

Review

Dave Foreman's *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*

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Last year when Northern California Earth First! was preparing to renounce tree-spiking, I called Dave Foreman to tell him what we were up to. Dave responded by writing me a letter stating emphatically and passionately why he disagreed with me. Then he said that, despite our differences, he respected my work and thought I was "a hero who will be remembered 100 years from now."

I don't know what happened to Dave Foreman in between that letter and the publication of his new book, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*. But the tolerance—indeed celebration—of diversity that has been the vitality of Earth First! since its inception seems to have gone too far for him. The "Rednecks for Wilderness" have been taken over by (shudder) hippies, and now Dave Foreman wants out.

There's no taking away from Foreman what he has contributed to radical environmentalism. Ten years ago, he helped change the face of the movement by introducing a revolutionary concept—biocentrism, or deep ecology. The idea that humans are not the crown of creation, but rather just another of

nature's many species. And that all species have a right to exist for their own sake, regardless of their usefulness to humans. And that wilderness must be preserved for the sake of biological diversity and evolution, not just to provide scenery for backpackers.

It was through Dave's work that I and many others embraced these concepts. They are well explained in *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*, but disappointingly, many of the chapters in this book are reprints of earlier articles. Still it is worthwhile to restate the basis of our activism.

But there is an inherent contradiction in Dave Foreman. His ideas are radical, even revolutionary, but he is politically and culturally conservative. I mean, the guy worked for Barry Goldwater. He proudly calls himself a patriot and a Republican. His heroes, mentioned repeatedly in this book, include white-man land rapers like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams instead of biocentrists like Chief Seattle or Vandana Sheeva (of the Chipko movement in India).

These contradictions become glaring when Foreman tries to translate the theories into political action. For example, he says Earth First! was never intended to include anti-corporate activism. He says it was founded on the issue of public land use only. "Most people in this country," he says, "myself included, respect the concept of private property." Well, wait a minute. If you really believe that nature is not here to serve humans, and humans are merely part of nature, how can you support the idea that humans can "own" the Earth? And what are we supposed to do if the 2,000-year-old redwoods we

need to save for the sake of biological diversity and evolution happen to be on "private" land? And what if the reason they are being cut is to finance a junk-bond corporate takeover? Should our slogan be No compromise in Defense of Mother Earth on Public Land Only, And Only If We Don't Have to Confront the Corporate Power Structure?

Foreman's middle-class bias is also shown in his contempt for industrial workers. "We are inconsistent when we castigate Charles Hurwitz for destroying the last wilderness redwood forest, yet feel sympathy for the loggers working for him," he says. "Many loggers, or cat-skinners, oilfield workers, miners, and the like, simply hate the wild and delight in 'civilizing' it." Of course, many suburban professionals hate the wild too, but Foreman is much more generous toward them. It's okay for Foreman to support himself by writing books printed on paper made by applying toxic technologies to the trees that the evil loggers cut down, because "most of us still need to make a living that involves some level of participation in 'the system.'" Now, I don't hold any romantic views about the noble proletariat, especially after being the recipient of their fisticuffs, truck-rammings and pipe bombs. But I also know timber workers, oilfield workers and miners who love the wilderness and are trying to stop its destruction. And it seems to me that people's complicity should be measured more by the amount of control they have over the conditions of their lives than by how dirty they get at work. One compromise made by a white-collar Sierra Club professional can destroy more trees than a logger can cut in a lifetime.

Foreman defends tree-spiking in this book,

although he acknowledges the ethical problem posed by the near-decapitation of millworker George Alexander when a saw hit a tree spike at the Cloverdale L-P mill. Foreman says that the Cloverdale spiking was not done by Earth First! This is probably true, although I think it's irrelevant to the argument over tree-spiking's safety. But, says Foreman, "After the initial hoopla blaming Earth First! for the accident, several northern California newspapers issued apologies when it was learned that the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department's primary suspect was a conservative Republican in his mid-fifties who owned property adjacent to the logging site." In fact, the press had a field day vilifying EF! over that incident, and never retracted or apologized for anything. And the absolutely only paper that ever named the suspect or acknowledged that it wasn't EF! was the AVA. That kind of inaccuracy in recounting local events makes me wonder how much of the rest of this book is exaggerated for convenience of argument.

Another part of Foreman's book describes at length his proposal for how to reform the Sierra Club and other mainstream groups. The problem, he says, is that the big environmental groups are staffed by professionals who spend their time in front of computers instead of hiking in the wilderness. In order to restore that "wilderness gene," he wants all staff members of the "Big 10" environmental groups to be sent on a two-week wilderness vacation each year. I must admit that the idea of state Sierra Club rep Gail Lucas backpacking in the wilderness is pretty funny to contemplate. (Where would she plug in her hair dryer?) But there's no

way that it would solve the problem of Sierra Club compromise. The Big 10 kowtow to the corporations because they are part of the system, and if they stop compromising, the corporations will stop negotiating with them. If a two-week wilderness trip really did change Gail Lucas, she would just be replaced by someone who had more of a "compromise gene."

Just as significant as the things Foreman says in this book are the things he doesn't say. There are no real "confessions" in this book. Rather than confront the hard, controversial issues, Foreman lobbs vague accusations at us "class struggle social justice leftists" that he claims have "infiltrated" Earth First! He doesn't mention the controversial right-wing stances he has taken, such as advocating the starvation of Ethiopians and the closing of borders. He never analyzes the success or failure of tactics like Redwood Summer, and he proposes individual monkey-wrenching as a main strategy without discussing whether or not it has actually succeeded over the past 10 years. He barely mentions and never goes into any detail about his experience of being infiltrated by an FBI provocateur and busted for conspiracy to down power lines in Arizona.

Foreman also engages in some petty stuff. He lists the founders of Earth First! and omits Mike Roselle, who, although he is now on the outs with Foreman over these issues, was certainly a principal force in building Earth First! Foreman also lists the Earth First! musicians who have inspired him and conspicuously omits Darryl Cherney.

Finally, Dave Foreman concludes that we hippie anarchists have steered Earth First! away from its original principles, and it's time for him to quit. He

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says we have already accomplished what we set out to do 10 years ago. I certainly disagree with that. Sure, we've educated a lot of people, but they're still butchering the forest, and our country just destroyed Iraq. What I think we've been doing is putting the principles of biocentrism into practice in the real world. And the radical implications of the theory, as well as the repression we've encountered, have scared Dave Foreman off.

So I'll return the compliment you gave me last year, Dave. You're a hero who will be remembered 100 years from now. But the movement has passed you by, and it's time to step aside. Work elsewhere, where you feel more comfortable. But quit bashing those of us who are still on the front lines.