

Alien-Nation

A Glimpse of the July 4th Earth First! Gathering

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1987

Introduction

The following essay is from *Alien-Nation*, an interesting first issue of a newsletter produced by several people in Olympia, Washington, who until recently were associated with Earth First! No one wants to have their worst fears confirmed, but in many ways that is exactly the effect this account had on us here in Detroit. Being isolated geographically from both the activities and organizational life of Earth First!, we have been concerned that perhaps there was more truth than we realized to the contentions of some that the only problem with Earth First! lay with the "Tucson group" and that it is "only Dave Foreman and Ed Abbey who have crazy views."

However, the experiences related here suggest that the organizational style and reactionary tendencies may be more widespread than anticipated. One friend who read George Bradford's essay ["How Deep is Deep Ecology?" FE #327, Fall, 1987] prior to publication felt we may be on the verge of "throwing out the baby with the bath water" and said what Earth First! needed was a "pruning and grafting." If there is internal opposition to Abbey's and Foreman's racism and chauvinism (national and male), we think the evidence of it would be pleasing and should be forthcoming if we are to take this contention seriously. Regarding the suggested "tree surgery," we say let it begin, although we suspect that the "tree" is not going to be very cooperative if one is to heed the words quoted in the preceding essay of those "limbs" which would be pruned.

We urge those who are interested to contact Alien-Nation, P.O. Box 10122, Bellingham, WA 98227, for the full text of their free newsletter, which in addition contains articles, "Direct Action vs. Directed Action" and "Eco-Mutualism." They also have available their excellent account of the 1986 Chicago Hay-market Centenary available for \$3.00. Please enclose postage for both publications.

A Glimpse of the July 4th Earth First! Gathering

This newsletter has been created in order to put forth our group's understanding about the organization, Earth First!. This newsletter is not meant to be an expose but rather a point of departure for us from what we consider dangerous tendencies within Earth First!. Our active involvement with the radical ecology movement continues, and we hope that this newsletter will only help us grow and better understand the long process still ahead of us.

After much internal discussion about how to address the issues, we decided to put out a newsletter that is in the form of an open letter to both the anarchist and radical ecology movements. We hope this newsletter will find

its way into many hands and stimulate the types of discussions and analysis that allow us to be critical and yet, at the same time, constructive.

It is our hope that people will respond to our points of view with their own so that we can judge whether or not to continue to put out a newsletter for people that find our opinions, if not shared, at least provocative. If it becomes clear that readers of this have not found it worthy of comment, then this will be the first and last issue of this newsletter.

We do not intend for this' to be a forum to criticize Earth First! as a regular program. The discussions contained within this newsletter are to help us go beyond this point. Our departure from Earth First! (working under the Earth First! banner) is as much a time of growth for us as it is personal disappointment. We intend to be principled in this discussion and open to others about why we choose not to participate in the EF! organization—the many earnest and fine supporters of EF! within and without its ranks deserve no less from us as friends, acquaintances and comrades.

Our group in Olympia, Washington has been working with EF! for about one year. Our participation, beginning with irregular spurts of activity, had increased to a regular activist role. We organized several demonstrations, presented a musical roadshow for several cities, helped to create a slide show about EF!, did tablings and money-raising events, and presented a workshop on Deep Ecology and EF! at the anarchist gathering in Minneapolis this summer.

Our original decision to join EF! was based on a perceived coincidence of philosophical and action-oriented points of view. We are anarchist communalists. That is, we believe in no state, anti-authoritarian relations, and communal living and decision making. Direct action is also an essential part of our belief. Theories and philosophies must be put into action (e.g. sabotage), or it all remains an intellectual armchair game. We also believe in a philosophical position we articulate as eco-mutualism, that is that human society and the natural world are not mutually exclusive. We must learn to live in a harmonious relationship with each other and the natural world without dominance of any sort as part of our lifestyles. When we first read the EF! literature coming out of Tucson, we were attracted to common ideas we shared with EF!. We were excited about the strong statements regarding an anarchistically organized movement, a non-hierarchical structure, and an emphasis on decentralized direct action emanating from local groups, But even with this coincidental merging of ideas, there were troubling tendencies that we perceived within the EF! journal. For this reason, we had much hesitation in actually calling ourselves members of EF!.

EF! claims to be a movement and not an organization which contains many diverse, and, at times, contradictory political philosophies and tactical positions. No one characterization can describe the "rank and file" of the various EF! regional and local groups. However, a dominant point of view and a distinct image has been cultivated and maintained within the organizational journal that comes out of Tucson, Arizona. This image of a "rough and ready, red-necked, alcoholic, kick-ass hombre out to protect the wilderness" reeks of sexism, racism and the worst kind of wild west imagery. While it is an image obviously not shared by many of the people who gravitate to the direct action of EF!, it is still the image that must ultimately be identified as Earth First! since none other is portrayed. It has become the opinion of our group that this image and point of view is real within the upper echelons of EF! and is extremely right wing, if not decidedly fascist in its orientation.

These conclusions are based upon two events which occurred this summer. One was the anarchist gathering in Minneapolis and the other was the EF! July 4th, Grand Canyon, North Rim rendezvous. The anarchist gathering was important for two reasons. First, our initial involvement with EF! occurred because of a workshop that was conducted by an EF! organizer at the 1986 Haymarket anarchist gathering in Chicago. This stimulated us to search out EF! in our local area. The second reason was that we had published and edited a book about the 1986 Haymarket gathering called *Mob Action Against the State*, a collection of 70 people's impressions about the event and wanted to distribute it. While we were in Minneapolis, we also distributed the EF! journal and many copies of Ecodefense by Dave Foreman. We conducted a workshop on monkey-wrenching when an EF! person was unable to attend. We showed our slide show and talked about the ideas of deep ecology.

There was a distinct criticism of EF! that we encountered at the convention from a person from the *Fifth Estate* who presented ample evidence that EF! not only was racist in its approach but fascist in its attitude about censorship and authoritarian control. At the workshop, we argued that, yes, there were these tendencies in EF!, but that

there wasn't an organization in America that didn't have some of these tendencies within it. We felt that EF! was the first anarchistically oriented mass organization that has existed in a long time in America. There seemed to be room for progressive anarchists to work and struggle within the movement. We left the convention feeling positive about the events and determined to raise some of those more disturbing questions at the rendezvous.

The rendezvous presented us with what we felt was a perfect occasion to share with EF! the anarchist literature we had obtained at the gathering and the book we had published. It was an opportunity to talk about anti-authoritarianism and non-hierarchical relationships. We set up a small literature table at the main gathering place where various other literature was available. Our reception was favorable with many, and, in fact, several people were pleased to find other openly anarchistic Earth Firsters.

One of the items we were anxious to present for discussion was a letter Ed Abbey had written to *The Bloomsbury Review* (April-May 1986). We were extremely disturbed to learn of his stance on immigration which we viewed as overtly racist. Abbey approached us while we were tabling, and one of our group openly questioned him about the letter. Our position was that the article ignored imperialism and exploitation of the Third World by developed capitalist and socialist countries. Abbey's response was wrapped in a biological "control of population" theory and an ethnocentric view of northern European culture as being the supreme culture. Many people joined our discussion until it became a lively debate attended by a large crowd of about 30. To our astonishment, though, the argument was halted suddenly by the Rendezvous Committee. They attempted to shut the open discussion down by using several tactics. We were asked who we were, what we had to do with EF!, what our books had to do with EF!, and what anarchism had to do with EF!. Though we were perplexed with these attempts to discredit us, we readily explained our motivations for being at the rendezvous. The Committee then announced that we were not allowed to remain and sell our books because of a new rule which had been created on the spot. If we failed to comply with the decidedly selective enforcement of this rule (the Green Party, Animal Lib, and Rainforest Network were just some of the other political perspectives represented on the literature tables) we could be forcibly removed. When told we had to leave, it became apparent to us that any truly open discussion, including criticism, was not going to be tolerated. We were faced with a problem of suppression. To our dismay, our ideas were perceived as a threat; this was clouded in their sophisticated tactic of condemning the selling of material.

The Committee allegedly took a vote on our fate, and we were told to attend to plead our case. Our group decided not to attend, on principle that we were being arbitrarily harassed about our books. After all, other organizations were distributing their information, we weren't even claiming to be a separate organization, and EF! thought it was fine to sell material as long as 50% was contributed to them.

The next day, we set up the lit table and were immediately approached by Committee members who said that they had decided we could not stay and sell our books. We felt that was purposely obscuring the real issue, censorship, so we readily agreed to distribute our material asking for donation only, as opposed to covering our costs. When it became apparent to them that we would not leave and not wishing to focus more attention on us, they agreed to our terms. We asked them if they understood what anarchism means. They denounced anarchy as equivalent to chaos and left hurriedly.

After this incident, we felt it was important to seek out other people who called themselves anarchists, as well as people who were interested in the ideas of anarchy. A proposal was put forth to organize an affinity meeting in the form of an "anarchist potluck" that evening. We attended with the intent of opening up the discussion on anarchy and how it related to EF!. It was a great surprise to find 50 people gathered at the potluck. A circle was formed where considerably varied views of anarchy were expressed. Many there felt quite strongly about individualism and their desire to express it with freedom and spontaneity. There were only a handful of people who talked about anarchy in terms of a political, as opposed to personal, philosophy.

We were very concerned that a movement which calls itself non-hierarchical seems to have a central power structure. We felt this was being manifested by Tucson's tight control over the journal and money. One of our group mentioned an interest in hearing a dialogue on this and was shouted down with disapproval. We were told in no uncertain terms that if we didn't like the general EF! view, we could start our own paper. Once again, open discussion in the form of criticism, which we feel is vital to the growth of any movement, was short circuited.

Another of our group presented an issue which disturbed us deeply. An article entitled "Population and AIDS" in the *EF! Journal* of May 1, 1987, by Miss Ann Thropy (a man's pseudonym) advocated the AIDS virus as a necessary

solution to control human population. We were outraged at the idea that if the AIDS epidemic didn't exist, radical environmentalists would have to invent it. Our position was that as anarchists within EF!, we need to combat this type of attitude at all levels. No one responded to our viewpoint, and it fell flat. Instead there were people present who attacked our group for criticizing Ed Abbey's stance on immigration. They not only supported his view wholeheartedly, but further elaborated by suggesting that a new small pox virus should be released on the world.

That night a group paraded up and down the campsite under the guise of darkness, cracking a bullwhip and chanting "No more Earth First! wimps," "Down with humans," "I'm a humanoid" and other such macho slogans. There were many of us at the camp that considered this behavior nothing short of KKK type tactics and wanted nothing whatever to do with people who practice this type of cowardly intimidation. We knew that a definite crossroads had been reached with the EF! organization and that our direction needed to be discussed very carefully between ourselves.

This article is the outcome of that discussion, and our conclusions are as follows. It is clear that the anarchy that is (was) advocated by EF! organizers is of the libertarian type. Libertarianism is based on the idea of "limited" government and an extreme right wing form of laissez-faire small capitalist society. To have a "Don't Tread on Me" banner and huge American flag at the "Sage Brush Patriots Rally" does not in any way, shape or form represent the type of anarchy we are advocating. It is obvious that the "rugged individualism" of the American frontier is the ideal of EF! organizers.

We also feel that our philosophy of eco-mutualism which attempts to realize an harmonious relationship between the natural and what we call human society (and this is the only way for survival), is not at all compatible with the direction that deep ecology is taking the EF! organization. Social relationships cannot be ignored in our approach. We advocate nothing less than personal and social revolutionary measures to transform our relationships into non-dominating or non-exploitive ones. The deep ecology of EF! is becoming human hating and finally a racist ideal for advanced capitalist countries to maintain their dominance over the rest of the world and its resources. Believing that nature has intrinsic worth is only part of the equation. Without the social transformation to an egalitarian society, deep ecology (EF! style) can lead to the idea of the "life-boat" theory, that is the advanced capitalist societies fending off the rest of the world's masses in order to maintain their survival. The idea that we have to protect what we have and stop eco-destruction in order to maintain our lifestyles is ultimately fascist.

Our group is going to continue to work actively for the revolutionary changes that we believe are necessary if we are all (human and the natural world) going to survive. We have no doubts whatsoever about this resolve. We will no longer work under the EF! banner. Whether or not we will work with rank and file people from EF! depends on many factors that must be evaluated on a case to case basis. We will remain principled in our criticism and not fail to offer it to anyone who asks why we will not work as EF!. We will always work separately from EF! and always make our position clear that we are not EF!, nor do we agree with the direction the organizational leaders are taking. We hope many within EF! will begin to criticize and come forward in their resistance to the fascist tendencies within EF!. We will support those that do. What is clear to us, though, is that we must recognize that at the upper levels of the organization is a right-wing core that is dangerous and manipulative. Underneath the green is the ugly growth of fascism, and it must be rooted out.

fifth Estate

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