

Live Wild Or Die

The Other EF!

Mikal Jakubal

Introduction

FE NOTE: When we first published a critique of the deep ecology movement last fall (“How Deep Is Deep Ecology? A Challenge to Radical Environmentalism,” [FE #327, Fall, 1987] available through our book service for \$.75 plus postage), we did so not simply to criticize, but also to connect with people in that movement (outside the handful of “leaders” and stars) who might share or at least be open to a vision that recognizes the interrelated character of the industrial-capitalist (work-commodity) system, mass technics, statism and empire, and the destruction of nature and human societies. The articles printed here are a result of such connections (which is not to imply that the writers agree entirely with us, either). We hope to continue our dialogue and collaboration with EF! people where possible while furthering our discussion of environmental politics.

In fact, a second special issue is almost completed and due out in late January/early February, under the tentative title, “Return of the Son of Deep Ecology Part 2.” A further discussion of deep ecology, wilderness philosophy and environmental ethics, it will move beyond the garish spectacle we’ve all suffered between various and sundry figureheads and hangers-on of deep and social ecology—a show in which the FE point of view has been all but completely blacked out, particularly by the left-lib press that has reported it. But we persevere; an essay on Bookchin’s social ecology will follow.

The demonstrations reported by Mikal Jakubal took place in northern California, near Laytonville. For more information on them, see the December 1988 issue of *The Portland Alliance* (2817 Stark, Portland OR 97214) or contact him directly.

One more shovel-full of dirt and I hand the tool to my partner. My turn to rest. Breathing is difficult in the dust-filled air as four of us alternate in short insane bursts of effort between the pick, shovel and resting while a fourth keeps watch down the road. It’s 5:00 a.m. and last night’s minimal sleep has not prepared us for such exertion. Someone remarks that we couldn’t be paid to do this! After two days of mobile blockades and barricade building we’ve decided to escalate by digging this impassible trench across the logging road at a steep narrow section where repairing it will be difficult. Sooner than I like, the pick is back in my tired arms. Little by little the ditch widens.

By mid-morning the barricades have been rebuilt and we’re back at the road’s bottom with the rest of the blockaders. Today fewer than a dozen of us prevent the loggers from reaching the worksite since the locals and the Cahto Tribe—to whom this land is the traditional dwelling place—have yet to arrive, word comes through the radio that the cops—lots of cops!—are en route. A last tactics session and we resume songs and music, and wait.

Yesterday’s blockade had been an unexpected success though only three of the group actually expected to be arrested, we bluffed the cops into thinking that all 25 of us would have to be carted off. Hours later when enough

police arrived to actually accomplish the task, and after stalling as long as possible, we stood and began moving. But instead of stepping aside as requested, we began a slow march up the middle of the road, creating a mobile blockade.

Singing or chanting the entire time we walked a snail's pace toward the road's end some five miles distant, the sheriff's Blazers always close at our heels. At the first barricade—three 200-pound stones—we continued moving, ignoring police orders to stop. Once past we awaited while, much to our amusement, winches were required to move boulders which we'd placed by hand. When the vehicles moved toward us we resumed the show march to the next barricade—this one an 8-foot high wall of logs, boulders and brush. And so it went until the last barrier, at which point we stepped aside and allowed the vehicles to pass. With no arrests, we'd prevented logging for all but a couple of hours that day.

The cops arrive and today they don't seem amused. As we did yesterday, we begin our uproad march but now we cross the barricades and keep going. We don't wish to be around when the authorities reach the trench we've just dug. After crossing the "tank trap" (as the cops will later call it) and with loggers and police still miles away struggling with winches and chainsaws to remove our debris piles, we exit over the ridge and make our way cross-country toward base camp.

En route, we hear over the scanner that orders have come from the Department of Interior in Washington, D.C. to call back the officials and loggers and put the timber sale on hold—for now anyway. No matter how temporary, any victory won through open struggle is sweet and we whoop it up accordingly. At the river we stop for a swim before returning to camp.

Most of us must leave soon for places distant and so the fight lies now in local hands. However, after accomplishing in three days with direct action what they'd been unable to do in 8 years of working in official channels, it is quite unlikely that these people will give in without another fight.

Earth First! Activities

In the past year Earth First! has received a considerable amount of critical attention in the pages of the Fifth Estate and elsewhere. And while this critique has been of much value in stimulating thought and discussion, it has mostly been written from an outside observer's viewpoint—that is, by those with little direct experience in the actual workings of the "movement." However sincere the motives, the unfortunate result of this has been that nearly all criticisms—and valid ones at that!—have focused on outward appearances generated by certain, not necessarily representative, quarters of EF! Diminished in this manner to its merely "spectacular" dimensions, the larger authentic portion of EF! activities and ideas have been (unintentionally) omitted from the main lines of discussion. It is my intention here to try to fill in the blanks a bit and hopefully provide a clearer picture of what EF! is up to these days and what may lie ahead.

Beginning this piece with an action account seemed the clearest way to convey a sense of what EF! actually does and why it's become so popular. After all, it is the heartfelt desire to act on one's beliefs that deeply infuses EF! and lends the movement a vitality and spirited sense of purpose and humor not often found in activist milieus today. Regardless of other shortcomings of EF!, inability to act and lack of humor are certainly not on the list. Recent activities have included everything from midnight urban bricking raids on corporate offices to larger, more organized actions such as the one described above.

Texas Earth First! recently successfully fully blockaded real estate development activity in order to stop destruction of caves needed as habitat for several rare and endangered species of insects. In the Kalmiopsis Wilderness area of Southern Oregon EF!ers (and others) have waged a protracted fight to prevent logging and roading in this, the world's most biologically diverse coniferous forest. Activities there have included "tree sitting" on platforms 80 feet up to prevent felling, street theater, banner hangings, "mindless vandalism" (window breaking, etc.), demos, survey stake pulling and equipment sabotage (\$60,000 damage done at one site alone. This activity is, of course, done undercover and separate from other protest activity). North Coast EF!ers are continuing their two-year fight to prevent levelling of giant redwoods with blockades and tree-sitting. After stopping last year's planned helicopter slaughter of wolves by the British Columbia government, the Wolf Action Group is gearing up for an-

other confrontation this winter. Washington EF! as well as groups in Montana and San Francisco have been active on a number of issues. Most groups are involved to one degree or another in filing timber sale appeals, public education, and similar “mainstream” environmental protection activities.

The Many Faces of EF!

To describe this summer’s actions, which ranged from creative, dramatic confrontations to boring liberal reformism and from destructive individual nightwork (e.g. machine breaking) to nationally or internationally organized campaigns (e.g. national days of USFS protest, International Rainforest Week) would require many pages. More important, however, than spectacular details is the organizational form adopted by those involved. And here some explanation is in order.

As EF! has evolved over the last 9 years a split personality has emerged whose two faces are best described by their dominant characteristics—one centralized, the other federative. The central includes the EF! Journal and those around it, the EF! Foundation and Mike Roselle/Direct Action Fund. As yet no thorough critique of this part of EF! has been undertaken, though it is sorely needed. The federative aspect is composed of the local groups, scattered individuals and a handful of issue-oriented alliances (e.g. Wolf Action Network, Biodiversity project, etc.). In addition, many new “splinter groups” have arisen, formed by those who, for whatever reason, wish to operate under other than the EF! banner: Stumps Suck! (a joke that became real), Cathedral Forest Action Group, Wilderness and Bombs, Live Wild or Die! Rumors of the Revolutionary Ecoterrorist Pie Brigade led to impatient anticipation of their first strike.

Though there occurs much communication, coordination and cross mixing of activists, each group operates in complete autonomy—both from other groups and from the journal staff, foundation et al. Washington EF!, for example, is composed of half a dozen established or nascent regional/local groups, each with their own meetings, mailing list, issues and activities. No group has any staff, membership or formal hierarchy. (Of course, by simple virtue of their dedication many individuals have acquired specialized knowledge and skills or “influential” status. However considerable attention is paid this topic in order that such traits be used for the general good and not power-mongering or manipulation.)

Quarterly “Rendezvous,” held in the woods on Solstices and Equinoxes, are a sort of “tribal gathering” and provide opportunity for discussion, conspiracy and merriment. Each summer international Round River Rendezvous (RRR) is held where local groups, activists and newcomers have a chance to meet. The RRR resembles a larger version of the regional gatherings and is open to anyone.

As with most other active EF! groups WEF!ers put out their own newsletter. Unedited, it provides a genuine forum for the diverse interests, issues and activities of the various WEF! local groups. To avoid any editorial/ideological circumscription of content, the compiling, layout and distribution of the Newsletter may shift to whichever group wishes to take on the task. Additionally, each group is allotted an inviolable block of space regardless of size considerations for other articles. As with other groups’ newsletters, WEFT has experienced a steady growth in size and scope—as well as distribution (800+), reflecting both the quantitative and qualitative expansion of ideas and actions occurring in the movement.

Criticisms of EF!

“That all sounds great, but what about Foreman, AIDS, closing the borders to Mexicans and all that?!!”

Indeed! My effort here is in no way meant to whitewash these issues. Rather it is an attempt to place them in their proper perspective. For however well-based the accusations made by FE and others, these criticisms concern actions and statements emanating from the previously described “centralized” personality of EF! and do not necessarily reflect the views of EF!—the movement. Certainly there are other EF!ers—many others in fact—who hold similar views as Foreman, Abbey and the rest. Yet it is only the editing of the EF! Journal within increasingly nar-

row ideological parameters and that publication's apparent position as the "voice" of EF! that give those views such unchallenged prominence.

Why EF! activists "allow" this situation to persist is a complex subject best dealt with as part of a thorough and critical evaluation of the whole milieu done by those on the inside. Though that must wait to be done elsewhere, a few remarks are appropriate here. First, it's important to realize that the majority of EF! activists possess little or no radical background, most coming from somewhere in mainstream America in the last several years. In other words, EF! is "politically young" and unfortunately lacks a deeply radical—i.e. revolutionary—perspective. The obvious results of this are excessive devotion to single-issue environmental politics and a less-than-critical attitude toward the ideas and actions of the group. But, remember, everyone can learn and considerable transition is already taking place.

The issues confronting EF!—and all other—activists have become so severe, so urgent that it is now nearly impossible to imagine their solutions outside the context of total transformation (well...I guess some people can "imagine" it). This growing realization, coupled with an increased exposure to radical ideas, has fired a considerable radicalization within EF! on the past 18 months. As well, many more anarchists are to be found in the EF! milieu, furthering the trend. (Of 25 blockaders on Cahto Peak, eight were active anti-authoritarians.) Corresponding to this broader vision, the overall level of militancy has significantly increased. Liberal pacif/passivism and ideological forms of non-violent action are being superseded by more creative spontaneous tactics. "CD" now often means creative disruption, and former trepidation about eco-sabotage is giving way to widespread outright endorsement.

There is also a slowly growing antagonism toward the activities of the centralized EF! as this facet becomes ever more set apart from the real flow of the federation. And this even while the center remains vitally dependent on the groups on a mutual dependency to be sure!

Many people have ceased using the EF! title and sentiments expressed in favor of "leaving EF! and its baggage behind" have become far more widespread than certain quarters of EF! would care to know about. Authoritarian power-politics and manipulation are no longer simply glossed over under the guise of "tolerance for diversity" as several incidents this summer demonstrated. As a result of the desire for greater independence many local group newsletters have expanded their scope and WEF! is in the process of choosing a new name for their Newsletter. The Women's Action Group will soon print their own journal and the first issue of an "alternative" to the EF! Journal will soon be out. Titled *Live Wild or Die!*, it will provide a forum for activists feeling a bit alienated from the workings of the Journal

Much change for the better is happening. Soon, EF! will likely be unrecognizable from what it was just a few years ago, if it isn't already so. Movements, as the name implies, move—and those who fail to keep up must inevitably be left behind.

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Copies of the Washington Earth First! *Newsletter* are available for \$1 through the FE bookstore.

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