

It Used to be the Red Scare...

Now, it's the Green Scare

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"We should war with relentless efficiency not only against anarchists, but against all active and passive sympathizers with anarchists."

—President Theodore Roosevelt, annual address to Congress, December 3, 1901

"It is time to take a look at the culture and climate of support for criminally-based activism like ELF and ALF and do something about it. Just like al-Qaeda or any other terrorist organization, ELF and ALF cannot accomplish their goals without money, membership and the media."

—Senator James Inhofe, US Senate Environment & Public Works Committee, May 18, 2005

William Preston's *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933* was written forty years ago but is still quite relevant. Using a wide collection of governmental archival records and interviews, Preston pieces together a picture of how and why the Industrial Workers of the World was crushed by the US government. This campaign against the IWW (and dissent in general) provides an important historical context for some of the current attacks on the radical environmentalist movement in the US.

Preston points to things like the Haymarket incident (1886), Alexander Berkman's attack on a Carnegie Steel boss during the Homestead strike (1892), the assassination of President William McKinley (1901), and the creation of the National Guard as an explicitly pro-business paramilitary arm deployed against strikers (1903).

He ties those events to the spawning of Federal legislation like the Immigration Acts of 1903 and 1920, the various Deportation Laws passed between 1917 and 1920, the Espionage Act of 1917, and the Sedition Act of 1918. These are further discussed in relation to the new intelligence and police powers extended to the Bureau of Immigration, the Bureau of Naturalization, the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, the US Post Office, and the War Department for domestic operations. What emerges is a frightening portrait of law-and-order authoritarianism that is the direct ancestor of state power in age of the USA-PATRIOT Act.

Discussions about the smashing of the IWW usually center around US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's nationwide "Red Scare" dragnet of 1919 and 1920. The Palmer raids swept up thousands of immigrants and working-class dissidents who were arrested, usually held without a fair hearing, and either imprisoned or deported.

But Preston claims that the Red Scare of the late 1910s was just the tip of a bigger iceberg of brutal anti-immigrant, anti-democratic, and pro-capitalist sentiments that go back to the harsh economic depression of the 1870s. Preston's argument is that the persecution of the Wobblies is best understood in connection with the rise of violent right-wing political forces in the US who were anxious to define who and what was "un-American."

What happened to the Wobblies in the World War One era—the mass arrests, the kangaroo court cases, desert internment camps, the use of Federal troops against IWW organizers, deportations—was not the product of the postwar political environment in the US after 1918, but rather a set of circumstances that emerged after fifty years

of racism, anti-immigrant bigotry, xenophobia, and white nationalism. This poisonous mix was used by politicians to secure power and by bosses to break up workforce solidarity.

These are the same “enemy within” fears that greatly energized the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1900s, and it continues to work today by motivating the Minuteman vigilantes on the US/Mexico border and raising the status of rabidly Islamophobic pundits to that of celebrity public intellectuals.

The IWW’s most effective strategy to force concessions from capitalist exploiters was defiance through direct action, such as militant strikes and workplace sabotage. To counter these actions, the bosses claimed that the IWW threatened the sacred right to private property, and since so many of the Wobblies were immigrant laborers, it wasn’t difficult for fear-mongering pro-capitalists to portray Wobbly anti-property attitudes as “un-American” and alien.

Protecting human rights at the expense of property rights was represented as a seditious threat to the US by right-wing reactionaries, so it was justified to deport Wobblies to foreign territories, even if that meant stripping them of their citizenship or de-naturalizing them without due process. Similarly, damaging attacks by the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), and Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) against private and corporate property have resulted in the FBI and the US Congress regarding these groups as “the nation’s top domestic terrorism threat”—in other words, the new enemies within.

This goes a long way in explaining why a six-year plan for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) does not list right-wing domestic terrorism as a threat; instead it intends to focus primarily on foreign organizations affiliated with radical Islamist groups following the lead of al-Qaeda and domestic environmentalist organizations. (Incidentally, the biggest raid successfully accomplished by the DHS in the last six months was a case involving DVD bootlegging—copyrighted property is covered as a national security concern by the USA-PATRIOT Act.) In late May, the FBI’s deputy assistant director for counter-terrorism told the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works that—despite never having taken a human life in their actions of the last thirty years in twenty countries—these “eco-extremists” pose a greater threat to public safety and domestic tranquility than the murderous psychopaths involved with the KKK, armed white Christian separatist militias, and women’s health-clinic bombers.

“Investigating and preventing animal advocacy extremism and eco-terrorism is one of the FBI’s highest domestic terrorism priorities,” the deputy assistant director intoned soberly. “We are committed to working with our partners to detect, disrupt, and dismantle these movements, and to bring to justice those who commit crime in the name of animal or environmental rights.” Referring to a mass murder terrorist plot by white supremacists in east Texas that was exposed in 2003, philosopher Steven Best, an ALF press officer who has been subpoenaed to appear before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to testify about eco-terrorism, made this point “Given the priorities of the corporate-state complex, for which property is sacred and life is profane, it is a greater terrorist offense to possess bolt cutters than to stockpile weapons of mass destruction such as anthrax, sodium cyanide bombs, machine guns, several hundred thousand rounds of ammunition, and remote-control explosive devices.”

According to the FBI, there are nearly 200 open cases currently under investigation involving disruptions of business-as-usual at pharmaceutical and biotechnology corporations, SUV dealerships, university medical research labs, fur farms, dog-food factories, logging sites, and upscale housing developments.

And it is precisely because of their effectiveness in causing financial loss through property destruction, that these environmental and animal rights organizations are presently the „ target of police scrutiny and new, harsher state and Federal laws, just as the Wobblies were for their acts of work stoppage and point-of-production sabotage. As with the war on the Wobblies 80 years ago, State and Federal legislators today are working closely with Big Business to craft new terminology and to create webs of new laws to ensnare environmental and animal advocates. Using these police powers, the authorities can also go after those who donate money to environmental “front” organizations (according to some in Congress, Greenpeace and the Humane Society are really just fronts for the ELF and ALF), website service providers, and bookstores that sell their publications.

One coalition of lawmakers has been promoting laws to create the concept of “eco-terrorism” for the last two years in California, Texas, Arizona, Pennsylvania, New York, Missouri, and Ohio. One recent example of this is the case of Peter Young, whose trial begins in September—Young was charged with “animal enterprise terrorism,” a

crime created by lawmakers in 1992. Young now faces up to 82 years in a federal prison for trespassing and vandalizing fur farms in Wisconsin. Six SHAC activists in New Jersey have been charged with “animal enterprise terrorism” for their campaign against the contract animal testing laboratory Huntingdon Life Sciences—each face up to 24 years in jail.

Under this rubric of eco-terrorism, local law enforcement can turn to help from FBI, the US Secret Service, US Marshals Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the US Department of Immigration and Naturalization, and the US Coast Guard to persecute persons responsible for freeing lab mice, breaking the shop windows of a fur-coat store, or vandalizing Cadillac Escalades and Ford Excursions in a car dealer’s sales lot.

If what has happened this summer is any indication, then the means for the dogged pursuit of “un-American” environmental militants who attack property will likely be extended to other social change groups in the US such as Food Not Bombs (after all, what could be a more egregious affront to the cult of private property than giving free vegetarian meals to the poor and hungry?) and Anarchist Black Cross prisoners’ rights groups.

According to a State Trooper investigator with whom I spoke in early June, the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force is now going after a number of FNB and ABC cells, and it may prosecute under the USA-PATRIOT Act and the statutes of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act of 1970, a set of anti-organized crime laws that gives a great deal of power to police with some very open-ended definitions of “fraud” and “extortion.”

As Preston argues in *Aliens and Dissenters*, the Immigration, Deportation, Espionage and Sedition Acts of eighty years ago swept up large numbers of people and ruined their lives in order to protect the sanctity of private property from radicals like the Wobblies. Corporations and the Federal government were the beneficiaries of these mass arrests and the accompanying atmosphere of repression. These newfangled “eco-terrorism” laws, the USA-PATRIOT Act, and its subsequent legislative offspring will serve the same masters for the same purposes.

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