

Informed Consent or Informed Rejection of Pesticide Use A Concept for Environmental Action

By David Orton

This paper describes a “concept” which arose from the experiences of environmentalists in Nova Scotia, Canada, who were organizing against forest spraying using the herbicide Roundup¹ (active ingredient glyphosate) and the insecticide Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis variety kurstaki). The type of forestry which uses pesticides has been characterized as “pulpwood forestry”² and has certain features such as clearcutting; the reduction of biodiversity through replacing the existing natural forest with a few selected softwood pulp species like balsam fir, black, white and red spruce; the elimination of hardwoods; even-aged management; use of pesticides to “protect” the pulpwood tree plantations; use of industrial machinery for harvesting, etc. Every year extensive forest spraying takes place in Nova Scotia and every year environmentalists and the public living close to forest spray sites engage in battle to try to stop or seriously impede the spraying.

Introduction: Genesis of a Concept

In September of 1986, a report appeared in a local newspaper in Nova Scotia³, outlining concerns held by some East Hants county councillors regarding forest herbicide spraying being carried out by Scott Maritimes Limited, an American-owned multinational pulp and paper company operating a kraft pulp mill in the province. Scott, which is one of three multinational pulp and paper companies in Nova Scotia, operates in about 20 countries around the world. In Nova Scotia, Scott owns over one million acres of land, has a long-term lease of over 200,000 acres of public land and “manages” quite a number of private landholdings for pulpwood forestry purposes. This company annually carries out a forest-spraying program. The report mentioned that Scott had been asked to address Council on their spraying program and to deal with various concerns that a number of councillors had. One of the councillors was quoted as saying: “There should be ‘no spray in East Hants unless council votes’ for the program.”⁴ Two members of the environmental group the North Shore Environmental Web (NSEW)⁵, to which this writer belonged at the time, decided to attend the East Hants Council meeting, to which Scott was invited to speak on October 14, 1986.

Scott’s presentation

Three people from Scott addressed Council and used a slide show as part of their presentation. Representatives from “supervising” provincial government agencies – like the Departments of the Environment, and Lands and Forests – were present in the audience. A spokesperson for the Environment Department intervened forcefully in the discussions in support of the Scott position. It is the Department of the Environment which is the primary authority for signing the spraying permits, giving legal approval to spray the forests.

An “information package” had been given to all the councillors by Scott. This was the same package given to rural residents living in the immediate vicinity of forest spray sites, where Roundup was to be sprayed using helicopters. In 1986 the following documents made up the package:

- Roundup Herbicide Bulletin, January 1984, published by Monsanto, the manufacturer of Roundup.
- Roundup Q&A, July 1984, published by Monsanto.
- Roundup in Forestry, no date, published by Monsanto.
- “Dear Resident” letter from Scott, dated August 21, 1986.
- Herbicides in Forest Management, no date and no authorship, but a provincial government Lands and Forests document.
- A Matter of Safety: The Story of Forest Pesticide Regulation, no date, published by the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association.

The letter from Scott noted that the herbicide “treatment” was necessary for “weeding”, that is, eliminating competing vegetation in seedling plantations and naturally regenerated forestry sites; and also for “site preparation”, that is, eliminating vegetation before planting nursery grown seedlings. Scott’s letter stated that:

Roundup is registered by the Federal Government for use in forestry and agriculture and is considered safe to human health and the environment by Federal and Provincial Departments of Health and Environment when applied according to prescribed guidelines.

For any technical information on herbicides used in forestry, Scott’s letter gave a toll-free telephone number for the public to call. This number was to the federal Department of Agriculture in Ottawa. This is the federal agency which “registers” pesticides, and also promotes their use in Canada. So all the information in the information package was promotional of the use of the herbicide Roundup. The collusion between governments, the chemical companies (Monsanto), and the pulp and paper industry, is nakedly apparent.

Detailed notes were taken of the presentation by the Scott personnel to the East Hants Council. While a number of questions were asked of Scott by the councillors, it became apparent, that apart from their own personal experience, and despite the evident scepticism, the councillors did not have the concrete information to counter the claims made by Scott. There was a short break after Scott had given its talk. I spoke with the councillor who had been the most critical and asked if he thought Council would be willing to hear me as a representative of an environmental group, speak against the forest-spraying program. When Council reconvened, they voted to let me speak at the next council meeting on November 17, 1986.

Environmental group presentation

For our talk to East Hants Council against forest spraying, it was necessary to analyze the essence of Scott’s performance. It was from this consideration that the concept of “informed consent or informed rejection”⁶ became clear as the counter to the Scott presentation. The

information provided to council by Scott was strictly promotional and no critical information was given on the herbicide Roundup. In addition, and most importantly, there was no right to refuse the forest spraying, either by residents living close to spray sites or by council itself, concerning the spraying being carried out in the municipality of East Hants. The decision on whether to spray or not, after a pesticide had been approved for use in Canada by the federal government, was a decision made by the provincial government, not by the county council. Yet it was the county council to which rural residents were turning to complain about forest spraying. So the question of the lack of consent seemed crucial. The title of our presentation therefore became “Informed Consent ... or Informed Rejection – The Basic Issue in Forest Spraying Programs.”

A four-page document was prepared to concretely address and refute the various claims made by Scott. I spoke to this document in addressing council. The concept of informed consent or informed rejection was introduced as follows:

The North Shore Environmental Web, an environmental group with members and supporters in Pictou, Colchester and Cumberland counties, lives in the shadow of Scott. We believe that it should be a fundamental right that rural residents subjected to forest pesticide (insecticide and herbicide) spraying, should give an informed consent or informed rejection on all spraying programs which can affect the environment in which they live, or their own personal health.

The Web would like to see municipal councils, like East Hants, facilitate a genuine discussion in the rural communities on chemical forestry, which recognizes that at the present time basically all the information which is readily available to the interested public from industry or government sources, is uncritical and promotional in nature of the existing pulpwood forestry policy and the pesticide use on which it rests. We would also like to see this council formally support the position that the people directly affected by forest spraying programs have the basic right to give an informed consent or rejection of such programs, and that the forest industry be bound by this.

Our document, which the councillors had in front of them, gave an overview of the forestry situation in Nova Scotia, before outlining and answering in considerable detail, five claims which we had identified Scott as making. For example, the “strictness” of the federal pesticide registration process and the “safety” of Roundup had been asserted.

Yet dissenting environmental toxicologists, like Canadian Ross Hall, had a different view of the registration process, it was pointed out to the councillors:

If Environment Canada were to apply rigorous criteria to the assessment of the environmental toxicity of pesticides, few if any of the 405 currently registered ones would be likely to pass. In addition, it is unlikely that any new chemical pesticides would be registered.⁷

Regarding safety claims, the distinction was made for the councillors between the active ingredient of Roundup (glyphosate) and the unknown inert ingredients⁸; that most of the

information Monsanto presents only concerns the active ingredient⁹; that inert ingredients – or contaminants which may be part of the production process – are not identified in the information supplied by Monsanto on Roundup. Inert ingredients can be chemically or biologically active¹⁰. The last point made on safety was to mention that Lasso (alachlor), a chemical herbicide made by Monsanto, had now been withdrawn from the Canadian market as an animal carcinogen and groundwater contaminant, after being declared officially safe for many years¹¹. In general, Monsanto considers the actual studies it has done, on which it bases its safety claims, as confidential information.

An animated discussion followed our presentation. There was a lot of support from a number of council speakers. Only one of the councillors seemed to be in any way critical of the position that had been put forward. There were four of us present from the environmental group and it was hard for us to believe the support from the councillors. One of the councillors ‘said “This puts balance to the picture from Scott and the government’ and council should go on record supporting informed consent.¹²” A motion was then put before council and it passed unanimously. The following was sent to this writer from the Council, as representing the content of the motion:

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to advise that the Council of the Municipality of East Hants have gone on record as supporting an Informed Consent or Informed Rejection policy, as it relates to the Chemical Spraying of the Forest Lands in the Province of Nova Scotia, but more importantly, the Forest Lands within the Municipality of East Hants.¹³

Popularization And Concept Development

Local media, and sometimes provincial media, cover county council meetings in Nova Scotia. The media response to the East Hants Council decision was favourable. The Truro Daily News (November 19, 1986), in Colchester County, carried an extensive article covering the presentation, the responses by councillors and the content of the resolution passed. An editorial accompanied the article and was headed “Getting all the Facts”. It opened with the following paragraph:

David Orton is rather pleased with himself. He should be. As spokesman for the North Shore Environmental Web, Mr. Orton has convinced East Hants Municipal Council that landowners should be fully informed before theirs or neighbouring lands are sprayed with herbicides, pesticides or insecticides.

In Hants County, The Hants Journal (December 10, 1986) carried a sympathetic article on the front page, “Right to forest spraying should be by ‘informed’ consent”.

In December of 1986, the NSEW put out a press release, sent throughout Nova Scotia to media outlets, pointing out the position taken by the East Hants Council. The release concluded:

The North Shore Environmental Web urges the general public to adopt the above position as their own and to work to see that this is implemented as policy in the province. Also, the Web asks other municipal councils to follow the example set by East Hants Council on the forest spraying issue.

The Web, which seeks a permanent ban on all forest spraying in Nova Scotia, is willing to assist members of the public, and speak before municipal councils on the issue of informed consent or informed rejection of forest spraying programs.

There was extensive newspaper coverage of this release. East Hants Council has maintained its position of opposing Scott's forest herbicide spray program in the county, during the 1989 spraying season¹⁴.

Seeing the extent of the initial response to the formulation of the concept of informed consent or informed rejection, it was decided that this should be further promoted within Nova Scotia.

Preparations, some considerations

One important factor influencing the conduct of a campaign to promote the concept of informed consent or informed rejection was the situation within the NSEW, which was one of internal weakness. This affected the amount of organizing that could be undertaken. There were only a small number of people prepared to do work and only a small number prepared to speak publicly or do the required preparation to address public meetings. All this meant that the organizational base for a wide scale campaign throughout Nova Scotia was absent. Given this situation, it was decided to speak before several county councils, as this could be carried through. Such a program would, because of media coverage, raise for public discussion informed consent or informed rejection.

The objectives of the various talks before the councils were to explain informed consent or informed rejection; to have the individual council discuss and vote on a resolution; finally, to have the media covering the meeting present our point of view publicly and thus help create a basis of support in the wider society for this concept. We took the public position that a councillor could support an informed consent or informed rejection resolution, even if one favoured pesticide use.

The NSEW had a written philosophy that environmentalists should not work with corporations or governments¹⁵. This was a minority view within the environmental movement in Nova Scotia. Going to speak before a number of county councils, to ask them to adopt a position on informed consent or informed rejection, could seem a betrayal of the position of not working with governments. Yet, given the weakness of the environmental movement in Nova Scotia, a few dedicated activists scattered throughout the province, with a larger number of people willing to support but not initiate environmental struggles, and the absence of a mass movement of opposition to environmental atrocities, it was argued that the raising of ideas within society is a crucial step in building an environmental resistance movement. It was also seen that the content of the position taken before a council was decisive in conveying an attitude towards governments.

County councils are a level of government closer to democratic influence. Councillors live in the communities they represent and there are no major economic rewards for being elected. From a green or bioregional viewpoint, this is the level of government closest to nature for rural residents.

Informed consent or informed rejection puts a veto power in ordinary people's hands. This makes this concept quite different from the "right to know" legislation which, in Canada and the United States, governs the use of toxic chemicals in many workplace situations. Right to know legislation is also being passed in many communities to require, say, the posting of notices advising the application of pesticides to parks or garden lawns. While such legislation is, in general, a step forward as pesticide users do not like the spotlight of publicity which can lead to public mobilization, informed consent or informed rejection says pesticide spraying can be stopped – if people in the immediate area do not give their permission to pesticide use.

The general resolution

It was decided to develop a general resolution on informed consent or informed rejection which could be taken before county councils or other organizations. However, in February of 1987 another Nova Scotia environmental group, the Cape Breton-based Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (CAP), inspired by the East Hants Council decision, went before the Victoria County Council to present an informed consent or informed rejection position. The Victoria resolution starts to make more concrete a definition which can be used to better organize around:

Be it resolved

Due to concerns expressed by many residents of Victoria County regarding the potential hazardous effects associated with pesticide treatments such as chemical spray drift, runoff, and accidental exposure of persons and property to pesticides, this duly elected council requests of the Nova Scotia Department of Environment that residents living within one kilometer of an area proposed for pesticide treatment be notified in person, or in writing, thirty days prior to the date of the proposed treatment, and that residents be granted the right of informed approval or rejection in regard to the issuing of the pesticide permit.

This resolution was passed by council. It reflects the philosophy of CAP, of working with various government "regulatory" agencies, like the provincial Department of the Environment.

For the general resolution, it was decided to include not only forestry, but herbicide use on power transmission lines, roadside spraying and railway line spraying. While in principle opposing pesticide use in farming, some members of the NSEW did not want this to be part of the general resolution. The reasons given by such members dealt with the knowledge required to understand the large numbers of pesticides to being used in farming; the desire to try to keep forestry as the main focus; and an effort to stop agricultural interests, well represented on county councils, from mobilizing against informed consent or informed rejection.

The following is the text of the resolution taken before the Halifax, Cumberland, Colchester and Pictou county councils in 1987:

RESOLUTION CALLING FOR “INFORMED CONSENT” OR “INFORMED REJECTION”, GOVERNING ALL PESTICIDE SPRAYING ON FORESTS, POWER TRANSMISSION LINES, ROADWAYS AND RAILWAY LINES IN _____ COUNTY.

WHEREAS many hazards associated with the use of chemical sprays like herbicides and insecticides are often found about only after they have been used a long time and have caused obvious damage to humans, wildlife and the environment.

WHEREAS alternatives to these various chemical sprays must be sought out, so that we do not continue to pollute and destroy our environment which sustains all life.

WHEREAS at the present time, all the information which is readily available to the interested public comes from industry or government sources and is uncritical and promotional in nature of pesticide use.

WHEREAS in the spring and summer of 1987, it is planned that forests, power transmission lines, roadways and railway lines will be sprayed with an assortment of chemical poisons in _____ County. On forests: the herbicide Roundup and the bacterial poison B.t., which also contains chemical additives; on power transmission lines: the herbicide Tordon 101, also known as Picloram (Tordon mixtures contain 2,4-D); on roadways: the herbicides 2,4-D and Dicamba or substitutes; on railway lines: Spike 80W, also known as Tebuthiuron.

BE IT RESOLVED that this meeting of the _____ formally support the position that:

1. The people directly affected by forest, power line, roadway and railway spraying programs have the basic democratic right to give their “informed consent” or “informed rejection” to such spraying programs, which can directly impact upon personal health and the immediate environment; and
2. Residents of _____ County living within one kilometer of proposed forest spray blocs (B.t. or Roundup), must be notified 30 days prior to the proposed spraying, and such residents have the right and responsibility to give an “informed consent” or “informed rejection”, by signature, in regard to the issuing of the particular pesticide permit, which then becomes binding upon the government and forest industry.

In May of 1987, the above general resolution, in its entirety, was passed by Halifax County Council. The vote was unanimous. A Petition with 638 names opposing pesticide spraying for the areas covered in the general resolution was presented to council, by a supporter of NSEW, who actually lived in Halifax County, and who had organized obtaining the signatures in the county. This person spoke to council, and so did I.

The general resolution was not voted upon at the Colchester and Pictou council meetings. At the Cumberland meeting, nine councillors voted to reject the motion and four abstained from voting. The centre of the opposition in Cumberland was a large commercial strawberry grower:

Councillor Henry Knol said he would not support the resolution because Mr. Orton was giving a one-sided story. He said billions of dollars have been spent studying the chemicals and that it would hurt the county's basic industries, forestry and agriculture, if the resolution was adopted.¹⁶

A number of councillors at the Colchester, Pictou and Cumberland council meetings, saw the general resolution as a threat to forestry and agriculture.

The Women's Health Education Network (WHEN), an information-sharing network of mainly rural women in Nova Scotia, adopted the general resolution at their Annual General Meeting in May of 1987, after a presentation from a woman member of the NSEW. The resolution was published in the WHEN Quarterly Vitality.

All of the above decisions were reported in the capitalist media. A number of environmentalists riot associated with the NSEW wrote letters in various publications expressing support for informed consent or informed rejection, or expressed their support in other ways. Anti-spray agitational leaflets produced by the NSEW incorporated this concept. Generally it can be said that "informed consent or informed rejection" was adopted by the environmental movement in Nova Scotia, as something that could be supported. This support is ongoing. Currently the Tusket River Environmental Protection Association, based in Tusket, Yarmouth County, has a general resolution, similar to the Victoria County statement, before various elected bodies in Shelburne, Yarmouth and Digby counties during winter 1989 to spring 1990. The Protection Association has had their resolution adopted by Argyle Municipality¹⁷.

Popularization outside Nova Scotia

Information on informed consent or informed rejection has been sent to a network of contacts in the environmental and green movements across Canada and in the United States. While this article is the first systematic account of the concept, information about informed consent or informed rejection has appeared in the Canadian journals Alternatives¹⁸ and The New Catalyst¹⁹. United States publications like the Journal of Pesticide Reform²⁰ and Earth First!²¹ have also had information. Green Web Bulletins²² produced by the environmental group this writer is now associated with have incorporated the concept, e.g. "Blueberry Spraying: A Chemical Horror Story", "Christmas Tree Cultivation: Open Season On Pesticides", and "Opposing Forest Spraying". These Bulletins have been distributed nationally and internationally, to a network of activist contacts and green movement publications.

The industry response

Based on information that has become available, it can be said that the forest and agricultural industries in Nova Scotia saw the concept of informed consent or informed rejection as a direct threat to their use of pesticides in the province. The provincial government, which plays the

obsequious role of hand servant to the two industries, was also opposed to any restrictions on the right to spray, coming from the county council level.

We received anonymously a copy of a statement which had originated from a group called “Forestry & Agriculture for Nova Scotians” (FANS), dated May 4, 1987 and signed by Mike Brown, FANS Co-Chairman Forestry, and Robert Eaton, FANS Co-Chairman Agriculture. This statement concerned “Recent resolutions passed by Victoria and East Hants County Councils.” It is reproduced below:

Please find enclosed copies of two (2) resolutions that have been passed by the Victoria and East Hants County Councils, as well as other related information. The material is self-explanatory.

From our contacts with other Municipal Councils in various parts of the province, it appears as if the anti-spray lobby is mounting an organized campaign to have similar resolutions adopted by many other Councils. Of course, if the Councils do not hear our side of the issue, they may believe the propaganda presented by the anti-pesticide groups. As an initial, quick response to this situation, it is suggested that each of us contact 2-3 members of our respective Associations and ask them to call 1 or 2 local Municipal Counsellors to discuss this issue, and to emphasize the importance of proper pesticide use to our industries. If it is found that an anti-pesticide lobby group plans to make a presentation to any particular council, equal time should be requested for a local group of pesticide users to outline the importance of pesticides, and to clarify any false or misleading information presented by the anti-group.

Please call either one of us if you have any questions. Your prompt action on the above, could save us all a lot of difficulties in the future.

Mike Brown has a degree in forestry and is involved with a company called “Precision Vegetation Management Inc.”, which carries out contract spraying of forest sites. He also has a history in Nova Scotia of opposing environmental groups concerned about forestry and pesticide issues. For example, in 1983 Brown was the Chairman of a “Truth in Forestry” group, closely tied to the forest industry. I know nothing about Robert Eaton.

We received two independent reports of a meeting held in Halifax, the provincial capital, of people from the forest industry and representatives from government agencies, where the discussion was on how to neutralize the concept of informed consent or informed rejection and the people seen as directly linked to its promotion. Information was also sent to us concerning the lobbying efforts of the Forestry Sector of the Nova Scotia Voluntary Planning Board²³, who in late 1987 were contacting councils, for example New Waterford in Cape Breton, to urge them not to pass resolutions relating to spraying.

The Executive of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture held a meeting in September of 1981, a report of which was carried in the farm publication Farm Focus²⁴. The report noted the passing of resolutions by county councils requiring 30 days notice prior to chemical spraying and

that the Executive had notified all county branches of the resolutions and requested that delegates be sent to any council meeting where spraying was being discussed.

In May of 1988, I wrote a letter to many newspapers in Nova Scotia concerning the concept of informed consent or informed rejection. The main newspaper in the province, The Chronicle Herald, published this letter²⁵ and also a response in June, from a person who identified himself as a “forest technician”, strongly disagreeing with the concept. The technician’s letter stated:

Informed consent is just a way of ensuring very few plantations will be protected in our province.²⁶

The pesticide-using industries – whether forestry or agriculture – and their corporate suppliers are not prepared to give up the use of pesticides without a fight. The fight can be quite dirty. Back in October of 1984, an “Educational Seminar” was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, hosted by the Atlantic Vegetation Management Association²⁷.

The theme of the seminar seems to have been how to undermine environmental movements, and three experts in this field were invited to speak²⁸. One of the speakers made the point that “It takes a movement to fight a movement”. Recent articles in the New Catalyst and Wilderness Alberta have discussed how “the forestry companies have begun to set up front organizations to carry their story to the public”²⁹. It is from such an interventionist perspective that we perhaps should look at the opposition to informed consent or informed rejection.

Evaluation And Conclusion

Forest herbicide spraying is increasing each year in Nova Scotia, as the naturally existing forest becomes “legally” turned into a gigantic pulp farm. Yet there is increasing resistance to pulpwood forestry and all that it represents. The fight against pesticide use in the forests is part of this. Yet the basic consciousness that it is we who must adjust to the forest and not the forest to us, is still a very minority view. The concept of informed consent or informed rejection has not stopped forest spraying. Yet this writer believes that this concept can serve a valuable role in helping to unmask the realities of power. For this reason it should be supported. Moreover, it can have application to many urban and rural spraying situations.

The users of pesticides, whether forestry or agricultural interests, the chemical corporations which make and sell these pesticides, and the government “regulatory agencies”, all maintain the fiction that these chemical poisons are “safe”. These groups, particularly government agencies, insist that they are concerned about educating people about pesticide use.

The attempt to bring before county councils the concept of informed consent or informed rejection can bring about a wide-ranging and potentially subversive discussion, namely:

- The pesticide literature made available by governments, chemical companies, and pulp and paper companies, is promotional of pesticide use. This literature is not critical and does not consider alternatives to the use of pesticides. The small amount of critical

literature that is available is not part of any information supplied by the pesticide pushers. For radical environmentalists, the lack of an extensive critical pesticide literature shows the necessity of the green and environmental movements having an independent scientific capacity. This is quite opposed to the mainstream conventional environmental wisdom, of relying on the government promoters of pesticides, to supply educational material and regulate pesticide use.

- Pesticide users and their government “regulators” do not care whether people living close to spray sites agree or not with the spraying. People have no right to refuse. Hence the government is not protecting but oppressing the people.
- For people living in the countryside, the closest level of government – the county councils – have essentially no say in whether or not pesticides should be applied in their counties.
- Therefore, people have to rely on their own mobilization to stop pesticide use, even if their particular county council has adopted an informed consent or informed rejection position as governing the county. So this concept can liberate the personal initiative of people, to take the need for a toxin-free environment into their own hands, and change their local situation.

Of course, the use made of informed consent or informed rejection, for example the draft of a resolution offered to a county council, will reflect the philosophy of the particular environmental group. If the group sees such a resolution in a reductionist manner, as simply being a veto over the use of pesticides and as not including access to critical literature on pesticides and alternatives to pesticide use, the potentiality of the resolution will remain limited. Another problem is in addressing pleas for help to the very government agencies which are approving and encouraging pesticide use.

One aspect of informed consent or informed rejection is that it is essentially a human-centered concept. This means that a biocentric perspective – an equal concern for other life forms and their ecosystems – cannot be said to be part of this concept, as so far developed. However, even biocentric organizers on pesticide issues usually have to start with human-centered concerns – effect on personal health, groundwater contamination, spray drift, etc. – and then try to expand this into the effects of pesticides on forest ecosystems and wildlife. A more inclusive conception of informed consent or informed rejection, where animals, trees and mountains have standing³⁰, needs to be developed.

The support for pesticide use has a relatively small social base, yet it is organized and has access to class power. It is foolish for environmental groups to mainly rely on the capitalist media to carry a message on anything which significantly challenges the existing power relationships. Putting aside personal connections, for Canadian newspapers, the Kent Royal Commission on Newspapers has shown that about eighty percent of newspaper revenue comes from advertising. The environmental movement has a potentially much broader base, yet in Nova Scotia it is fragmented, lacks a critical self-consciousness, and does not coordinate its efforts on a province-wide scale. Even given the very limited nature of the effort to popularize informed consent or

informed rejection, there was a momentum for this concept in late 1986 and 1987, but it was not sustained. While the focus for organizers for stopping forest-spraying remains the communities closest to forest spray sites, a measure like informed consent or informed rejection can help. It can help in that it is one method for creating public opinion that people, to stop forest spraying, must look to themselves. It will mean, ultimately, “illegally” putting their bodies on the line.

Despite the negative view of the enforcement capacity of the county councils in this paper, one should still strive to have such councils adopt an informed consent or informed rejection position on pesticide use, in the same way that peace activists have urged the adoption by municipalities of the designation “nuclear free zone”. Such actions help to delegitimize nuclear weapons, even though it is the federal Canadian government which is legally responsible for defence and security.

Also, Greenpeace has confronted American warships in Vancouver Harbour, using the fact that Vancouver was declared a nuclear free zone in 1983³¹. Similarly, if a county council declares itself as supporting an informed consent or informed rejection position on pesticides then, with a sufficient mass mobilization, such a theoretical stand could be made enforceable against the interests of the pesticide pushers.

Informed consent or informed rejection should be a basic democratic right. The positive response to this concept in Nova Scotia shows that it taps into a deep unease about chemical spraying. It also taps into a growing consciousness about a world-wide problem of toxic contamination and the contribution of a forestry policy – pulpwood forestry – which contributes to this by deliberately introducing chemical poisons (pesticides) into the forest environment. Yet informed consent or informed rejection, given capitalist society’s reliance on chemicals to reduce labour costs, cannot be granted unless a different set of priorities and values are put in place. This concept can help to strip away the authority of the users and promoters of pesticides and in this sense it is a reform which can assist to undermine the existing system. Informed consent or informed rejection is also a green concept, because it is congruent with a green philosophy which believes that environmental, economic, political and social decisions have to be made by those who will suffer the consequences of such decisions. Environmental activists should support informed consent or informed rejection.

Notes

1. Roundup has now been renamed “Vision” for forestry purposes. The term Roundup is still the commercial name of glyphosate in agriculture.
2. This term was introduced in Pulpwood Forestry In Nova Scotia, a presentation by the author on behalf of the Socialist Environmental Protection and Occupational Health Group, to the Nova Scotia Royal Commission On Forestry in Halifax, on April 19, 1983.
3. “Scott forest spray program worries East Hants council”, Mid-Week Extra, Daily News (Truro), September 23, 1986.

4. Ibid.
5. I resigned from the North Shore Environmental Web on February 15, 1989.
6. Two of us in the NSEW had read the book by Carol Van Strum, A Bitter Fog: Herbicides and Human Rights (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1983). Strum has a chapter in her book called “Informed Discretion”, where she argues for “an informed-consent amendment” to the American Bill of Rights, dealing with drugs and pesticides. She advocates that citizen groups should take up a campaign for such a constitutional right. Neither of us had been thinking of Strum when deciding on a response to Scott’s defence of their herbicide-spraying program before East Hants Council.
7. Ross H. Hall, A New Approach To Pest Control In Canada (Ottawa, Canadian Environmental Advisory Council Report No. 10, 1981), p. 2.
8. The active ingredient makes up 41.0% of the Roundup formulation and inert ingredients make up 59.0%. Independent researchers in 1988 identified the inerts in Roundup. The main inert was a surfactant, polyoxyethyleneamine or POEA.
9. In 1989, non-Monsanto researchers identified a contaminant, 1,4-dioxane, a human and animal carcinogen, in the forestry herbicide Vision.
10. The basic article to be read on the problem of inerts in pesticides is by Mary O’Brien, “But What About the Other Half? The Fascinating Tale of (Non-) Inerts”, Journal Of Pesticide Reform 6:2 (Summer 1986), pp. 6-7. O’Brien notes: “People cannot talk about the health or environmental effects of a pesticide unless they are basing their conclusions on testing of the full formulation: active ingredients, intentionally added inert ingredients, and contaminants.”
11. A CAPCO Note (Canadian Association of Pesticide Control Officials), dated January 27, 1988 and put out by Agriculture Canada states, “the use of alachlor represents an unacceptable risk of harm to public health.” The registration of this pesticide was therefore withdrawn. Alachlor, manufactured by Monsanto, was first registered for use in Canada in 1969 and it was widely used as a herbicide on corn and soybean crops.
12. The quote is from then Councillor Clarrie MacKinnon, in the article “Supports environmentalists in approach to forest spray”, the Daily News (Truro), November 19, 1986.
13. The motion was signed, Neville D. Glover, Municipal Clerk, Municipality of East Hants, no date.
14. Pat Lee, “East Hants council objects to spraying”, The Chronicle Herald (Halifax), August 10, 1989. This article notes Scott was spraying 78 sites in Nova Scotia covering about 2,000 hectares, in Hants, Colchester, Cumberland, Halifax, Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough counties.
15. “North Shore Environmental Web – Our Orientation”, August 26, 1986.

16. Tom McCoag, "Group seeks consent before spray applied", The Chronicle Herald (Halifax), June 6, 1987.
17. Information received February, 1990, from the Chairman of the Tusket River Environmental Protection Association, Anti-Spray Committee.
18. Alternatives, 15:1 (December 1987/January 1988), p. 32.
19. The New Catalyst, Number 7 (Spring 1987), p. 17.
20. Caroline Cox, "Nova Scotia Organizes to Obtain the Powers of Informed Consent and Informed Rejection over Pesticide Applications", Journal Of Pesticide Reform, 8:2 (Summer 1988), p. 35.
21. Letter to the editor, by the author, Earth First!, VIII:VIII (September 22, 1988).
22. The Green Web is a small independent research group, serving the needs of the environmental and green movements, founded in November 1988.
23. The Voluntary Planning Board is a group of mainly business people who project the viewpoint of "common ground" on various contentious issues. The public image is of "voluntary" citizen, non-partisan involvement. The basic funding for the operating of the Board is provided by the Nova Scotia government. The composition of the Forestry Sector committee, includes representatives from all the pulp mills, the Nova Scotia Forest Products Association, Group Ventures Association, Christmas Tree Council, federal and provincial forestry agencies, etc., – all the economic exploiting forestry interests.
24. "Federation meets in Truro", Farm Focus (Yarmouth), October 14, 1987.
25. The Chronicle Herald (Halifax), May 26, 1988.
26. Letter to the editor by Ian Stevenson, Forest Technician. The Chronicle Herald (Halifax), June 24, 1988.
27. There is a complete four-page report of this meeting, as an Inter-Office Memorandum of the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources, Forest Extension Service, to its Regional Resource Managers. The report is under the heading "'Only a Movement Can Combat a Movement' Environmental Campaigners Say".
28. The speakers were Maurice Tugwell, Ron Arnold and Dave Dietz. The above Memorandum describes the three as follows: Dr. Tugwell is director of the Centre for Conflict Studies at U.N.B. and an expert on the use of propaganda in so-called 'low level' conflicts. Ron Arnold is a journalist and consultant from Seattle, Washington, who has extensive knowledge of environmental movements in the U.S.A. Dave Dietz is a lawyer/lobbyist whose firm has been employed for the past four years to organize a grass-roots organization called Oregonians for

Food and Shelter which has been successful in reversing some of the ‘anti-pesticide’ momentum in Oregon. (p. 1)

29. See Anne Cameron, “Mind Over Matter: Reverend Moon and Multiple Abuse”, The New Catalyst, Number 16 (Winter 1989/90). Also, H. Purcell, “Organized Anti-Environmental Groups (in Forest Industry)”, Wilderness Alberta, the newsmagazine of the Alberta Wilderness Association, 19:3 (Winter 1989). The quote is from the Purcell article. Ron Arnold is discussed in both articles and he is linked with the Unification Church (the Moonies). Arnold is also listed as Executive Director of the Centre for the Defence of Free Enterprise.

30. For an early discussion, see Christopher D. Stone, Should Trees Have Standing? Towards Legal Rights For Natural Objects (Los Altos, California: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1974).

31. Robert Matas and Deborah Wilson, “Greenpeace plans more protests after mischief charge dismissed”, Globe and Mail, December 30, 1989.

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