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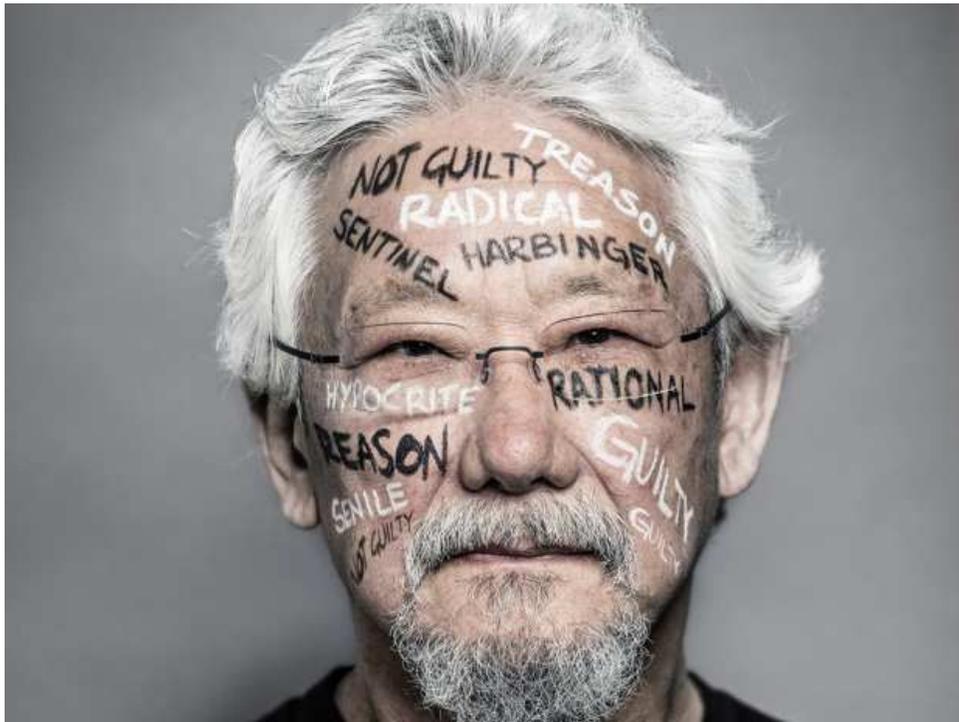
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## Evidence for the prosecution of David Suzuki, part one: Suzuki hails Cuban agriculture as a global model



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***This is the first in an FP COMMENT series, Evidence for the Prosecution of David Suzuki, in the [mock trial](#) of Mr. Suzuki planned for Nov. 6 at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. In this item, we present evidence Mr. Suzuki is guilty of gross economic ignorance. In 2006, CBC Television—home of David Suzuki’s The Nature of Things—carried a two-part special report that portrayed Cuba’s agriculture system as a global model for developed nations. In August of that year, Terence Corcoran wrote this column: “How to Farm In a Police State.”***

Fidel Castro will die some day, but rest assured the CBC is on standby to make sure the murderous old totalitarian is mourned by Canadians as a benevolent dictator, the imperfect but lovable revolutionary who stuck it to the Americans. Last Tuesday night, with news of Castro’s latest illness, The National hauled out Joe Schlesinger for a typical dose of Canadian folklore: Castro may have had his failings, but he has also in many ways been successful. “He put schools in places where there had not been any. He brought medical care to people who before him had none.”

As if nobody else in the world had ever set a school where none existed before. But never mind, because that bit of whitewashing is nothing compared with David Suzuki’s latest, a two-part propaganda homage to the greatness of Cuba’s agricultural economy. The

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In Cuba: The Accidental Revolution, Suzuki portrays Cuba's messed-up food supply system as "the largest program of organic and sustainable agriculture ever undertaken," a system that offers "critical lessons for the developed world." Or at least those are the words Suzuki reads, words written by Ray Burley, a Canadian farm owner who also wrote and directed other Suzuki documentaries on the evils of modern agriculture.

The first hour of The Accidental Revolution regurgitates classic Cuban revolutionary myth (Batista, repression, prostitution). It takes us through Cuba's role as a Soviet satellite until its abrupt end in 1989. The fall of Soviet Communism left Cuba without oil supplies, equipment and resources. Castro's giant collectivized farm system collapsed. No fuel, no food.

The Accidental Revolution then goes on to examine Cuba's replacement food system, a regression to pre-industrial agriculture, including networks of 10,000 garden farms all over the country, including Havana.

Ah, Havana. Here the script is unintentionally hilarious, as when the camera pans a street in Havana, Cuban music overlaid, and Suzuki recites this line: "Havana pulses with the languid energy of survival."

The big equipment breakthrough is the return of oxen to pull ploughs. There's no money for tractors or fuel. One scene lovingly records a man struggling to wedge his plow into the ground as two oxen push forward, a beautiful setting reminiscent of Canadian farming, circa 1870. Suzuki provides commentary: "Oxen don't compact the soil, like heavy machines. As a result, soil fertility is improved. Oxen can go into the fields when it's too wet for tractors."



Since this is a Ray Burley script, those lines reflect the main theme: Modern farming is evil. Each of Cuba's desperate lurches back to 19th-century farm methods is contrasted with current methods in Canada and hailed as vastly superior. Oxen are better than tractors. Cubans have learned to do much more with less and don't use chemicals or fertilizer.

Each small garden farm produces multiple crops — vegetables, fruits, coffee, forage. That avoids the Canadian "practice of monoculture where large tracts of land are planted with a single species that creates the most severe pest problems."

Suzuki says the old Soviet industrial farm system imposed on Cuba by Castro is "the same system used today by northern countries like Canada." That's untrue, to put it mildly. But it allows Suzuki/Burley to bolster their propaganda point.

The use of earthworm composting, based on labour-intensive movement of earth and animal and garden waste, is said to be "extremely efficient." Pests are controlled using bacteria, ladybugs and natural chemical such as extracts of garlic. "Nothing is wasted," Suzuki claims.

That would be true if you didn't consider massive waste of human effort to be a problem. One small Cuban garden farm employed 84 people. In all, more than 350,000 people work on the 10,000 garden farms scattered all over Cuba, eking out a living on incomes of a few dollars a month.

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As Cuba's beautiful countryside drifts by like scenes from another century — mule-drawn carts, dirt roads, workers weeding fields — Suzuki keeps up the Canada bashing. "In contrast to countries like Canada, where farm communities are dying, the [fuel crisis] has created a rural renaissance in Cuba. The Cuban philosophy of ofarming has become the antithesis of industrial agriculture."

Cubans who operate larger rural farms must sell part of their production to the state. The rest they sell directly in city markets. But "in Cuba, there are no middlemen or wholesalers," says Suzuki, digging up some raw Marxism for recycling. Cuban farmers "get most of the money consumers pay for their products. Canadian farmers only get a tiny fraction." But Canadian farmers are thousands of times richer, thanks to middlemen — it's known as the division of labour.

After almost an hour of this hymn to the glories of Cuba's agriculture "revolution," we come to these words, a 45-second footnote in the dying minutes of the show: "Despite the warmth of the Cuban people, Cuba is a police state. There is a visible and invisible police presence, especially in the cities. For a country its size, Cuba has a large army. There is no press freedom. Complaining about government is tolerated, but criticizing the government is not. Local dissidents are often forced into exile. Neighbourhoods have citizens' groups called Committees for the Defense of the Revolution who report suspicious activities to authorities. International human rights groups have long complained about political prisoners in Cuba."

What a bummer. After almost an hour in Cuba as a bucolic ox-powered paradise, Suzuki announces that Cubans live under "tight-fisted control" and have no freedom. Is this a total coincidence, or could it be that the rise in oxen use is a function of a police state run by the old murderous despot? Could it be that people are not doing this because they have a choice?

Maybe Suzuki and Burley will cover these questions in Part Two tomorrow night.

(This Terence Corcoran column appeared in FP Comment on Aug. 6, 2006)

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