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Earth First! is Dead — Long Live the Earth Liberation Front!

Snorky the Sea Elf

Autumn 1995

As we all expected, it's finally happened. Earth First! has officially joined the ranks of the mainstream groups and have thrown their lot in with the hierarchical committees and executives of FoE and Greenpeace. The recent EF! Action Updates report with glee that a top-level meeting was held in July between "leading" (i.e. careerist) Earth First!ers, Road Alert and Reclaim The Streets, with representatives of FoE etc, The purpose of the meeting was on how NGO and grassroots groups can best cooperate. It was decided that all groups would not brand their names in future, but rather work towards one movement. Now this all sounds very nice in theory — we need a strong movement to resist ecological destruction — but what it hides is a move by, some individuals to push their own agenda and tactics for EF! and the direct action movement without really consulting those grassroots and, if anything, acting in the same manner as the larger mainstream groups have done before them.

Before readers start getting upset and accusing me of criticizing EF! for the sake of it or because I might have a grudge to bear, then

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let's look at the facts. Since its inception, there has been a drive to pacify and deradicalise EF! and give it a more acceptable face. This began in the early years with ecocrats such as George Marshall of the Rainforest Action Group/Lea Valley EF! who wanted proper membership lists and "central command" to many others who have managed to ride the wind of media attention over Timbmet and Twyford Down and who have now entered careers in Road Alert, Women's — Environmental Network etc but have stepped down from their fiery words of direct action to much more conciliatory methods. This has been combined with an almost dictatorial control over actions, a fanatic position over nonviolence isolating and stopping those who want to get involved but refuse to be beaten up without trying to defend themselves, especially people from the local community. Fluffies have dropped to even lower depths when they promised to point out 'disrupters' to cops. These tactics ensure any 'militant' endeavour is greatly curtailed. They fail to acknowledge that in many countries, nonviolent and more forceful protest regularly go hand in hand on the same demo — it's a matter of live and let live, unifying rather than dividing a movement.

We've come back to where we started, falling in with the mainstream. For those of us who have memories remember FoE central office's attempt to prevent their local groups working with us, sending around a warning letter spreading disinformation about EF! It is not a matter of working or not cooperating with them, it is the whole issue of what their aims are and how they're structured. Their main goal is environmental protection, not ecological and social revolution that EF! in UK originally sought. Their idea of direct action falls very short of ours, very much within the law, restricted to hand-picked 'stunt men' and for media purposes only — such as FoE's pathetic performance at Twyford where Johnny Porrit chained himself to a fence and left with the cameras. Yes, work with local members as they're usually fed up with their own organisation's centralisation and are far more radical than their office counterparts.

This pacification has spread and infiltrated deep into the EF! network, now succumbing to the same middle class values and ethics they wanted to break free from. The movement is now dominated by student groups – the strongest centres anyway – while the other contacts are tiny, constitute in name only. Those inspired by the early actions have gone away, setting up their own camps, becoming totally autonomous and community centred, though carrying out the aims of eco-direct action. no doubt sick of EF!'s capitulation.

What scares these new EF! ecocrats is change. They're terrified that things will happen without them having any control, very much like their counterparts in FoE back in 1991. These 'activists' – whose faces and numbers change but whose intentions are basically the same – have failed to realise that the authorities have evolved, have learned how to deal with D-locks and chains, office occupations etc though the movement have failed to do the same. Yes, it may have involved more people and had a nice few protests and day-long blockades but where are the victories? How many road schemes have we stopped in early construction – not those affected by government turnarounds? How many woods have we stopped from destruction? What are the signs the government have given up car culture, where's the integrated transport system? No – the fact is that Twyford is built, M11 has fallen, Solsbury Hill is under concrete, Wells Relief road has sunk its foundations, Pollok has rerouted but is still built and Skye Bridge spans Midge's hunting ground. Will there be a 3rd battle of Newbury or – like everywhere else – just another Road Alert! controlled picnic with imported bored middle class zippies taking control and dictating everything... The list is endless and why? All because we have failed to keep our promise to defend our Earth to the end and have isolated those from working class communities getting fully active in our campaigns. It is these people who usually get the brunt of a road scheme, toxic waste plant etc. We have failed to tap their

anger because EF! does not know how to communicate with these people.

EF! has failed to respond to this and continues to pursue the lobbyist methods of other groups while trying to fool people by merchandising the monkeywrench and words of no compromise. All sorts of trinkets are sold that have no relation to what is professed. EF! forgets its Brighton 1992 agreement to accept and publicise the Earth Liberation Front as its underground wing, instead using every means possible to avoid acknowledging its existence. Actions that put ecoteurs liberty in jeopardy are usually shoved down into some dark column of the Action Update if they're published at all. They've stooped so low as to take ELF's name off Earth Night circulars and some have even publically declared it "does not exist", such as Roger Gegen of Reclaim The Streets in a press release defending the Freedom Network from MI5 defamations printed in the Sun by distancing it from the 'violent' ALF, ELF, GA etc. No doubt he's worried about a brake on fundraising and attracting the 'wrong sort of people' — the smell of elitist nest feathering and a fear that EF! may get a bad reputation. Are we seeing another Greenpeace in infancy (Paul Watson certainly saw that sellout) with its own set of media presentable leaders such as self-styled EF! spokesperson George Monbiot, who cries for land reform but never takes any back? We remember his past dismay and criticism at criminal damage and direct action at Timbmet, even at EF! itself. Like so many of his kind, he is nothing but a bangwagoner whose circle of friends include the hierarchy of FoE and Guardian Green news pimp and Small World partner John Vidal, and whose credentials and class fit perfectly with his own.

Sucking up to the likes of FoE and Greenpeace will only further restrict imaginative actions. EF! will be reliant and dependent on these large organizations for funding and the legal restrictions that go along with them. They are not about to risk their respectability, the fear of losing all those membership funds is too much to bear. For this reason, it is now to call it quits. We have had enough of this

sell out. It is time for EF! to dissolve and those who still want to defend the planet to go their own way and give substance to their rhetoric. Realise it's time to take on new tactics, involve those who the careerist deem too violent or militant to be associated with, a movement with closer links with animal liberation, anti-fascists, and is prepared to use the same means to achieve their ends. Let us support ELF actions, not ignore them. We need an underground as much as a surface movement. If careerist fools want to join the mainstream, let them do it — but damn them if they're going to drag the rest of us down with them. Let's stop bickering about Deep and Social ecology, stick together and produce a solid Revolutionary Ecology movement that refuses to surrender its goals and can effectively take the State on.