

Big Business and Trust

Gabriel Decker

In *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson discusses how government comes together with big business to decide what is best for the country as a whole. Big business is all about profit and the bottom line. The public wants to protect the environment, and have affordable products to purchase that are safe to use around their family. Trust is something the government has to earn by showing they have the people in their best interest and not big business. *Silent Spring* shows how the government has sided with big business and let the people of the country down.



I do not know if the government is just siding with big business corporations, or if they are being manipulated by big business. It is hard to believe the government can be as gullible as their actions suggest. In chapter nine Rachel Carson discusses killing budworms with the use of DDT. The problem was DDT killed stoneflies and mayflies too. The young salmon population needs these bugs to survive. The government spent money trying to replace the insects inadvertently killed, but went ahead and sprayed for the budworm again. Needless to say, all of the insects were killed, along with the young salmon, but the budworm still survived (Carson) 132. With these types of actions how are we supposed to trust our government? The amount of money to replace insects to protect one species had to be expensive. I do not understand why the government would spray a second time, because they knew the chemical would kill the bugs they just replaced. This type of logic just does not make any sense, so there would have to be another explanation for why the government would act this way.



People vote officials into office because they feel they can trust those officials to do what is best for the people. The officials tell us the chemicals used to protect our natural habitat from unwanted critters are safe for the environment. What the government does not tell us is they have not fully tested or know any of the ramifications that result from these chemicals. The bigger problem than that is after they find out how devastating the chemicals are to the environment, they keep using them without any regard for the destruction to the plants and animals the chemicals were not intended to kill. We trusted the government and they used poisons without abandon. Then, when Carson brought the problems the chemicals were causing into public view, these same elected officials blamed her for starting the problems. She spent years studying the problem of insecticide poisonings that the government turned a blind eye

to. The government saw their intentions as good business and their business should not be questioned by anyone. No one is above reproach including our elected officials.

Studies the government has awarded grants for have proven there are cheaper ways to effectively remove unwanted insects. Not only are the ways these people have come up with are less costly, they are more efficient too. So, my question is why do we keep on trying the same ways that are proven deadly and ineffective? The definition of insanity is to keep doing the exact same thing over and over again while expecting different results. Are the people in charge insane? Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* seems to provide plenty of evidence that they might be.



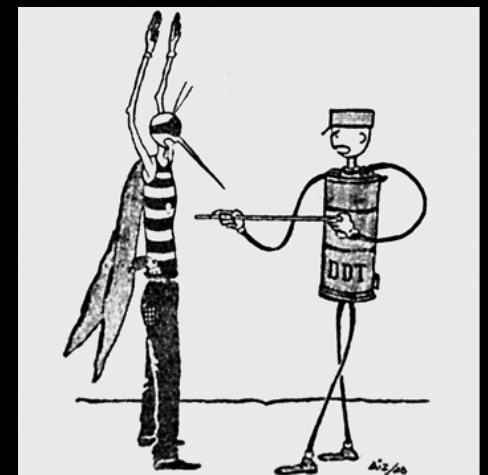
Silent Spring shows a source of double standards, too. Rachel Carson discusses the town of Hinsdale, Illinois. In the town the government sprayed the trees to protect them from a bug that specifically targeted the Elm trees. Over the years of spraying DDT the birds all died off. The birds died because DDT clung to the leaves of the trees and soaked into the soil in the ground. The species of birds that were killed were starlings, chickadees, and robins. The birds built their nests in the trees and ate the toxic worms from the ground. I think Carson sums it up best when she states:



It is hard to explain to the children that the birds have been killed off, when they have learned in school that a Federal law protects the birds from killing or capture The Elms are still dying, and so are the birds. Is anything being done? Can anything be done? Can I do anything?
(Carson) 103.

Since there is a law protecting the birds from being killed, who is to be charged with their deaths? Do you charge the person who was ordered to spray the trees with the fatal insecticide, or do you charge the government for recommending the use of the insecticide? How do you charge the government for breaking their own laws?

World War II was over, and I feel the government had to declare war on something. Instead of fighting people, they decided to fight insects and bugs. The irony is not only did we declare war on specific insects; the Department of Agriculture wanted to eradicate the bugs from existence. Failure was an option and more problems than solutions came about because of our zest for war. One example of the war is with the gypsy moth. The moth lived in four different



states; Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Michigan, and New York, and it was known to inhabit specific trees in these different state's woodland areas. "The Department of Agriculture sprayed salt marshes, towns, and New York City metropolitan area.... They sprayed the quarter-acre lots of suburbia.... and showering insecticide over children at play" (Carson) 156. Was the government really that concerned with a moth, or were they testing their chemicals over populated areas? The gypsy moth did not live or breed in salt marshes or in New York City. So, why was the government spraying these areas where the moth did not live?

When people tried to stop the spraying in their area by means of lawsuits and injunctions, the people were met with hostility or ignored. One case dealing with the gypsy moth went all the way to the Supreme Court. The case was filed by a famous ornithologist to stop the spraying in 1957. The courts ruled the condition was "moot" because the act had already been performed previously (Carson) 158. Not only common people, but specialists who studied our natural society, knew the fragile balance nature resided within, were asking the government to stop spraying their poisons because of the death toll in nature. Birds, cattle, squirrels, and insects were all dying because of the spraying and the public was concerned. Their cries were ignored and shrugged off as insignificant data and erroneous reports of a hysterical society. The government kept spraying.

Farms were sprayed that had dairy cows. The farmers did not want their farms sprayed because they did not want the poison getting into the cows' milk. The government sprayed anyway. The fields the cows grazed in infected the cows with DDT. It is against the law for other countries to import milk into our country that has chemicals such as DDT in it. However, if our own government sprays the fields and the cows have DDT in their systems, there are no rules saying the milk cannot be sold within the state the cows reside in. The federal government sprays and then states the tainted milk is a state problem, not theirs. The Food and Drug Administration's hand are tied in a government loophole that does not allow them to act in the best interests of the people they are to protect.



In other words, our government spends millions of dollars creating different entities to protect the people of the United States. Each of these specialty offices can focus on a few specific problems so they can be easily identified and possibly solved more quickly, because these offices are specialist. Then, the government creates laws and loopholes that stop the protection agencies from actually doing their job. Another way this is done, is by not giving the agency the power to act upon its findings. In other words, the agency can identify the problem, but these in charge have to get someone else to step in to fix it. Our government

wants us to believe they are doing what is best for us, but it seems there is a hidden agenda that was uncovered in *Silent Spring*.

Shortly after spraying for the gypsy moth, the government decided to turn its attention to an insect in the south. Even though DDT killed many bugs in the northern states, it did not eradicate the gypsy moth. So, with no testing at all, the government decided to start spraying in southern states to kill the imported fire ants. These ants were deemed a pest and needed to be eradicated. It sounds like the United States was a testing ground for some new chemical. In order to convince the public the fire ant needed to die,



The Department of Agriculture launched one of the most remarkable publicity campaigns in its history. The fire ant suddenly became the target of a barrage of government releases, motion pictures, and government inspired stories (Carson) 162.

I did not realize our government was in the market of making movies. Ultimately, the government wanted to treat 20 million acres in nine states. This sounds more like a large scale experiment on the people in these nine states, than about killing a little ant. Did the government believe those same birds from the north would not die in the south? The fish that died in the west, would somehow survive in the south? Where was this logic coming from? The government did not know if DDT would kill the fire ant either. They just kept spraying.



The only beneficiary was the pesticide company. The United States Department of Agriculture was in the process of broad-scale pest elimination programs. I would have to question if that was really what was going on here. Why was it so important to our government to spend millions upon millions of dollars in an attempt to kill small insects, some who had already been here over forty years? Did the government find a new toy and want to play at our expense, or was it something more sinister? These upstanding adults in suits were asking the people they were sworn to protect to trust them. They knew what they were doing. Then, when we questioned their logic, they accused people of being hysterical and kept spraying.

The facts were in, and the many small creatures were eradicated in certain areas. These animals were never the intended targets of the government's large scale eradication movement. People protested the spraying; the government ignored their calls. Community

leaders and respected specialists studied the situations after each spraying and gave dismal reports of the carnage left behind. The government increased the dosage and sprayed some more. The people who flew the planes died from handling such toxic products. The government found new people to fly the planes. The government was sued for damages to crops. They paid the fines and started using stronger poisons. People found cheaper, more effective ways of dealing with unwanted insects. The government destroyed their whole crop with one spray.

The people put in office did not seem to have our best interests in mind. Town's people tried to save the birds and find healthy ways to remove unwanted insects. The birds that did survive laid eggs that never hatched or died shortly after hatching. The people in the communities banded together and asked the government to stop spraying their poisons. All of these situations were ignored in each of the different states the government came in to and decided something there needed to die. You have to wonder if the government did not have some other type of plan and it was never about the bugs. The amount of small animals dying was astronomical. No squirrels, no birds singing, no crickets chirping, they were all dead or dying.

Even today, next to other items in our grocery stores, you can buy multiple types of poisons to spread around your house. The shelves are lined with roach sprays for local spraying or foggers and smokers that fill every inch of your house. Another product is a fine powder of Seven Dust to sprinkle in your yard to kill ants and grubs. These chemicals are easily obtainable to name a few. All of these household chemicals tell you not to get the chemicals on your skin, because it can harm you in a multitude of ways, including death. If you tried to ship one of these items to a friend through the US Postal Service you would be considered a terrorist, but these same items arrive by the truck load at your local department store. These bags of poisons do not have poison signs all over them, but pretty grass and flowers growing healthy and blooming bright. That is the irony, healthy plants from poison.

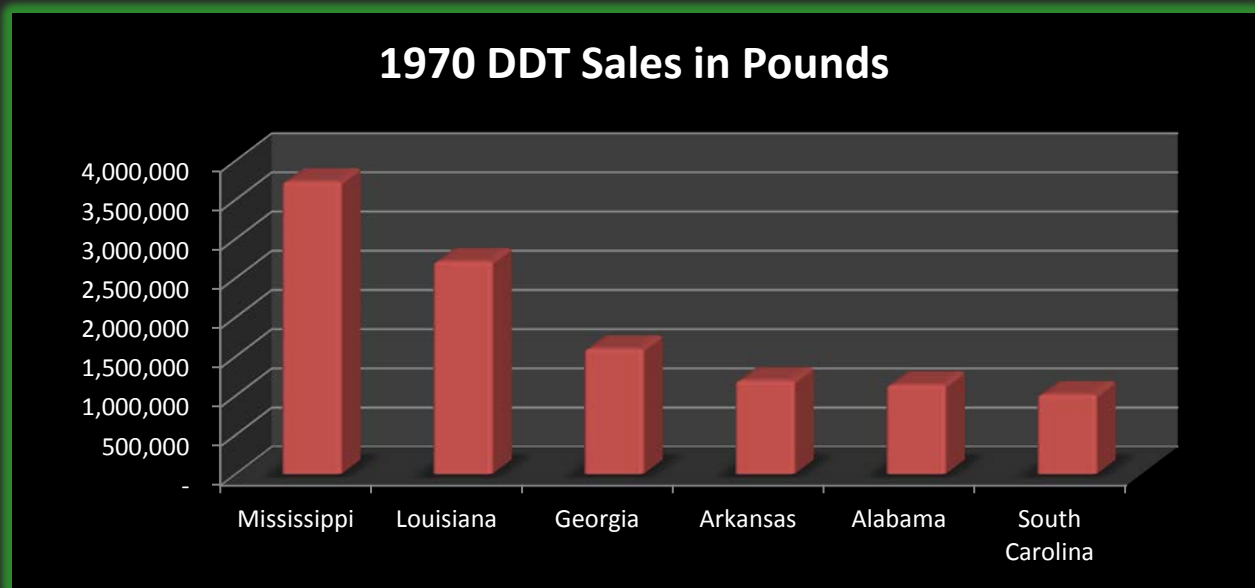
Why is our government so eager to hand us poisons that can kill us; contaminate our food; destroy our drinking water for thousands of miles; kill streams of protected game; and possibly kill us in the process? Do these officials not realize, they live in these same areas too? Do they think they are immune to the destruction left behind? Are they in it for the money, or are they just too stupid to realize the path of



POISON

destruction they are leaving? I do not know which situation would be better, but I believe the government does not have nature or the people it is sworn to protect in their best interest. They just keep spraying.

Silent Spring came out in 1962 and created a huge uprising within the government for its use of DDT and other chemicals as insecticides. Rachel Carson had facts showing how dangerous DDT was to the environment including animals that died during its use. In 1975, the EPA released documents showing how many pounds of DDT they sold to different states. The chart below shows the states in which more than 1 million pounds of DDT was sold.



(U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) 213

In *Rachel Carson and Silent Spring* by Al Gore, he talks about “when excerpts appeared in *The New Yorker*, a chorus of voices immediately accused Carson of being hysterical and an extremist – charges still heard today whenever anyone questions those whose financial well-being depends on maintaining the environmental status quo” (Gore)⁶⁴. The irony is Al Gore was labeled “Ozone Man” (Gore)⁶⁴ during his campaign election in 1992, thirty years later, for his views on climate control and global warming. Our government has not changed over time. Even today, comedians and talk show hosts still make fun of Al Gore for his views on wanting to take care of the planet. Mr. Gore goes on to explain how the government tries to shift the blame of what the chemicals the government was using onto her when “Senator Abraham Ribicoff’s welcome states you are the lady who started all of this” (Gore)⁶⁹. Carson did not start a problem, she just brought the problem into public light for everyone to see. Once this happened, the government had to react, but still tried to blame her for bringing the problem up.

If Rachel Carson could see the problems with the use of poisons to protect nature, then why does the government not see the same problems? If they could not see the problems, then they were idiots. If they did see the problems and did nothing about them, then they were siding with big business and could not be trusted. Plants and animals need us to protect them. We need the government to protect us. Big business needs us to buy their products. Whose side is the government really on, and do they not realize these chemicals will kill them too?

Works Cited

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. Book.

Global Healing Center. *Effects of Pesticides*. 07 November 2012. web page. 07 November 2012.
<www.globalhealingcenter.com/effects-of-pesticides>.

Gore, Al. "Rachel Carson and Silent Spring." *Courage for the Earth* (2007): 63 - 79. Document.

Koehn, Nancy. "From Calm Leadership, Lasting Change." *The New York Times*. 27 October 2012. Article.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *DDT: A Review of Scientific and Economic Aspects of the Decision to Ban Its Use as a Pesticide*. Government Report. Washington: EPA, 1975. Report.

Williams, Terry Tempest. "The Moral Courage of Rachel Carson." *Courage for the Earth* (2007): 129 - 147. Document.