

Delving Deeper into Deep Ecology

Fifth Estate Collective

1988

INTRODUCTION

The letter exchanges and articles on the next few pages represent the second installment of what we see as an ongoing process of investigation and discussion of the ecology perspective and movement, nature and society. The response to FE #327, our special Fall 1987 issue on deep ecology has been overwhelming and gratifying—one of the greatest responses to any single issue since we published a special women's issue sixteen years ago.

There are probably a number of reasons for this, first and foremost the growing recognition universally of ecological crisis. It is also becoming more and more clear that the crisis is rooted in the content of repressive civilization itself; confidence in mega-technic capitalism's Dream of Progress is rapidly eroding, and people are seeking ways to renew human communities and community with the natural world.

This explains the appeal of a deep ecology action-oriented group like Earth First! which eschews compromise in defense of Mother Earth. It also explains the interest in our special issue, which explores some of the ways in which deep ecology is itself compromised by its uncritical acceptance of ideological elements of current anglo-american civilization (patriotism, cultural chauvinism, a sagebrush rebel posture, a refusal to oppose capitalism, and Malthusianism, to name a few).

Most of the response has been in the form of short notes of support and requests for multiple copies with other letters describing personal experiences or views on the matter and reflecting a disquiet about the organizational style and political positions of EF!'s charismatic, macho leaders.

We are only able to print a few letters in this issue, because of the unavoidably long exchange and other material that we felt needed to be printed. More letters, including one from the notorious EF! writer Miss Ann Thropy himself, will appear in the next FE, along with an essay being prepared by George Bradford which we decided to hold back to avoid overkill, "Further Remarks on Deep Ecology." We continue to welcome responses and discussion, though we reserve the right to respond at length ourselves, since many letters raise important issues that need to be directly addressed.

One disappointment has been the refusal of the EF! spokesmen (so far) to respond directly to our essay, other than mentioning it and giving our address in their paper. We did receive a 23-page-long manuscript from deep ecology professor Bill Devall which did not even mention our essay except to tack on its title to his bibliography.

Devall's essay will have to be discussed at another time if at all, but it reflects the other major disappointment we experienced, which was the implicit lumping of our critique of deep ecology in with a full-scale "attack" by a horde of "anarchist-leftist-marxists, led by Murray Bookchin." Thus, in a single motion, Devall writes off social critique and all forms of opposition to capital while willfully ignoring the substantial, long-term differences between the FE and Bookchin's social ecology perspective. In fact, these differences are the very areas of discussion that for the last decade have given the FE its individual character: our critique of technology and technological civilization; our reappraisal of primitive society and its relevance, both as a model for anarchy and as an alternative, visionary epistemology for people today; our critique of scientism, positivism and rationalism; and our affirmation of a sacred

or spiritual dimension in nature. Our differences with Bookchin are substantial, but we favor open dialogue with social ecologists as we have desired it with deep ecologists, so we will explore these areas in the future carefully and (hopefully) fairly.

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Fifth Estate #328, Spring, 1988

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