means nothing at all. Whatever one's opinion, the fact remains that Greenpeace, those rambunctious defenders of seal and whale, have left town.

"We couldn't get enough public support", said Mike Lacourciere, former director of Halifax's Greenpeace office which closed down this summer.

"With no pogy coming in, we had no resources to keep it going."

Greenpeace opened their office at 1585 Barrington Street this March, hoping to raise public awareness about ecological issues like oil spills, the chemical spraying and overharvest of forest land, overfishing and, most notably, the Newfoundland seal hunt.

Lacourciere said his organization gave films and lectures, put up posters and distributed information about ecology, but there was little interest.

"A group under a different name might have had a better response with the people", he admitted.

Despite their problems in the Maritimes, Lacourciere said other Greenpeace offices were planning some kind of action against next year's Newfoundland seal hunt, but he couldn't be specific.

The Greenpeace Foundation, a non-profit organization, began in 1969 when a boat

called the "Phyllis Cormack" (later rechristened the Greenpeace) sailed from Vancouver to Amchitka in the Aleutian Islands, protesting a U.S. nuclear test there. Although they have fought other nuclear tests by the French government, physically tried to prevent Russian and Japanese whalers from harpooning their quarry, and actively declaimed against many other dangers to the environment, they are mostly known in the Maritimes for their annual protest of the seal hunt.

Susan Mayo, coordinator of the Ecology Action Center at Dal, said she was "neither glad nor sad" to see Greenpeace go. They were energetic and enthusiastic people, she observed, but "they didn't do a lot."

We can still get on with what needs to be done, she said.

She agreed with Lacourciere that only a small percentage of the Halifax population is actively involved in work on the environment, but said these people are very committed and really care about what they are doing.

"It takes a lot of time for people to start accepting stuff", she said, emphasizing that people's attitudes toward the environment change slowly.

"I often got the idea Greenpeace wanted to change everything overnight."

She also noted there is not a lot of money in Halifax and that to expect it on a "golden platter" is impossible.

Feeling on campus toward

Greenpeace's departure was pretty lukewarm. Few people were aware they ever had an office here.

Gwen McKinnell, a student in religion, said she had mixed feelings about what they do. "I admire the risks they take and their sensitivity to ecology", she said, "but I'm not sure about some things they do."

Greg Morgan, an arts student from Newfoundland, thought some of the things they do are good but not their protest of seal hunting. "Newfoundlanders who kill seals are poor", he said. "A Newfoundlander would punch you if you talked like that (supporting Greenpeace) to him."

Lacourciere said he has been an environmentalist since 1971 when he opened a paper recycling company in Halifax. Since then, he has helped clean up oil spills, protested against nuclear testing and done research on energy conservation, organic farming and other ecology related subjects. In February he went to Newfoundland and joined other Greenpeacers in dinghies and small boats who tried to prevent Newfoundland seal hunters from leaving port.

Lacourciere said the Greenpeace Foundation's ultimate goal is to make man realize that life on this planet is a matter of interdependence with other creatures. He sees Greenpeace's role as one of protesting wrongs done by man to allow others to become aware.

Greenpeace is not as prominent in the news right now as they used to be, he said, because they are aligning with the rest of the environmental community, particularly in the protest against nuclear energy. The Clamshell Alliance and the Nova Scotia Energy Coalition are groups in which Greenpeace is involved, he said.

Lacourciere said he would still be doing some Greenpeace work at his home on 5639 Morris Street, and people needing information or offering their services can contact him there.



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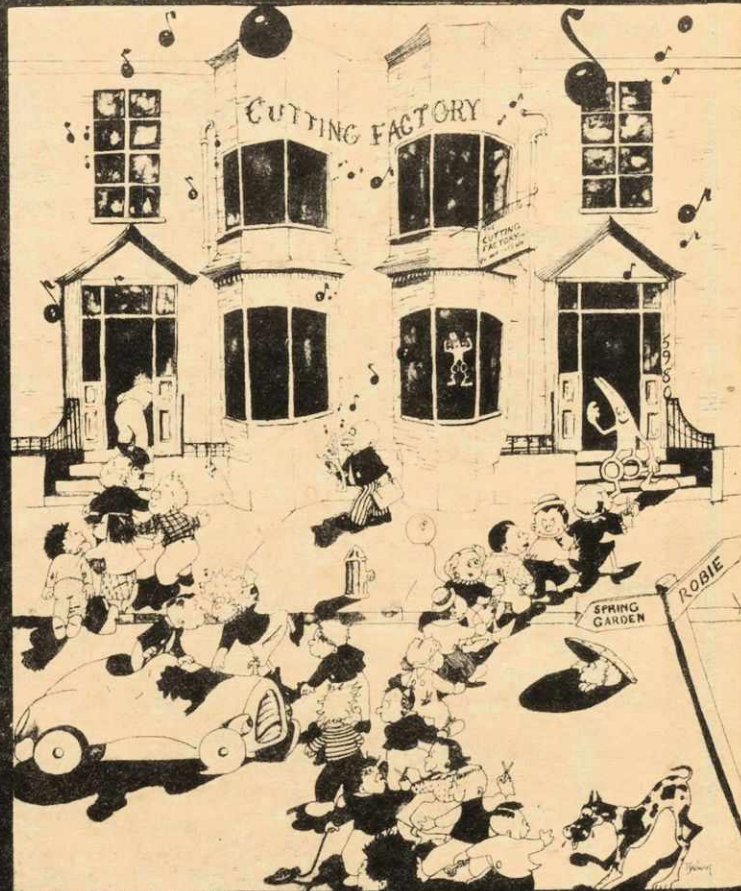
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