

Play Soggy Games, Win Stupid Prizes

Movement Defense and the ENGO

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The History of Save Old Growth: by means of an update and epilogue

In the Creeker II article “Know Your ENGO Enemies”, it remained to be seen the trajectory of the organization Save Old Growth (SOG). For the sake of movement history, it shall be reiterated here.

In late 2021, Roger Hallam, newly exiled from Extinction Rebellion (XR) for his inability to work with others, began unofficially leading an international offshoot of XR: the A22 Network. While a distinct entity from XR, A22 receives funding from the same source—the Climate Emergency Fund (CEF). Similar to XR London, XR Vancouver was split between those who wanted more arrestable actions and those who needed a chance to heal. The A22 Network, desirous of a Canadian chapter, wooed the most eager members of XR with an opportunity to be paid for more headline grabbing actions. Within the A22 Network, 10 other countries compete with one another for a limited money pool: mass numbers of sacrificial arrests are required for media attention, and mass numbers of arrest are required to be competitive for funding.

In its first two iterations from January to April, SOG convinced dozens of people to surrender to the state in a multitude of barely-disruptive highway actions. SOG’s actions were generally to block the Trans-Canada Highway by gluing hands to pavement, obtaining fifteen minutes of block time at great personal cost. By April, two of the five founders left because of the pushiest central organizer: Zain Haq (King Push). In the run up to the June Blockades, King Push fought the combined wisdom of the rest of SOG, who argued that there were insufficient humans and resources to sustain three blockades. The June blockades were a fiasco and King Push managed to push out two more central organizers. Thousands of hours of organizing went into marketing, recruiting, and planning the blockades. Originally conceived of as three highway occupations, solicitations went out to sustain camps of dozens of humans, bands were hired, cars for hard-blocks purchased and modified, and hundreds of posters announcing the June blockades were wheatpasted throughout the cities. With little security culture practiced—King Push rolled his eyes at any mention of subterfuge—law enforcement was well aware of both the location and times of the blockades. Any criticism by volunteers was chastised as negativity: build it and they will come! At the Massey tunnel, fifteen minutes of block time was achieved before everyone on the action was arrested and the campers on the Tsawwassen beach chased off. A very hesitant protestor climbed a hastily constructed ladder structure near the Swartz Bay ferry terminal, and had that structure assaulted by a motorist. After breaking his pelvis and being arrested, the mood was too dour, and everyone left camp. At the Iron Worker’s Memorial Bridge, action participants arrived to find that three of the four cars parked near the blockade were already being towed away by police. A single car managed to careen onto the freeway in pursuit, but none of the passengers were able to lock in quickly enough. It was a humorous sight indeed to watch the musicians scattering around the sidewalks of the bridge as they rapidly realized there was not going to be a blockade, let alone a rock concert. Someone in active psychosis, who had attended only two meetings, was seen giving press interviews and had to hastily be squirreled away... unadulterated fiasco.

King Push would not apologize nor take any responsibility, and all the remaining organizers asked him to leave. At this time, new organizers emerged creating a more consent-oriented culture recognizing the need to properly vet candidates and proactively provide information of

the consequences of arrest, as well as take better care of people in the court aftermath. But it was too late. As the court system requires months to grind their injustices, new media stories emerged from individuals about manipulation, push culture, and of people feeling abandoned. The remaining organizers could not deny full-throatedly the veracity of the stories coming out. They recognized the SOG brand was toxic and deserved the reprobation and scorn it was receiving. They realized that it was no longer recruiting and—as the crown prosecutor was increasing the carceral outcome—SOG would only increase the penalty to any group fighting in the streets of Vancouver on this (or any other) issue, without moving the legislative needle. Most of the organizers came to realize that SOG was doing harm to the entire movement and decided to shut it down. They were unable to shut it down. So many people had swallowed Roger Hallam’s Kool-Aid on “nonviolent civil disobedience” so thirstily, that they were literally convinced that if this specific tactic—whether it was succeeding or not—was not being used, all resistance was at a stand still and the world was over. The A22 Network would not let this tactic disappear in Canada, and King Push had started a new campaign with identical tactics and the backing of Roger Hallam, and that’s where you get Stop Fracking Around.

Push Culture: An Arrest MLM

Sitting in a Save Old Growth action-planning meeting, an organizer looks around at all the people who have been arrested too many times and their eyes furtively avoiding capture, awkwardly worried about their continued role in the organization. The organizer asks: Are you willing to be arrested? If no one is willing, we can’t have an action tomorrow. And if no one is willing, who can we call, spend all night frantically calling?

At a recruitment meeting, an organizer jokes about how they miss getting arrested, miss the feeling of handcuffs; it’s been too long. *Are you willing to participate? Are you willing to risk arrest? If so, are you willing to glue?*

Fresh meat needs to be informed a little bit about the consequences of arrest but not too much. We don’t want to scare them away. The prosecutor is increasing the sentences. We’re not sure what the sentences are if they get arrested now. We could tell them that we’re unsure or we can tell them old news... just some community service. We need an action tomorrow after all. We need arrests.

Months and months after the actions, lonely arrestees wish they had more support in court. Where are those organizers now? Meanwhile, King Push gets hailed by national media as a hero, facing deportation, but is never seen at any of the legal solidarity meetings. For King Push, these humans were resources, necessary collateral damage. He didn’t really care. At the recruitment meeting, he was so interested when you told him you’d consider arrest, but now, at the courthouse, where did he go? Students facing months-long curfews, fines they cannot afford, and King Push smiles and looks away. It’s for the greater good, he’ll say. Intermediary arrest-convincers now recognize the damage they’ve done, the friendships they’ve burned, resistance members they’ve pushed away. Organizers find out that King Push had threatened to end friendships for the sake of one more arrest... tomorrow’s arrest. Like the CEO looking at quarterly profit, King Push knows the attention economy and his funding depend on every other tomorrow. A trail of burnt-out resisters, broken promises, and too many arrests. The state’s eyes fully open to the once possible future insurrectionary fighters. So many resisters are now registered with crimi-

nal records with the state, probationary conditions, and all the fear and trepidation repression brings.

Arrests aren't even enough for King Push: his mentor, Roger Hallam, requires remand. Protestors must be herded through symbolic arrests continuously until they are held on pre-trial detention. What happens to their apartment or their bills? That's not King Push's problem. More souls for the grinder.

When XR Montreal realized his serpentine tactics they told him where to go. When Save Old Growth realized his unscrupulous nature and amoral character, they told him they could no longer work together. Then he founded Stop Fracking Around, hoping to hitch his civil disobedient tactic to the Shut Down Canada movement and the Wet'suwet'en struggle. Getting paid to find all the revolutionary fighters in an area and get them arrested is what cops do!

Militants new to this movement, don't listen to those who try to convince you to surrender happily to the state. Form affinity groups with people you trust, cause actual disruption with the goal of disruption, not the goal of arrest. The logic of Save Old Growth/Stop Fracking Around, a crooked 'mean/ends' analysis which seeks to treat those considering resistance solely as a means to leadership's end, is not constrained to this organization. We see it, usually walking hand in hand with the NGO industrial complex, in so many spaces of resistance. It is the logic of XR and of Earth First!, and we've seen it practiced recently far beyond the streets of Vancouver (Stop Line 3, Fairy Creek, etc.) The crown of King Push is worn widely by many would-be kings. The cannon fodder of these movements cannot sustain the repression (dozens of trips to court, fines & legal fees, probation conditions, the trauma of arrest & detention), and are often pushed out of the movement and back into the system. Disruption and anonymity are sustainable, and anyone putting on uncomfortable pressure is not building sustainable movements. "How comfortable are we all with this" should be a paramount concern of action planning, as it is only "we" who keeps "us" safe.

Removing the fangs of a movement: the emergence of the professional messaging class

Just as the Stand.Earth types became the spokespeople at the end of Clayoquot Sound, so too did the Last.Stand types eventually become the curator of the memory of Fairy Creek. What was once a message of Land Back and radical resistance became a narrative of liberal reform and a social media awareness campaign. There is a certain creeping type who, with smiles and offers of assistance, sneaks its way in the door promising a professional media expertise: *I know all the reporters and politicians. I can get your message out. I can be in charge of your social media.*

This class claims to be professional and for a small stipend they'll provide their assistance. Who knows how many campaigns they are working for simultaneously? How many banners of dead campaigns do they hold like so many crumbs in their talons? At first they assure they won't lead, only advise. But their moderating presence is felt almost immediately: *Oh, that sounds too militant. You should be courting good citizens in good standing. And no masks... masks make you look like an eco-terrorist.*

This class has its own agenda. They are unwilling to risk arrest themselves, though they recognize that arrestees have a sincerity in the minds of the public. They use these arrestees as their

mouthpiece: *is it ok if I use your name to quote my lobbyist playscript? I need the names of my 'honorable arrestees'. I need names to speak for.*

Before you know it, they are asking if the radicals would be willing to work with the politicians. *Maybe since you land defenders are trusted, you could work on an NDP campaign.* And paid as this class is, by multiple nebulous ENGOs simultaneously, when everything is crested and the banner is being dropped, it is this professional messaging class who still holds the microphone, still asks for funding for curating a dead media abandoned by militant land defenders. Ada'itsx, Rainforest Flying Squad, Save Old Growth all controlled by those who are the non-militant spokespeople of ancient movements all sounding eerily like one another. These media experts continue to be paid, as they now control the donation boxes, while the radicals who fought in these movements materially struggle to keep fighting. And these experts, be they messaging professionals or unarrestable, careerist, parachuting photographers, position themselves as the reformist authors of movement epitaphs.

Stop Fracking Around will attempt to do this with Shut Down Canada if we let them. Shut Down Canada cannot and will never be liberal reformist. If King Push asks you to get arrested, tell him to frack the frack off.

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“Creeker has received a submission that we would like to release immediately as it poses a timely intervention. Written by ex-members of Save Old Growth, it details a number of concerning internal dynamics of the group and draws attention to how SOG has simply re-branded itself as Stop Fracking Around, while continuing to engage in the same activities that has caused so much concern in land defense and radical communities.”

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