

# About this issue

Fifth Estate Collective

1989

The following essay by George Bradford continues the discussion of environmental perspectives begun in these pages in our Fall 1987 edition. Our previous special issue, published at that time, "How Deep Is Deep Ecology? A Challenge to Radical Environmentalism" (also by Bradford), appeared as a major statement coming out of the theoretical work the *Fifth Estate* has been undertaking since 1979 in examining the character of technology, industrial capitalism and the worsening ecological crisis.

Within this context, we have sought a revolutionary approach in critically analyzing the roots of domination and alienation in the modern world. This has led us to a profound appreciation of the social and cultural forms of the primal societies which preceded the relatively short epoch of human existence we call "civilization." For us, this inquiry into the primitive affirms those pre-technological cultures, not only because of their mythic ties to the cycles of the earth, but also because of their communal solidarity and stateless freedom. We do not see these early anarchic social patterns so much as a distinct goal to replicate, but rather as a guide for creating a vision in which social peace and ecological balance are re-established.

Deep ecology was the focus of our 1987 essay since it, more than any other environmental philosophy, claimed to go beyond the traditional moderate approaches of mainstream ecology and conservation organizations by advocating a "new paradigm" as the basis for arresting the destruction of the natural world and for defending wilderness. Deep ecology appears to challenge the reigning ethos of industrial development, technology, science and mass society, professing to ask "deeper questions" and posing a "biocentric" view in which all species are seen as having equal value.

It specifically rejects a human-centered or "anthropocentric" outlook, maintaining that such a stance posits the importance of human needs over those of other species. This "new philosophy of nature" has been put into practice most prominently by the Earth First! movement through confrontational tactics and eco-sabotage (monkey-wrenching) which proclaims, in the words of their slogan, "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth!"

While sharing a similar sense of desperation at the increasing devastation of species and the remaining wilderness, Bradford took issue, in his first essay on deep ecology, with the conceptual framework of this new philosophy. He demonstrated how deep ecology often correctly identifies the crisis and even many of its causes, but fails to understand it adequately within the political and economic context of industrial capitalism. This failure has frequently led some adherents to espouse an empty misanthropy in which all "humans" are blamed for the ecological problems we face, making no distinction for class, race or gender.

The most blatant (and now notorious) of these distorted conclusions came in the form of right-wing political statements from some Earth First! spokespeople, in which they cheered AIDS, adhered to a reactionary Malthusian theory of over-population, advocated letting Ethiopians starve and called for the closing of U.S. borders to Central American refugees.

Succeeding issues of the *Fifth Estate* continued the debate as defenders of deep ecology and Earth First! exchanged ideas and criticisms with *Fifth Estate* writers (See FE Spring & Summer 1988. Winter 1989). The resulting contact with deep ecology academics and Earth First! field activists has been both maddening and gratifying for

us and probably for them as well, but all in all we were impressed with the accuracy of Earth First!'s much touted "diversity of opinion." Indeed, we've established rewarding contacts with several Earth First! activists and we're aware of a growing anarchist tendency within this movement, which only makes sense given their hatred for this society.

G. Bradford's current essay started as a further exposition of the themes begun in "How Deep Is Deep Ecology?" but eventually took shape as a wide-ranging response to a critical letter sent by a deep ecology stalwart and frequent contributor to the EF! Journal who writes under the sobriquet, Miss Ann Thropy. Bradford focused his remarks on this letter not only because it is of the thoughtful and challenging sort we hoped his essay would engender, but also because it contains so many of the theoretical constructs which typify deep ecology thought.

The disproportionate length of the reply confirms the old adage that it may take a minute to tie a knot, but often an hour to loosen it. However, the essay leaves the plane of simple refutation to independently strengthen the radical environmental perspectives we at the Fifth Estate have been building over the years. This essay represents the synthesis of an immense body of work emerging from various fields of political, environmental, philosophical and feminist thought on the issues of population, social disintegration and the ecological crisis. It is a discussion of philosophical perspectives developed within the studies of environmental ethics wherein Bradford grapples with these ideas and, from a radical and primitivist perspective, considers the relationship of humankind to the natural world.

Of course, not all that has transpired in the exchange on the questions of ecology and civilization has been as fruitful as we had hoped. There is always a tendency (one we may share ourselves) to ideologize one's theoretical territory and rigidly defend it against all challenges in a manner that can mirror the patriarchal power modes of the institutions we all oppose, hence, creating a political racket rather than a basis for a mutual interchange of ideas.

It should be our task and desire to explode all of the political and ecological rackets, to push beyond the established parameters, divisions and boundaries of what constitutes contemporary approaches to ecology, realizing that the radical environmental movement is in its infancy and that the challenges to the megamachine's relentless destruction of the planet are just beginning. The stakes are too high to allow an exchange among those willing to examine the crisis at its roots to degenerate into a battle for ideological supremacy divorced from activity which concretely confronts ecological degradation.

Ultimately, no matter what style of language or discourse is involved, this is neither an "academic" nor "political" debate, but rather a discussion among people who are passionately involved in opposing the social and political forces which, in Fredy Perlman's words, are "world-eaters." This concentration on an ecological perspective is in no way a digression from our long held desire for revolutionary anarchy to prevail over this modern, industrial, hierarchical, repressive and mediated society. On the contrary, it is an extension and broadening of that desire.

Anarchy without an environmental grounding, without a connection to both the physical wilderness and to a spiritual sense of wilderness, feeds into an anarcho-syndicalism which still chains people to the machinery that destroys the planet and the spirit. Environmentalism without anarchy leaves the world as it is, with its vast social inequities intact and an ecologism for the affluent.

At a time when U.S. President George Bush designates himself an "environmentalist" and Ann Landers questions "progress" in her advice to the lovelorn column; when increasingly, ecological "issues" become strategically separated from their root causes in order to protect and extend the system which produces the crisis and engenders more of the same, we should do nothing less than declare ourselves revolutionaries who will only find a resolution to our fears and a satisfaction of our desires outside of the confines of this society. This essay by George Bradford sets the context for such a vision and for a social and ecological struggle which must of necessity flow from that conception.

We ask you to join the debate, to think about what is being discussed, to add your voice in your community, but finally to act, for it is the inability to act on our desires which confronts us in a world in which anything can be said, but nothing done. Let's change that.

—E.B. Maple and Lynne Clive

This issue, like the one containing the original deep ecology essay, is a joint project of our Detroit staff and our friends in San Francisco, Freddie Baer and Danny G. Freddie's unflagging efforts in editing, typesetting, de-

sign, graphics and layout require special note, but as usual, none of this could have appeared without the efforts of numerous other people involved in the different aspects of production. Our gratitude is extended to them as well.

The special issue, "How Deep Is Deep Ecology?" (Fall 1987), is now out-of-print, but is currently being republished as a booklet by Times Change Press, P.O. Box 5031, Evanston IL 60204, whose titles relate to social, political and personal issues. We will announce in our next issue its price, etc., or write directly to Times Change.

If multiple copies of this issue are desired, please send \$1 each for 1–4 copies and \$.75 for five and over, postpaid.

#### CORRECTION

In the article "Live Wild or Die! The Other Earth First!" in our last issue (Winter 1988–1989), we listed the address of Mikal Jakubal incorrectly. The correct address is P.O. Box 2962, Bellingham WA 98227.

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