

# Split in Earth First!

Kelpie Wilson

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Redwood Summer seems to have sent some Earth First!ers over the edge. Many of the old-line EF! activists stayed away from the summer actions, feeling that “outsiders” had invaded their movement and diluted EF!’s bio-centric vision. Two EF! founders, Dave Foreman and Howie Wolkie, resigned in August (if one can resign from a “non-organization”) and the entire paid staff of the *Earth First! Journal*, which is closely associated with Foreman, announced in their current issue that they were resigning due to constant criticism of their editorial policies.

A number of other prominent and long-term EF!ers, including the captain of the Sea Shepard, Paul Watson, also used the current Journal to announce their resignations, often in vitriolic terms, giving Redwood Summer’s influx of “hippies and leftists” unconcerned with the centrality of Wilderness issues as the reason they feel alienated from the organization they worked with for a decade.

The splits that are now at the forefront have been in the works for a long time. While the split is truly a multiple fracture, the major conflict can be boiled down to a difference of opinion over whether radical environmentalism can be effective without supporting social justice issues. The camps line up vaguely with Foreman, the Journal staff and “old timers” in one, and Mike Roselle, another EF! founder, Judi Bari, hippies, anarchists and feminists (Foreman’s term is “dipshits”) in another.

After Foreman publicly resigned from EF!, he moaned that today’s activists are “more interested in the wild within than the wilderness without.” This statement was picked up by Pacific Lumber who used it in a press statement to try and discredit Redwood Summer activists as crazy hippies.

Another source of the internal rancor stems from the decision of the summer organizers to publicly renounce tree-spiking—the centerpiece eco-sabotage tactic for which the movement was renowned. The debate centered around whether or not this was capitulating to the “humanist” perspective of the summer’s organizing.

George Bradford, in his “How Deep is Deep Ecology” [FE #327, Fall, 1987], declared that the problem with deep ecology was its refusal to place the environmental crisis in its proper political context. Few of even the Bari/Roselle breed of EF!ers would agree with such an anthropocentric assessment. Although I lean toward the ecological context, I recognize that human problems have a critical bearing on whether or not the assault on the planet ceases. Sexism, racism, classism and industrialism must disappear before the planet is safe, and radical environmentalism means to me ending all forms of domination.

Where does EF! go from here? A new committee is being organized to take over the *EF! Journal* and hopefully, most of EF! will function as it always has, as a loose collection of bioregionally-based, locally autonomous groups.

*FE Note:* A full airing of the issues involved in the split, as well as statements from most of the personalities involved are contained in the Aug. 1, 1990 *EF! Journal*. Send \$3 to POB 7, Canton NY 13617.

# fifth Estate

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