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Seeds of Victory

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Why We Cant Succeed Without a Multigenerational
Movement

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Earth First! faces a substantial barrier to creating a sustainable movement. Our communities suffer from a rapid turnover rate and a lack of diversity, including when it comes to age. While we regularly talk about how often people seem to just disappear, we fail to recognize or discuss the qualities of our communities that contribute to these patterns. We have failed to create the infrastructure and support that would allow people to remain within the movement long-term. Instead, our conversations tend toward the personal (how our actions affect other individuals) and the global (the large scale implications of our actions), while glossing over the effects our collective choices have on our communities. Our failure to create sustainable, multigenerational communities is a direct result of the lack of priority we've given to support for parents and children. Choosing to have kids has become an environmental faux pas, which is not going to help our lack of sustainable communities. The decision not to reproduce needs to be considered not only from a personal and global perspective, but from a community perspective as well. Removing ourselves from the reproductive process has

the unintended consequence of removing our communities from an entire facet of human existence.

We see an example of this type of thought in the previous issue of the *Earth First! Journal* (see *EF!* May-June 2008). Gedden Cascadia argues in "A Few Too Many" that choosing to have a vasectomy is an important and responsible decision for any male-bodied environmental activist. Surrounded by the effects of a world burdened by a population far beyond its sustainable capacity, it's easy to see where Gedden is coming from. However, we cannot oversimplify the current situation. Even if everyone in the Earth First! movement and other radical communities chose not to procreate, it would not bring an end to environmental destruction. In fact, it would weaken the very sort of movement we are working to build by reinforcing a culture that does not register support for parents as a priority.

The peril the Earth faces was created by more than an abundance of humans. More abstract trends—the commodification of nature and an absurd level of overconsumption—lie at the heart of our current situation, and simply decreasing the number of humans on this planet will do little to change these endemic obstacles.

In Gedden's article, we are told that adoption can be a viable alternative to creating a child. However, the overall tone of the article implies that having children is an experience valuable to the individual alone. Our communities and the ways in which our decisions affect them are not part of the equation.

The result of our collective blindness to the consideration of community surrounds us. The homogeneity in age of those we associate with is a prime example. In any given community, there may be specific excuses for this lack of diversity, but when looked at on a broader scale, it becomes clear that such homogeneity is endemic. In order to confront this pattern, we must first recognize that this limited age range makes it impossible to build a sustainable long-term movement. Diversity in age brings us a diversity of perspectives and experience levels. It gives us a new generation

to take on our struggle, and it creates space for us to move on to a different stage of our lives while remaining active and effective members of the movement. We will neither remain young forever nor desire our current lifestyles forever. Whether train hopping and transient or settled with children, there are infinite lifestyles that individuals can take on while being valuable members of Earth First!. Yet only a small portion of those lifestyles are currently supported and accepted by our communities.

The majority of people entering our communities are young adults drawn to radical ideas because they have experienced first-hand how incredibly sick mainstream society is. Their disillusionment and frustration at the dominant culture can be powerful motivators. However, because they didn't grow up surrounded by a given radical community, there is less incentive for them to remain within it. The all too obvious result is the high turnover experienced in Earth First! and other radical communities. Many have commented that the Rendezvous have few familiar faces from year to year. It's tough to work on any sort of long-term project or to develop a strong community when people don't stick around. We find ourselves repeating the same conversations for years because the majority of people in the discussion only recently appeared, and there aren't enough people from before to pass on collective memories and ideas. Because of this, it is impossible to make large, consensual changes about the direction we want the movement to be headed in or to sustain an effective campaign, which can take years if not decades.

Compare our movement to struggles where those fighting side by side have been together for their entire lives and their communities have carried on for generations. Such communities have more similar goals and a greater investment in remaining united. Our communities are composed mainly of people who only found one another once they were more or less fully developed, so there is a distinct lack of this type of solidarity and sense of personal investment. Couple this with the fact that the majority of our commu-

nities fall painfully short when it comes to supporting folks once they've decided to settle down or have children, and the reason so few people stick around in the long term becomes undeniably clear.

We are stuck in a rut, and to remove ourselves from this rut, we must begin to accept a wider range of lifestyle choices, including the decision to have kids. Changing our culture requires not simply raising consciousness but actively building support systems. For example, we must develop communal child care. If we put more effort into creating a culture that cares for children and helps them develop, we can introduce them to an alternative to the dominant culture before they have been shaped by it. Not only will this save the children we interact with from years of vague dissatisfaction and misery, it will give us stronger, more robust social cohesion.

We have ignored our communities and their needs for long enough. We will never be able to create a true threat to those in power so long as we do not have unity and stability in our movement, and we will not have that until we place a greater focus on supporting all members of our communities. Creating the infrastructure for a multigenerational movement needs to become a priority. As a movement, we have much on our side. But in order to win, we have got to stop jumping from a personal to a global mind-frame, and instead begin thinking of our decisions and actions in relation to our communities.

