

Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

AVA, September 1990

I'd rather be sitting around base camp listening to Bob Marley, smoking a hooter, and writing this on the back of a rolling paper. But if Dave Foreman wants a divorce from all the hippie leftist anarchist humanists in Earth First!, I've got a few things to say.

First of all, I'm not out to trash Dave Foreman. I have a lot of respect for him, both for introducing me and many others to the idea of biocentrism, and for the decentralized, non-hierarchical non-organization he helped set up in EF! But this divorce has been a long time coming, and it's based on real political differences.

Dave Foreman calls himself a conservationist, and believes that the focus of EF! should be limited to preserving wilderness in public land set-asides. I absolutely agree that we need to save everything we can, and I support all efforts to preserve or re-establish wilderness. But I don't think preserving wilderness in set-asides is enough. Our society is so destructive that any wilderness we preserve may be destroyed by acid rain, drought, or greenhouse effect. And, as the Earth continues to deteriorate under the weight of human abuse, social pressure to consume any unspoiled land will become so great that we will lose it eventually.

The only way to preserve wilderness and the

TIMBER WARS

EF! blockade during Redwood Summer, 1990, shuts down logging in the Sequoia National Forest. (photo by Peter Fisk)



Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

only way to save our planet's life support system from collapse is to find a way to live on the Earth that doesn't destroy the Earth. In other words, Earth First! is not just a conservation movement, it is also a social change movement. This is why EF! has attracted so many people who live alternative lifestyles. It doesn't make sense to bemoan the destruction of nature while supporting the system that is destroying it. Yet Dave Foreman proudly calls himself a patriot, and glorifies the dominant culture of our corrupt society. He says he is a no-compromise defender of biodiversity, yet he has made the ultimate compromise of accepting a society that is literally based on the destruction of the Earth.

But in spite of the fact that many of us think putting the Earth first involves profound social change, it is wrong for Dave Foreman to characterize us simply as "leftists" or "a class struggle group." We are not trying to overthrow capitalism for the benefit of the proletariat. In fact, the society we envision is not spoken to in any leftist theory that I've ever heard of. Those theories deal only with how to redistribute the spoils of exploiting the Earth to benefit a different class of humans. We need to build a society that is not based on the exploitation of Earth at all—a society whose goal is to achieve a stable state with nature for the benefit of all species.

Of course we are nowhere near such a society. But having this kind of worldview does not mean we are working on social rather than ecological issues. It just helps shape the strategies used in our Earth First! organizing. For example, Dave Foreman would like to keep the movement small and pure. But profound social changes don't happen without mass

TIMBER WARS

movements, and I think we need a whole lot more of us to bring about even the modest reforms we need to save the redwoods. So the strategy for Redwood Summer was to increase our numbers. We had 2,000 people at the Earth First! rally in Fort Bragg, and we have been staging constant actions all summer. We're not watering down the movement—we're spreading our radicalism by sending all those people home with new experience in direct action.

Another change that goes with our worldview is the prominence of women in EF! Ed Abbey's retrogressive view of women as sex objects doesn't make it here, where about three-quarters of the EF! organizers are strong and competent women. And, although male dominance is not the only problem with our society or the sole reason for the destruction of nature, it is definitely a factor. Any change towards a non-exploitive culture would have to include a balance between masculine and feminine, and we had better start with our own movement.

It is particularly ironic that Dave Foreman sees us as having strayed from EF!'s principles, because we are the front line warriors of Earth First!, literally risking our lives out there defending the forest. And that is the most important part of our movement. We are a direct action group, and our policy is set on the front lines, not on the lecture circuit or in the minds of theoreticians.

Nobody has all the answers, and one of the strengths of Earth First! has always been our diversity. Rednecks for Wilderness and Hippie Wu-Wu's can co-exist in Earth First!, as long as we are all fighting to save this planet. Our decentralized non-structure leaves room for many strategies to be fol-

Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

lowed at once. But if Dave Foreman or anyone else starts insisting on conventionality, we will lose our spark.

I don't see Dave's leaving as a split in Earth First!, but rather as an evolution. We are not moving away from his ideas, we are expanding them. The activities he proposes are not in competition with ours, and there is no reason for anyone to have to choose sides. Things are not the same as they were 10 years ago, and Earth First! is changing too. But we will continue, and a year from now we'll still be out there kicking corporate butt.