

Bombing won't stop Redwood Summer

Luba

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In a doubly bizarre set of circumstances, two California environmentalists experienced an assassination attempt followed by their arrest for “possessing” the device that almost killed them.

Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney, members of Earth First!, were victims of a car bombing Thursday, May 24, in Oakland, California. They were en route to Santa Cruz to continue preparations for the “Mississippi Summer in the Redwoods,” a planned season of civil disobedience aimed at disrupting logging of old growth forests.

Long-time activists, the pair of Earth First! folksingers had been among the most committed and visible promoters of the summer action intended to be the environmental equivalent of the 1964 voter registration campaign in Mississippi. They worked to focus attention on the threatened thousand-year-old trees on the North Pacific coast. Only five percent or less of original growth forests remain in the lower 48 states of the U.S.

Darryl Cherney co-founded the Garberville chapter of Earth First! in 1986. He was also known for his performances and song writing.

Judi Bari, whose background was union organizing, joined Earth First! two years ago. She had worked as a carpenter, but most recently had organized an Industrial Workers of the World chapter at Georgia Pacific.

Bari was the driving force behind an alliance between Earth First! and local timber workers which created storms of controversy and denunciation in both camps. Many environmentalists were shocked by Bari's and others' repudiation of a well-known EF! tactic, tree spiking.

Tree spiking was originally conceived as a way to prevent cutting in spiked groves. More important than the actual spiking was the notifying of loggers (via letters, posted signs, etc.) that certain areas were spiked and unsafe for logging. It was not anticipated that logging companies would knowingly cut in spiked groves.

When the logging companies began sending their workers to cut down spiked trees, Bari questioned the utility of this tactic. A press release renouncing tree spiking, issued in April by the Northern California Earth First!, reflected Bari's view that “the real conflict is not between us and the timber workers, it is between the timber corporations and our entire community.” Thus, a small but remarkable alliance between radical environmentalists and loggers was catalyzed by Bari.



(left) Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney, victims of an assassin's bomb, playing earlier at a Redwood Summer benefit. (right) The car they were driving when the bomb exploded.

The May 24th Bombing

Bari and Cherney were driving by the Oakland High School on Park Street when their car exploded.

Later, the Oakland Police bomb squad said it was “a crude device.” It was made of two-inch pipe, using an ordinary safety pin to prevent accidental explosion and an alarm clock timer. They said it was an “anti-personnel” device, meaning it was strong enough to destroy flesh and bone, but not large buildings.

Recalling the incident, Cherney said his first thought was that another car had struck them. “But something didn’t make sense. I had my seat belt on and had blood coming down from my head. I heard voices from outside, ‘It’s a bomb.’ Then I realized someone tried to kill us.”

It had been placed on the floor behind the driver’s seat where Judi Bari sat. It fractured her pelvis, damaged her abdominal organs, and destroyed the soft tissues in between. She also sustained facial lacerations. She required emergency surgery and several days of intensive care.

Bari was barely conscious the night of the blast when she was placed under house arrest at Highland hospital.

Cherney, who was sitting in the passenger seat, suffered a head laceration and an abrasion to the cornea of one eye as well as perforated ear drums and hearing loss. That night, after release from the hospital, he was taken to Oakland city jail where he was interrogated by police and the FBI. He was held over 24 hours without access to legal counsel.

Both Bari and Cherney were charged with possession and transportation of explosives.

Cherney and Bari had attended the Bay area meeting with members of the Seeds of Peace collective, another group actively preparing for Redwood Summer. Without a search warrant, the police cordoned off two of their residences and entered. Eight collective members were handcuffed, searched and taken into custody.

After their release, the Seeds found their home ransacked. One member stated, “The contents of entire rooms were piled up in the middle of the floor. Let’s put it this way: the earthquake last year did not do as much damage as the bomb squad.” Files and notebooks were missing. When police left, every door in the house was left open. Cherney’s van, parked by the Seed’s residences, was also searched. Police took two boxes and exploded them in the street. Hundreds of feet of cassette recording tape were left hanging down nearby utility poles.

Later, on the north coast of California, friends prevented authorities from searching Bari’s and Cherney’s homes without warrants. Explosives were not found in any of the searches. The most suspicious evidence obtained consisted of several rolls of duct tape and a sack of finishing nails.

Policeman Mike Sims kept the media informed on their “investigation”: “The evidence is strong that they were transporting the device. We’re assuming the bomb was placed in the car by the occupants” (emphasis added).

Sims was on somewhat firmer ground when he later told reporters “We’re making the assumption that if the bomb was built, it was meant to be used.”

In essence, there was no investigation. As far as the police were concerned, the victims were “obviously” the guilty parties. The police found themselves with the opportunity to search the Seeds of Peace collective without a warrant and to arrest some activists.

If Bari and Cherney’s guilt was “obvious” to the police, their innocence seemed equally obvious to themselves and scores of people who knew them. Cherney stated, “I’m innocent. I’m scared to death of explosives. I’ve never even lit a firecracker in my life.” Bari has likewise consistently denied any knowledge of the bomb and all involvement with violent activities.

Bari’s attorney, Susan Jordon said, “This is clearly attempted murder by someone who did not want them to do nonviolent protest in the Redwoods this summer. This charge is insane. There’s a person out there who attempted murder. Why aren’t they looking for that person?”

Indeed, there appears to be no one personally acquainted with the pair who finds any credibility in the police assertion that the bomb belonged to Bari and Cherney. During the entire four days and nights that Cherney was held in jail, a vigil of supporters waited outside on the street. Immediately after the bombing, many groups declared their support for Bari, Cherney and Redwood Summer.

Another Assassination Attempt

The lack of evidence linking the couple to the bomb, and the testimonials by acquaintances were not enough to cause the police and FBI investigators to question the source of the bomb. Nor were the many and varied death threats that Bari and Cherney had received in the last year.

Things had started getting rough last summer when a logging truck rammed Bari's car. Inside the car were Bari, her two children and another activist.

The police characterized it as "a typical traffic accident." Bari described how her car was hit "with no warning whatsoever: there was no squeal of the brakes, nothing. We were hit full force by a logging truck." A photo taken the day before shows the same truck unable to pass an EF! blockade in which Bari had participated.

On April 10, Bari received a letter stating, "Get out and go back where you came from. We know everything. YOU WON'T GET A SECOND WARNING." Two weeks later a photo of Bari with a gun site's cross hairs drawn on her head was pinned to the door of the Environmental Center at Ukiah. When Bari reported the incidents to the Mendocino County sheriff's office, she was told, "We don't have the manpower to investigate death threats like this. If you turn up dead, we'll investigate." The sheriff remains true to his word; no investigation has been started.

It seems that we must either consider a conspiracy theory, or be willing to believe that the authorities are very, very stupid. Both explanations have some merit. Adding even further to the confusion is a letter received on May 30 by the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*. The three-page single-spaced typed document details the structure of the bomb. It opened by saying, "I built with these hands the bomb that I placed in the car of Judi Bari...Now all who would come to the forest and worship the trees like gilded idols have been Warned. They see the fate that awaits them." The letter's author wanted to "strike down" Bari after encountering her at an Operation Rescue anti-abortion counter-picket.

Many local activists believe the letter to be another fraud. The FBI called it "interesting evidence."

We may very well never know who tried to kill Cherney and Bari.

Judi Bari Still Hospitalized

Judi Bari remains under guard at Highland Hospital. If her pelvis heals well, she will require around six weeks of traction. She is still heavily medicated because of constant severe pain. She has no feeling in part of her leg and it is unknown if this will be permanent. She will have to undergo many more months of hospitalization and rehabilitation before it will be known if she will ever walk again.

In an interview on June 4th from her hospital bed, Bari appealed, "I hope people don't lose sight of what this is really about. It isn't about Judi Bari. It's about the state of the forests and the communities that are dependent on them."

Support Redwood Summer

Redwood Summer actions are starting now to defend the last of the old growth forests in the Northwest. Major actions are scheduled for June 20 at the export dock of the Louisiana Georgia lumber company near Eureka, Calif.; July 21 at the Georgia Pacific lumber company in Ft. Bragg; July 30 in the Sequoia National Forest in Southern California; and a concert—"Redwoodstock"—on a date to be announced.

Smaller actions will occur throughout the summer. Those interested in participating may write for an information packet at: SF EF!, POB 411233, San Francisco CA 94141 or call (415) 824-3841.

Donations to support the summer activities and for medical and legal expenses are desperately needed. Please send them to Redwood Summer, Sonoma County EF!, c/o Pam Davis, POB 7544, Santa Rosa CA 95407. Make checks payable to Redwood Summer.

Related

“Redwood Summer: Anatomy of an Action,” FE #335, Winter, 1990–9

“FBI Still Stalling on EF! Bombing Case,” FE #352, Winter, 1999

Judi Bari website: <http://www.judibari.org/>

Fifth Estate's I.W.W. Resource Page.

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