

Chapter 10 : Fellow Workers, Meet Earth First!

SPECIAL ISSUE RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM Twelve Pages

INSIDE: Earth First! & the IWW ★ Workers & Wilderness ★ Monkeywrenching
★ Interview with Roger Featherstone ★ Poetry, Cartoons, Silent Agitators! ★

★ EDUCATION ★ ORGANIZATION ★ EMANCIPATION

INDUSTRIAL WORKER

Industrial Workers of the World



VOLUME 85, NUMBER 5, WH 1499 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS • MAY 1988 25 CENTS

WORKERS' DIRECT ACTION SAVES RAINFOREST

**Labor Environmentalism
in the Philippines**

Hunger is more common than a full stomach in the Philippines and environmental abuse has been a key factor in creating this tragedy. Labor unions there are strategizing accordingly.

In this nation of islands that once supported a rich, but always fragile, natural environment, 7 out of 10 people live in poverty today.

Visitors to the Philippines note three forms of hunger or destitution. In the first, people do not always know where their next meal is coming from, but they usually get it; their food consists principally of rice with occasional fish or vegetables. In the second instance, meals consist only of rice. In the third, there

and restore the land. They have just begun their studies.

"Until we can become self-sufficient farmers again, we will have to continue to support ourselves with work in factories and in the Middle East," said the union representative. Many farmers have emigrated to Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries to hire out as workers.

Chemical destruction is not the only threat to farmers. They depend on irrigation provided by the constant and even supply of water that flows from the tropical rainforests.

In 1946, rainforests covered 42 million acres of the country but excessive logging of valuable hardwood has wiped out all but 7 million acres. If the logging continues at the present rate, there will be no rainforest by the year 2000.

Destruction of a tropical rainforest is infinitely more devastating than the loss of a forest in a temperate climate. North American forests, for example, produce deep topsoil that can, in time, replenish destroyed trees. Philippine rainforests grow in shallow soil. Once destroyed, the rainforest is gone forever and with it, the thin tissue of soil that supported it, together with the rain and the irrigation cycle it created.

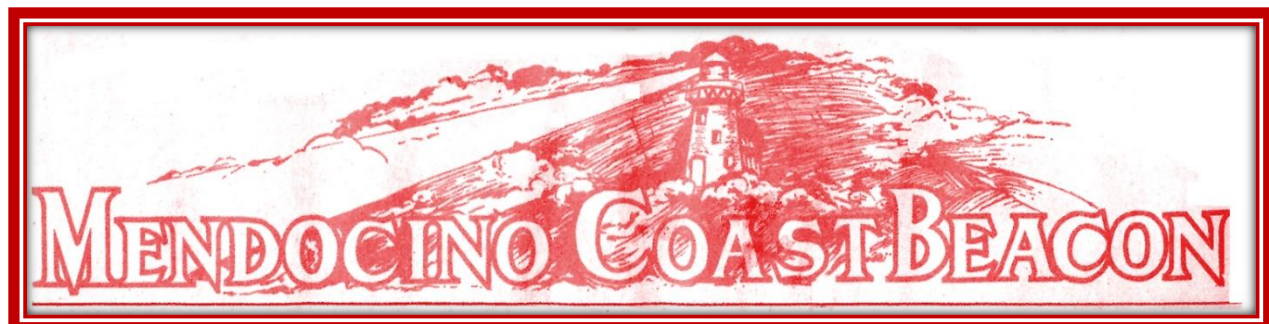
One such place where the rainforest has been devastated is the valley and peninsula around Midsilip, on the southernmost island of Mindanao. Rice farmers there grew alarmed at repeated crop wash-outs from flash flooding and landslides. They realized their crop failures would only increase unless they could

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WORLD LABOR DAY 1988

May 1988 Industrial Worker front cover.

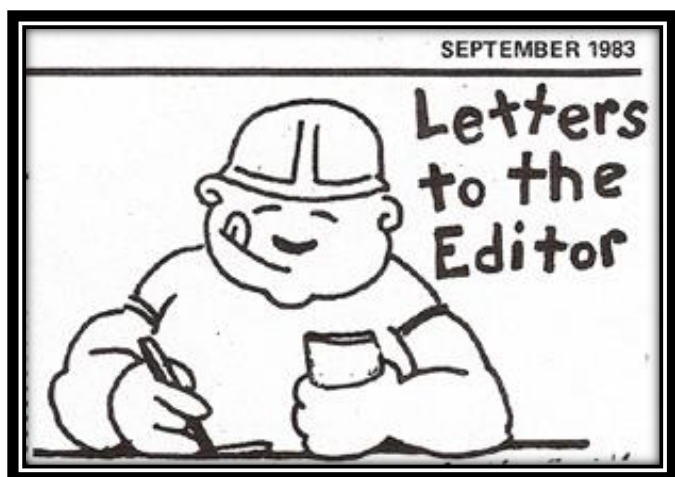


The IWW seems to have had a fairly constant, if subtle (or even subliminal) presence in Northwestern California. Note the letters "IWW" near the top of the banner headline of the Mendocino Coast Beacon, taken from the Wednesday, January 19, 1977 edition (later versions of the graphic have the "IWW" edited out, possibly because this publication hoped to appeal to a less radical audience).

It was inevitable that the two would meet, really. Earth First! was challenging the corporate extraction of resources, but it wasn't combating it at its source: the point of production. The problem was that the business unions theoretically could, but in practice they would not. They were too invested in their role as junior partners in the capitalist economy, which left them incapable of fighting it. There was only one union in the United States that could, and luckily, it still existed, even if it was but a shadow of its former self.



Image by Mike Roselle



Obvious copy from the September 1983 *Industrial Worker*

That the IWW influenced Earth First! is obvious. If the opposite was true in the early days of Earth First!'s existence, it is difficult to say. Initially, there was no direct or *textual* reference made by the IWW to Earth First! in its official publication, *The Industrial Worker*, prior to February 1988, although there was a one-time reproduction of one of Mike Roselle's images (frequently used in the *Earth First! Journal*'s "dear shit fer brains" letters section), slightly altered and used in the *Industrial Worker*'s own letters section in September 1983.

The IWW did take note of general environmental struggles and actions within the pages of the

Industrial Worker. For example, in the October / November 1980 issue there was a lengthy article titled, "Big Mountain Dine & Hopi Battle Mine Interests", a struggle which Earth First! supported for many years. In the June 1981 issue included a lengthy article about the Bolt Weevils—which predate Earth First!, but serve as one of its inspirations—called, "The Power Line Protest in West Central Minnesota". Earth Firstler Roger Featherstone, was once involved in this campaign. There was a similar, uncredited article about this movement, simply called "Bolt Weevils" in the May 1, 1984 issue of the *Earth First! Journal*. An isolated column (that does *not* mention Earth First!) called "Ecology Notes" appeared in the December 1982 issue. The same column never appeared again, however. By 1983, articles about ecologically oriented workers' struggles became more and more frequent, but Earth First! was never mentioned, even if Earth First! was involved in the struggle. Meanwhile, the Wobblies were rarely mentioned in the *Earth First! Journal* except for a few occasional letters from self-identified IWW members, or former members.¹

Behind the scenes, however, individual Wobblies and Earth Firstlers frequently came into contact with each other. Dave Foreman later revealed that he had regularly corresponded with Utah Phillips. Franklin and Penelope Rosemont had also been in contact with Foreman as well as Roger Featherstone, a veteran of several environmental campaign, who described himself as "a roving reporter for Earth First!"² In Tacoma, Washington, IWW members Barbara Hansen and Allen Anger lived in an apartment in the same building as the IWW hall along with long time member, and then branch secretary, Otilie Markholt. They were friends with George Draffan, who had been a member of the IWW when he was in college, long before joining Earth First! in the 1980s.³ Colorado IWW member and oilfield worker Gary Cox was also sympathetic to Earth First!. Cox had read *The Mon-keywrench Gang*, become a subscriber to the *Earth First! Journal*, and had attended an Earth First! speaking event by Dave Foreman and Roger Featherstone at the University of Colorado.⁴ A handful of IWW

¹ For example, see Harry S. Smith's letter to "Dear SFB", *Earth First! Journal*, Samhain / November 1, 1984; Smith mentions that he had been an IWW member in the 1920s, but he refers to the Wobblies in the past tense. SFB is an abbreviation of the ironically humorous moniker, "Shit for Brains".

² Author's personal communication with Penelope Rosemont, October 20, 2009.

³ Author's personal communication with Allan Anger, October 26, 2009.

⁴ Author's personal communication with Gary Cox, October 26, 2009.

members were Earth First!ers themselves, including a musician known as “Wobbly Bob”.⁵

Nevertheless, the first actual mention of Earth First! in the pages of the *Industrial Worker* touched on the Cameron Road tree spiking and the injury to George Alexander. In a letter to the editor in the February 1988 edition, Barbara Hansen, stated:

“Recently Earth First! has been attacked for tree-spiking by both the bourgeois press and other ecology groups. The criticism results from publicity surrounding an accident in a northern California mill in which a saw-blade shattered when it hit a spike and a worker was seriously injured by the flying debris. EF!’s response has been basically to deny that the spike could have been one of theirs, and they make a pretty good case. However, I was raised here in logging country, and it seems to me the questions shouldn’t be ‘Is it OK to spike trees?’ or ‘Who put the spike in?’ but rather, ‘Why wasn’t the worker protected against accidents?’

“All kinds of things get into tree trunks—barbed wire from an old fence can get overgrown and deeply embedded, even nails from a sign or a camper’s clothesline, Cedar trees will even pick up large rocks and carry them in a limb crotch as they grow, eventually burying them deep in a trunk. That’s why saw-blades are supposed to be changed before they get brittle enough to shatter, and why shielding is supposed to be in place to protect the saw-operator when something is hit, whether the object was placed there by nature or saboteur.

“I’ve heard some of my friends and neighbors who run small home sawmills for extra income bitterly complain about how OSHA officials come around and harass them about safety requirements and let the big mills get off free. But none of the articles I’ve seen in the papers have questioned the safety standards at the mill in question. Let’s hope our friends in Earth First! haven’t fallen into the trap of letting the press define its politics as putting ecology ahead of workers, when the real issue here is worker safety, not the ethics or tactics of direct action.”⁶



As one would expect, more than a few IWW members were less than sympathetic to Earth First!, especially given some of the more controversial declarations issued by the latter’s spokespeople, including Dave Foreman and Ed Abbey. Though such views were likely not held by the majority of Earth First!ers, skeptical Wobblies worried that an IWW association with Earth First! could result in negative associations with the IWW as well. For the most part, the Wobblies in this camp had little or no connection with rank and file Earth First!ers such as Greg King and Darryl Cherney. Had this been otherwise, the skeptical members of the IWW might have been less so. To the supporters of Earth First! within the IWW, however, Earth First!’s direct action tactics reminded them of the IWW campaigns long past, including the fight for the eight-hour day in the timber industry.⁷ While the IWW still *spoke* of direct action, particularly among the forests of the Pacific Northwest, Earth First!ers were out in the woods, *taking* direct action, albeit not at the point of production, which the supporters sometimes neglected to mention. The debate was by no means a lighthearted one, and personal egos and other peripheral disagreements about strategy and tactics sometimes muddled the waters further, as is all too common on the left.

Earth First!’s supporters in the IWW were meanwhile in regular contact with their supporters (and common members) in Earth First! and devised a strategy to try and win over the more skeptical members of the One Big Union. Fortuitously, at the time the editors of the *Industrial Worker*, (including Franklin

⁵ Author’s personal communication with Mike Roselle, August 31, 2008.

⁶ Letter to the editor, by Barb Hansen, *Industrial Worker*, February, 1988.

⁷ Author’s personal communication with Barbara Hansen, Summer 2009.

and Penelope Rosemont) were, conveniently enough, all supporters of Earth First!. Their predecessors, whose tenure had ended in December 1987, hadn't been, but a good majority of the membership considered the 1987 version of the publication uninspiring, even if the editors had done a consistent and reliable job of producing it. One group of readers had even described the *Industrial Worker* under their watch as "a condensed version of the *New York Times*."⁸ The new editors, by contrast, transformed the publication into one with much more interesting articles (by many accounts) and issue oriented themes, including some of which were not always free of controversy.

In the May 1988 issue of the *Industrial Worker*, however, the editors chose to unapologetically feature Earth First! under the banner of "RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM". To be fair, there were a couple of articles about environmentalism in general, including one by Gary Cox on workers taking direct action to preserve rainforests.⁹ The vast majority of the articles however, in fact, no less than six, in the issue focused *specifically* on Earth First!, and four of these were penned by Franklin Rosemont, though only one of them used his actual name (the other three were written using two different pseudonyms, including his IWW membership number (x322339) and a third pseudonym, Lobo X-99).¹⁰ Rosemont also submitted an interview he conducted with Earth First! "roving reporter" Roger Featherstone.¹¹ Barbara Hansen contributed an article on the controversial issue of Spotted Owls as an indicator species and how Corporate Timber used that as a wedge between timber workers and environmental activists¹², and Randall Restless of Montana Earth First! appealed to IWW members to take up wilderness issues as much as they did better working conditions.¹³ Hansen's article was the most relevant in discussing the common ground that IWW members (and workers in general) might find with

Earth First!, but none of the articles were critical of Earth First! beyond a minor point or two.¹⁴

It was obvious to all but the most naïve reader that the editors were trying to provide a platform for Earth First! in particular. Further emphasizing the point—the normal press run of the *Industrial Worker*, was increased from its normal 3,000 per issue to 10,000 and copies were deliberately distributed to Earth First! chapters and at Earth First! gatherings during the upcoming summer.¹⁵



The articles themselves were a decent introduction of Earth First! and the IWW to each other in general. Rosemont expertly described the IWW in his first article, which was likely directed at Earth First!ers not familiar with the Wobblies. In it, he made distinctions between the revolutionary and uncompromising principles and practices of the IWW as opposed to the collaborationist and expedient measures taken by the AFL-CIO, which—as even Earth First!ers agreed—had become little more than an arm of big business.¹⁶ Rosemont made particular note of the AFL-CIO's uncritical acceptance of corporate rhetoric that "environmental regulations led to the loss of jobs":

"First, in our view, the 'official' so-called labor movement, the AFL-CIO, is not really a labor movement at all, but rather a corrupt statist, CIA-dominated bureaucracy whose specific function is to control labor... all of them are

⁸ Letter to the editor, by Melissa Roberts, et. al., *Industrial Worker*, September, 1988.

⁹ "Workers Direct Action Saves Rainforest: Labor Environmentalism in the Philippines", by Gary Cox, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

¹⁰ These were "Earth First!ers, Meet the IWW", by x322339; "Fellow Workers, Meet Earth First!: an Open Letter to Wobblies Everywhere", by x322339; "Workers and Wilderness", by Franklin Rosemont; and "Subvert the Dominant Paradigm!", by Lobo X-99, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

¹¹ "Earth First! & the IWW: an Interview with Roger Featherstone", by Franklin Rosemont, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

¹² "Spotted Owls and Jobless Workers", by Barbara Hansen, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

¹³ "Common Ground", by Randall Restless, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

¹⁴ "Earth First! The Underbelly Exposed", by Chris Shillock, *Libertarian Labor Review*, issue #6, Winter 1989.

¹⁵ "Earth First! vs. the Rumor Mongers", by Lobo X-99, *Industrial Worker*, September 1988.

¹⁶ "We Are Not Alone in This" by Dale Turner, *Earth First! Journal*, Special Edition, June 16, 1989.

afflicted with outdated hierarchical structures and above all an idiotic ideology submissive to the capitalist system of wage slavery...Consider, for example, a ridiculous bumper-sticker slogan promoted by several AFL-CIO unions: 'Pollution: Love it or leave it.' This hideous inanity was supposed to save steel mills and oil-refineries in industrial hell holes like Gary, Indiana...Instead of the imbecile slogan, 'Pollution: Love it or leave it,' the IWW inscribes on its banner the ecological watchword, 'Let's make this planet a good place to live.' And we argue that the best way to accomplish this goal is to organize One Big Union of all workers to abolish the wage-system. The bosses are able to cause such vast environmental devastation because they have organized industry their way for their profit."¹⁷

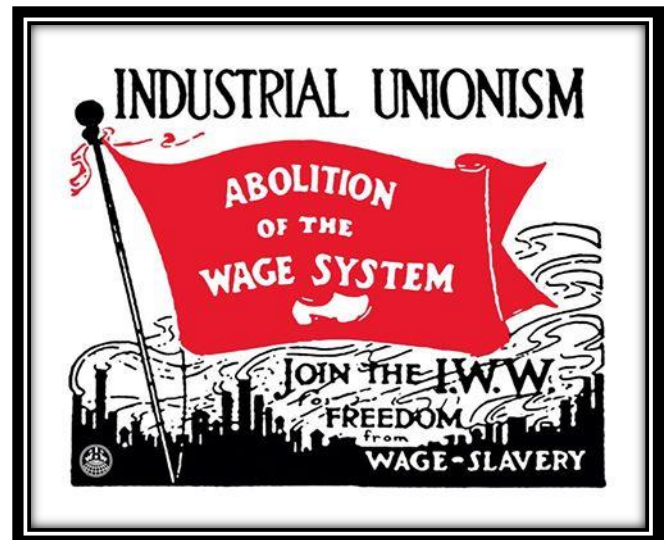
Rosemont also suggested that the IWW had been far ahead of its time, calling for some of the very measures called for by Earth First!:

"Historians of the conservation and environmental movements have not examined the contributions of the IWW, but there's a remarkable story there that should be told some day, at length...In its early years the Union urged that the organized working class would exercise an enlightened stewardship of the planet...the IWW sometimes looked far beyond the limited horizons of the conservation movement at the time...From the 1910s on, the IWW press published numerous warnings of the great dangers to America's forests posed by these malevolent mercenaries...

"On overpopulation, (as) early as the 1910s Wobblies argued that a smaller workforce could more easily win higher wages and shorter hours, as well as better living and working conditions and working conditions, and therefore the Union became a vigorous advocate of birth-control. Of course they could have further justified their position with feminist and environmentalist arguments. What is important, however, is that they reached conclusions compatible with feminism and environmentalism not by adopting someone else's arguments, but on

their own, out of their own experiences as workers in revolt...

"Wobbly bard Ralph Chaplin left us some powerful poems reflecting a profound awareness of Earth's natural diversity. And then there were guys like Irish-born Fellow Worker John Dennis who, after working for a time on the Great Lakes headed west, fell in love with the wilderness...Toward the end of his life he served as field consultant for St. John's Flora of Eastern Washington and Harrison's Flora of Idaho. 'What they needed,' he explained, 'was someone to show them where they could find various plants, and I knew the elevations and places where they grew.'"¹⁸



Rosemont's second article, essentially a glowing tribute to Earth First! passionately presented Earth First!'s good side and poetically compared the young but already famous radical environmental movement as one of the IWW's descendents (exactly as its founders had intended):

"Every once in a while a new radical movement arises and illustrates the social firmament so suddenly and so dazzlingly that many people are caught off guard and wonder: 'What's going on here? Who are these new radicals, and what do they want?'...

"This new movement proceeds to develop new direct-action strategies and tactics—or gives a new twist to old ones—and starts delivering real blows to the power and prestige of the ruling exploiters and their governmental

¹⁷ "Earth First!ers, Meet the IWW", by x322339, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

¹⁸ "Earth First!ers, Meet the IWW", by x322339, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

stooges. This in turn inevitably arouses the hostility of the guardians of the status quo—cops, courts, preachers, politicians, and the prostituted press—who raise a hue and cry for the punishment and suppression of the trouble making upstarts...

“And so the new movement, with wild songs and high humor, captures the imagination of masses of young rebels, spreads like wildfire, turns up everywhere, gets blamed for everything interesting that happens, and all the while writes page after page in the annals of freedom and justice for all.”¹⁹



As Rosemont surmised, such a description actually applied to the IWW as well as Earth First!, and he eloquently described how historically significant new movements always drew inspiration from their history-making forebears:

Truly remarkable is the extent to which each new radical current seems to subsume into itself the spirit, the theory and practice of its various forerunners, even while elaborating its own specific contributions that it will, in turn, pass on to others. What is new in each new movement, moreover, always enables us to see the older movements in a new way, and this in turn sharpens our perspectives and helps advance the struggle yet again...

(Earth First! unites) “the wilderness radicalism of the great ‘Yosemite Prophet’ John Muir and the flamboyant direct-action tactics of the IWW. Earth First! has transformed the most vital current of the old conservation

movement into something qualitatively new and incomparably more radical, and at the same time has helped to bring out a new and wilder dimension to the old Wobbly dream of ‘making this a planet a good place to live.’

“We have every reason to expect that environmental demands will play a larger and larger role in workers’ struggles in the near future.”²⁰

Rosemont made no references however, to the quite *un*-revolutionary comments made by Dave Foreman, Ed Abbey, and “Miss Ann Thropy.”²¹ He said nothing whatsoever about the tree spiking that injured George Alexander which, although not done by Earth First! was still an action likely inspired by *Ecodefense*. Indeed, Rosemont’s review of *that* publication uncritically compared it to the IWW’s own pamphlets on sabotage²², and he neglected to draw distinctions between monkeywrenching (which generally involved guerillas covertly damaging equipment utilized in destruction of wilderness—and sometimes merely used in resource extraction) and *ca’canny* (the collective and organized withdrawal of efficiency by workers at the point of production).²³ Rosemont also neglected to point out that the IWW had officially distanced itself from “sabotage” and had officially ceased selling or distributing any literature promoting it as early as 1918.²⁴

Perhaps Rosemont’s most debatable conclusions and oddball perspectives were presented in the one article he wrote under his own name, “Workers and Wilderness”. In this piece, Rosemont (quite rightly) illustrated the tendency by the ruling class throughout history (whether under despotism, feudalism, or capitalism) to domesticate the lower classes, properly identifying that as a means by the rulers to systematically enslave the thought process of the masses into acceptance of the current status quo, and

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Shillock, Winter 1989, op. cit.

²² “Subvert the Dominant Paradigm!”, by Lobo X-99, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

²³ See for example, Smith, Walker C., *Sabotage: Its History, Philosophy & Function*, Chicago, IL, IWW Publishing Bureau, 1913; and Gurley-Flynn, Elizabeth, *Sabotage: the Conscious Withdrawal of the Workers’ Industrial Efficiency*, Chicago, IL, IWW Publishing Bureau, 1916; both are reprinted on www.iww.org.

²⁴ “Resolution Regarding Sabotage”, Adopted by the General Executive Board of the Industrial Workers of the World, *Defense News Bulletin*, May 4, 1918; the chair of the IWW’s GEB at the time was none other than George Speed, who had earlier been involved in many struggles by workers to fight back against the class war initiated by the timber barons in Humboldt County.

¹⁹ “Fellow Workers, Meet Earth First!: an Open Letter to Wobblies Everywhere”, by x322339, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

that successful resistance to such enslavement required that the masses reject domesticity:

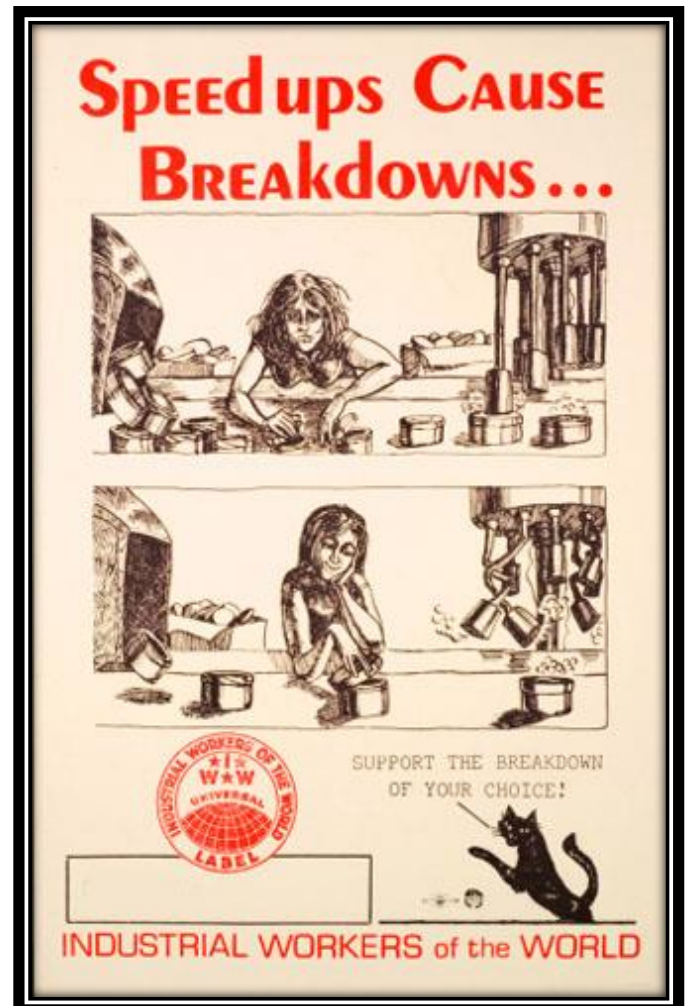
“Working-class history is the history of riots, tumults, strikes, street-fights, insurrections and revolutions that consciously or unconsciously presage a sweeping worldwide social transformation that would eliminate exploitation, establish new social relations based on mutual aid and production for use instead of profit, and therefore make life livable for all...

“All the great moments in the still-unfolding saga of the struggle for working-class emancipation—from the glorious machine-smashing Luddites in the early days of the ‘Industrial Revolution,’ through the Paris Commune of 1871, the rise of the Haymarket Anarchists in [the] 1880s [in] Chicago, the countless battles of the IWW, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the sit-down-strike wave all over the US in the 1930s, the Spanish Revolution of 1936, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution against the state-capitalist bureaucracy, the Detroit Insurrection of 1967 and the May ‘68 General Strike in France, up to the titanic class wars of our own time, from Gdansk to Johannesburg, from West Virginia to Grenada, from Lordstown to Managua—reflect this fundamental global aspiration for a cooperative, free society, without competition, profiteering, war discrimination, bureaucracy, pollution and all the other vile byproducts of declining capitalism’s industrial depravity.

“These outbreaks of revolt are not the work of timid or docile. And it is not without significance that the most characteristic expressions of rank-and-file workers’ insurgency in the US in recent years have been the unofficial and illegal strikes known as wildcats...domestication consists primarily of ideological veneer, that it is not all ‘instinctive,’ and that revolutionary activity is an excellent cure. Truly it has been said that workers learn more in a week of revolution than in a decade of ordinary life.”²⁵

However, Rosemont then made a dubious leap of logic equating domestication (by the employing class) to civilization *itself*. Whether intended or not Rosemont thus parroted the Malthusian and misanthropic

views championed by Dave Foreman, Ed Abbey, and Chris Manes. While it is certainly arguable that flourishing wilderness is favorable to complete domination over the natural environment by manmade technology and technological society in general, and that harmony with the natural environment even in an urban setting (with all of its technological functions) is essential, few among even the most committed Earth First!ers actually literally advocated “going back to the stone age.” The article didn’t once consider the possibility that the destruction to the natural environment is not so much the result of “civilinsanity” (as Rosemont called it) as it is *capitalist exploitation*, and most IWW members argue that a world devoid of wage slavery would be much closer to a utopian vision of a sustainable society than a stone age, hunter-gatherer existence (which with a world population of billions would be utterly destroyed in a manner of months).



Rosemont’s interview of Roger Featherstone *did* address some of the issues he neglected to bring up in his own article. Featherstone emphasized that Earth First! had been inspired by the early history of the IWW:

²⁵ “Workers and Wilderness”, by Franklin Rosemont, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

“We admire the IWW spirit, sense of humor, art and music; its direct action tactics; its unwillingness to buy into the political scene; its no-compromise attitude and, most-importantly, its guts. I think the spirit of the EF! movement today would make Bill Haywood and Joe Hill smile and say ‘right on!’ some of the tactics we use are borrowed directly from the IWW: our ‘silent agitators,’ our songbook, and even monkeywrenching itself came from the IWW.”²⁶

Featherstone properly argued that the wilderness preservation would be a boon to workers, as restoration jobs were far more labor intensive than strip-mining and clear-cutting. Featherstone envisioned Earth First! as something of a union for the species affected by corporate destruction to their habitats, and agreed that the IWW and Earth First! needed to educate each other and work jointly on common interests. Unfortunately, however, Featherstone also betrayed the same lack of class consciousness displayed by Dave Foreman:

“The guy cutting old-growth redwood for the Maxxam corporation is just as guilty of rape as is the corporate raider who engineered Maxxam’s takeover of Pacific Lumber. Well maybe not to the same degree, but still guilty...workers aren’t hurt by tree-spiking, but by mill-owners who don’t maintain their equipment to protect the safety of those working for them.”²⁷

While this might have described true believers in TEAM, it nowhere near resembled the attitudes of Kelly Bettiga, Pete Kayes, John Maurer, or Les Reynolds. Featherstone’s thoughts were not even shared by the Earth First!ers actually working directly to fight Maxxam’s takeover of Pacific Lumber.

Randall Restless’ article, no doubt solicited by the *Industrial Worker’s* editorial collective at least limited its critique of “civilization” to technology, but this argument makes no distinction between technologies that are inherently destructive, technologies that are neutral (and whose effects depend upon the user’s intent), and technologies that are beneficial (for example, those that are used to heal some of the damage

done by destructive use of technology). Restless argued (rightfully) that humankind itself was not in immediate danger of extinction (in 1988, at least), but that without biodiversity and a healthy environment, human-centered arguments would be meaningless. Some of Restless’ arguments were quite well thought out, such as his contention that many of the jobs supposedly threatened by Earth First! only existed due to massive federal subsidies, paid for by taxpayers often without their consent (or even their knowledge), and that,

Far too often, “jobs” is used as a catch-all slogan by industrial corporations wishing to shirk environmental regulations, by politicians lobbying for pork-barrel projects, and by Forest Service bigwigs hoping to maximize federal timber allocations. Workers rarely benefit and the profits derived from such exploitation serve only to make the rich richer.²⁸

However, rather than calling for the radical reorganization of the political and economic system that created these unfortunate situations, Restless instead questioned the appropriateness of the jobs themselves, declaring:

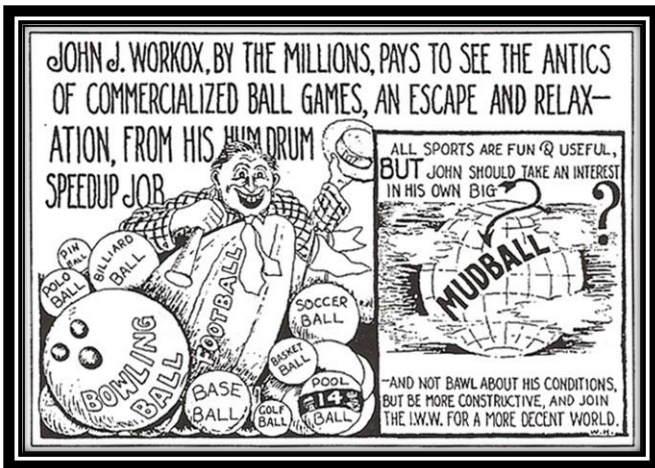
“EF! and other environmental groups are often accused of threatening the livelihood of workers by demanding too harsh and strict controls on industrial polluters and by advocating limits on access to minerals and timber. However, in this age of disappearing wilderness and proliferating pollution, we must analyze jobs in terms of their ecological appropriateness. Is the trashing of another piece of irreplaceable wilderness worth the creation of a few jobs? How many people benefit from the existence of pristine wilderness as opposed to those who benefit from jobs in a mine, or on a timber sale? For how long? We must also ask how many other species will benefit or suffer. Are the jobs in a pulp plant worth the fouling of the air breathed by thousands or millions? Do workers really benefit from such jobs, or does their labor serve only to further empower the bosses, while enmeshing the workers themselves deeper in the morass of industrial society?”²⁹

²⁶ “Earth First! & the IWW: an Interview with Roger Featherstone”, by Franklin Rosemont, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Common Ground”, by Randall Restless, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

²⁹ Ibid.



These were legitimate points in a limited ecological context, but Restless never once questioned whether or not the jobs *themselves* under a radically reorganized political and economic system, founded certainly on the ethics championed by Earth First! as well as the IWW, might in fact be sustainable. For example, in theory at least, the workers could gain control of a pulp mill and redesign it so that its effluents were minimized or eliminated altogether using different technologies.

Following Malthusian dogma, however, Restless suggested that the threats to other species were the result of the human species being “over successful”, never elaborating on what that comment meant and certainly not arguing against employing class exploitation being the primary cause. While it is likely that Restless was not in favor of famine and pestilence to control the human population (and to be certain, even Dave Foreman wasn’t necessarily advocating this), without clarifying statements, one could be lead to believe otherwise. And Restless’ advice to workers seeking to preserve the endangered wilderness, while well meaning, were limited to starting recycling programs in the workplace, monkeywrenching (but no mention was made of incorporating such tactics into the strategy of building workers power through class struggle unionism), whistle blowing, and/or quitting one’s job. Certainly most of these suggestions were useful to a limited degree, but by themselves, they alone would not bring about the societal changes needed to provide an alternative to the rule of capital.

By contrast, IWW member Barbara Hansen, who actually lived in timber country in rural Oregon provided some of the most useful discussion on the potential links that could be forged between Earth First! and the IWW:

“Media here in the Northwest likes to portray ‘workers’ as people whose interests are totally at odds with ‘ecologists.’ Out-of-work mill-rats are encouraged to blame their troubles on the city-bred backpacker’s desire to roll out an alpine sleeping bag in pristine wilderness on week-ends. Convoys of log trucks circle the state capital, protesting wilderness preservation measures... Workers are being ‘sacrificed’ to conservation.

“Such a portrayal of the ‘worker’ should be profoundly insulting to the people whose livelihoods depend on forest products... It’s not hard to see that even given full license to clear-cut every last old-growth forest, there are only a few years left of jobs to be had out of the Northwest woods. Most loggers and forest-product workers aren’t going to retire from those occupations, and the family businesses are not going to be passed on, no matter what conservation measures are taken.

“Still the media continues to pump out the line of Jobs vs. Ecology... in the interest of fooling the working majority into allowing the U.S. Forest Service to hand over the last of our public woodlands to the corporate few for final exploitation...

“What the timber industry spokesmen are not saying is that most of the logs hauled out of Northwest forest are not headed for Northwest mills, but are shipped directly from our ports to Asia, where they will be processed. Northwest mills continue to cut back and close down, not because the ecologists won’t let them have raw materials, but because it is the corporate choice to export rather than invest in the new equipment and skill necessary to produce finished lumber to the metric specifications and special requirements the Asian markets demand. No, we are only told that if we don’t destroy the last of our irreplaceable natural habitat—the great trees that are the vital heart of our region—one thousand people will go on the dole. We are not told that only a little capital outlay by the industry could produce many more than the 1,000 jobs lost to ‘ecology.’...

“Meanwhile, too, our landfills continue to be engorged with methane producing wastepaper garbage that has forced complete evacuation of more than one nearby community, and more and more living trees are turned into pulp to print the very newspapers that tell us that

forest depletion is inevitable and necessary to the economy.”³⁰

Whether favorable or not, the May 1988 issue of the *Industrial Worker* made an impact and generated a lot of responses by its readership from IWW members (and some Earth Firsters as well). Most of the letters were positive, and indicated that the issue was well received and generated positive interest in the IWW.³¹ Other comments were more critical, such as those of Arthur J. Miller, who pointed out:

Earth First! is just one organization among many that are radical environmentalist. Many of us in the IWW and the larger labor movement have advocated and organized around environmentalism on the job. Though most would call this organizing around “health and safety issues,” it is important to point out that the workers are always the front line when it comes to exposure to the hazards produced in today’s world. The movement is much larger than Earth First! and includes a lot of working class environmentalists within the labor movement. For instance, the United Farm Workers’ fight against pesticides not only fought for the workers and their families, but also for the health of the entire community...

“The difference between the IWW and Earth First! is that we want to bring about a social revolution where the workers seize their tools and instill social responsibility into production. We have an answer to the problem; we don’t just fight the problem. Earth First! can monkeywrench forever and not come any closer to defeating the enemy. The enemy is mass capitalist industrialization which has no regard for the Earth or for human rights. The IWW is out to organize the only group that has the power to win: the workers. I see no other way of doing it.”³²

One writer, Vera L. Ostrowski’s, did finally mention the controversial statements made by Foreman, Abbey, and Manes, stating:

“I’m surprised to see the IWW so friendly to the Earth First! bunch. Judging from what I’ve read about it elsewhere, EF! sounds like a pretty obnoxious organization. Last year one of the Chicago papers said that EF! openly advocates terrorism, and that its violent tactics have severely injured many workers in the lumber industry. According to other sources, EF! is a white supremacist group, and its leaders officially support the AIDS virus as a way of reducing overpopulation. This is pretty weird stuff! But the material you printed was very appealing, so I’m confused. Have you guys heard any of these rumors? Are any of the charges true?”³³

The editors assured everyone that the charges were false, and, to emphasize that point, Franklin Rosemont wrote a very lengthy defense of Earth First! asserting that none of the latter’s negative reputation was deserved. In Rosemont’s statement (again, written under the pseudonym “Lobo X-99”) began with a little name dropping, pointing out that Earth First! already had many supporters within the IWW, including Utah Phillips, who had called the radical environmental organization “the IWW of the environmental movement,” as if that would somehow address the criticisms against it. Rosemont repeated the assertion that Earth First! was a movement, not an organization, having no members or constitution. He then went on to claim that the May issue had generated much interest, that many had contacted the IWW from both Earth First! and the IWW expressing interest in joint campaigns, and that a wave of new IWW memberships and subscriptions to the *Industrial Worker* had been created by it.³⁴ There was no demonstrative way to prove the veracity of this statement, but the likelihood was that it was mostly true, but one could just as easily question whether or not a sudden spike in membership or newspaper subscriptions was an adequate metric for determining the strength of the potential Earth First! – IWW alliance.

Rosemont conceded that Earth First! had its shortcomings, particularly the aforementioned lack of structure:

³⁰ “Spotted Owls and Jobless Workers”, by Barbara Hansen, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

³¹ For example, see the letters by (1) Louis Bowman; (2) Albert the Alligator; (3) Denise Mayotte and Sal Salerno; (4) Robert F. Mueller (an Earth Firster living in Virginia who had written several articles for the *Earth First Journal* exposing the anti environment and anti-labor practices of Coors); (5) E.G. Nasser; and (6) Melissa Roberts, Rick Beck, Allan Anger, and Barb Hansen, *Industrial Worker*, September 1988.

³² Letter to the editor, by Arthur J. Miller, *Industrial Worker*, September 1988.

³³ Letter to the editor, by Vera L. Ostrowski, *Industrial Worker*, September 1988.

³⁴ “Earth First! vs. the Rumor Mongers”, by Lobo X-99, *Industrial Worker*, September 1988.

Earth First!'s open-ended, non-hierarchical, anarchistic, disorganizational form of non-organization undoubtedly has its strengths, but it also has its weaknesses. Structured political organizations usually have a hierarchical leadership, a carefully spelled-out platform, a rigorously controlled official organ aimed at the public to promote this platform, and some sort of internal bulletin in which card-carrying, dues-paying members can air new proposals and disagreements. Earth First!, however, makes no distinction between the internal and public lives.³⁵

The rigid type of organization that Rosemont seemed to be alluding to, however, was more akin to sectarian left parties than the IWW, but that distinction was not made in his statement. Rosemont also warned readers about taking statements made in the *Earth First! Journal* as official policy, stating:

There is no better way to learn about Earth First! than to read the *Earth First! Journal*...but don't make the mistake of thinking that everything you read in it is "official EF! policy"! As is clearly and prominently stated in 10-point type in each and every issue, the *Earth First! Journal* is not and has never pretended to be any more than "an independently owned newspaper within the broad Earth First! movement."³⁶

Next, Rosemont disputed the charges that (1) Earth First! was anti-worker (a claim that was indeed false, Dave Foreman's and Roger Featherstone's poorly chosen words notwithstanding); (2) that Earth First!'s advocacy of monkeywrenching injures workers (a claim that is technically false, but, as was the case in the incident involving George Alexander, was a matter of degrees); (3) Earth First! was a white supremacist organization (certainly false); (4) That Earth First! was nativist (again false, since Ed Abbey's and Dave Foreman's views on immigration were not shared by most Earth Firstlers); (5) That Earth First! considered AIDS a good thing (Miss Ann Thropy's tactless attempted dark humor was not meant to be taken seriously); and (6) that Earth First! was Malthusian.³⁷ Unlike the rest, this last claim was difficult to dispute,

especially given the fact that the *Earth First! Journal* sold a bumper sticker (in addition to numerous other items) that proclaimed "Malthus Was Right!"³⁸ To his credit, Rosemont admitted that "none of this was meant to suggest that the Earth First! movement is free of very real problems," and he made it a point to call Ed Abbey on the carpet for his comments on immigration and the urban poor that could easily have been interpreted as racist.³⁹

Rosemont's defense of Earth First! elicited several responses, including a very lengthy diatribe by Chris Shillock in the pages of the *Libertarian Labor Review*, an anarcho-syndicalist publication edited by a small collective, including IWW members Sam Dolgoff and Jon Bekken (who were both highly critical of Earth First!). Shillock declared:

"Anarchists particularly felt a kinship. Earth First!'s uncompromising defense of the environment and their rejection of government stewardship of the wilderness echoed our own experience of the futility of working within the system. Their use of direct action was taken from our own history. Their full-blooded all-out enthusiasm for nature promised a robust, holistic radicalism..."

"...(unfortunately) not only is Earth First! hostile to any meaningful social analysis, but it is freighted with so much nationalist and racist baggage as to make them obnoxious to any worker.

"Earth First!'s philosophy, also known as Deep Ecology, is set out in a book of that name by Bill Devall and George Sessions...It borrows from Zen Buddhism, Native American religions and from Heidegger, but is based on an immediate intuition of the 'wilderness experience'..."

"Deep Ecologists condemn other social and scientific views as 'anthropocentric' in contrast to their 'biocentric' outlook. This epithet is hurled throughout the pages of their journal, *Earth First!*, to clinch a point or to dismiss opponents..."

³⁵ Lobo X-99, September 1988, op. cit.

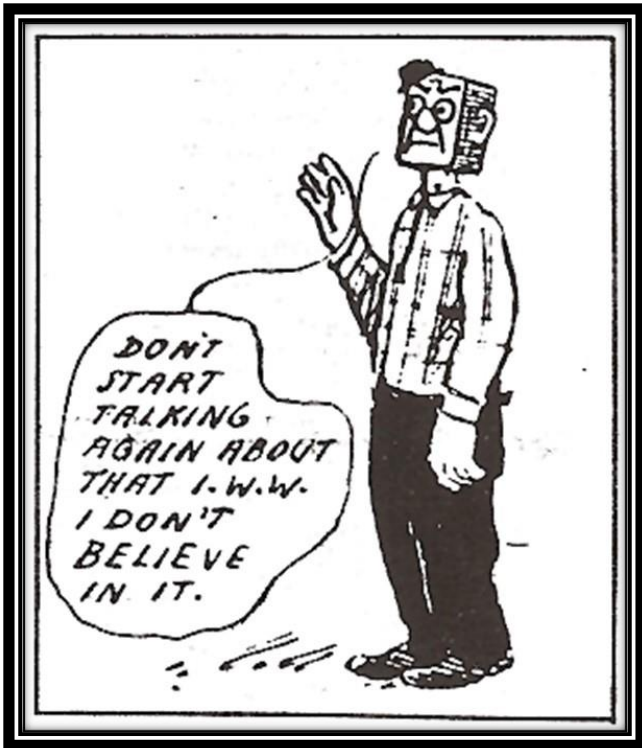
³⁶ Lobo X-99, September 1988, op. cit. Emphasis in the original.

³⁷ Lobo X-99, September 1988, op. cit.

³⁸ "The Controversy that Wouldn't Die: Workers' First!", letter to the editor by Louis Prisco, *Industrial Worker*, January 1989 and *Libertarian Labor Review*, Winter 1989. This publication was renamed *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* in 2000.

³⁹ Lobo X-99, September 1988, op. cit.

“Instead their concept of ‘biocentric egalitarianism’ turns the corner into a Malthusian blind alley shadowed with dark visions of a vengeful Earth lashing back at the species that uses her. Malthusianism has always been a pseudoscience serving the need of right wing ideology. In the Nineteenth Century, Social Darwinists used Malthus’ simplistic predictions of a dwindling food supply to justify doing nothing to alleviate the misery of the poor. Variations of this philosophy have been used in the Twentieth Century to buttress everything from eugenics to Third World starvation.”⁴⁰



Shillock went on to critique a second defense of Earth First! written by deep ecologist Kirk Patrick Sale⁴¹, suggesting that the latter’s overflowing hatred and scorn for mining, ranching, and logging corporations which exploit the wilderness “is closer to right wing populism than working class analysis.”, and reminded readers that Dave Foreman railed against “an ossified leftist worldview that blames everything on corporations.” Shillock also critiqued Rosemont’s defense of Earth First!, in particular also focusing on the latter’s structurelessness.⁴² Shillock concluded by stating:

“There is no problem with fellow workers joining Earth First! to achieve certain common and short-term ends. It is also possible that Dave Foreman and his Tucson group represent a minority view within Earth First!. However, they are the central group, and the one whose views were presented in the *Industrial Worker*. We have no business using our central publication to spread their propaganda.”⁴³

On the other side of the coin, Ed Abbey took issue with the Rosemont’s critique of his statements on immigration, arguing profusely that his stances were not intended to be nationalistic or racist.⁴⁴ But Abbey’s rebuttal was not enough to convince other IWW members, particularly the membership of the San Francisco General Membership of the IWW (which was located within a day’s automobile journey to the North Coast), who passed a strongly worded resolution “applauding the courage and ingenuity” of Earth First! and its use of direct action to defend the earth from destruction, but also challenging the lack of accountability by the “leadership” of the same and questioning the *Industrial Worker*’s uncritical articles on Earth First!.⁴⁵ Bay Area IWW member Louis Prisco was especially incensed, calling out the *Industrial Worker* editors for blatant violations of democratic principles as well as chiding Earth First! for its defense of Malthus—pointing out that even the primitivist leaning *Fifth Estate* had done the same thing—and echoing the growing chorus of critics of Ed Abbey for his aforementioned, questionable statements.⁴⁶

Ed Abbey responded, describing Prisco’s statements as “slanders” and (for no apparent reason) compared the latter to Murray Bookchin, calling both “Marxoid Dogmatists” (which is untrue as both Prisco and Bookchin considered themselves anarchists). Although he didn’t state it directly, Abbey’s defense of his positions were certainly Malthusian and indeed, *quite* racist (Abbey suggested that immigrants from third world nations, particularly Latin America had a tendency to breed rapidly, and his comments

⁴⁰ Shillock, Winter 1989, op. cit.

⁴¹ “Deep Ecology and its Critics”, by Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Nation*, May 14, 1988.

⁴² Shillock, Winter 1989, op. cit.

⁴³ Shillock, Winter 1989, op. cit.

⁴⁴ “Responses to Earth First! vs. the Rumor Mongers”, *Industrial Worker*, October 1988.

⁴⁵ “Resolution by the San Francisco Bay Area General Membership Branch of the IWW”, signed by Jess Grant, *Industrial Worker*, January 1989.

⁴⁶ Prisco, op. cit..

that Mormons did also didn't mitigate the prejudicial and unscientific basis for his claims).⁴⁷ Abbey insisted:

“[Marxoid Dogmatists] persist in their traditional beliefs that some kind of social reorganization, or more industry, technology and growth, or improvement in moral standards, can somehow solve all of our political, economic, environmental, personal and public difficulties. But this is not thinking; this is merely a reflex doctrinaire response to problems that are genuinely novel and more complex than any human culture has had to confront before...

“My real crime, therefore, is raising heretodox questions that require painful thinking—or even more painful rethinking. Ideologues have gone beyond thinking, and they fear pain. Therefore they react to challenge not by honest and workmanlike intellectual debate but by relapsing at once into the easy habit of name-calling.”⁴⁸

However it was *Ed Abbey* (not Bookchin or Prisco) who had engaged in name calling, and Malthusianism was about as rigid and ideological as anything suggested by either Bookchin or Prisco (both of whom were more than eager to challenge most of the dogma issued by actual “Marxoid Dogmatists”).

Angry readers responded to Abbey, pointing out several fallacies in his thinking (including some points that undermined his seemingly “biocentric” perspectives). Steve Nelson, an IWW member from Chicago, wrote:

“Mr. Abbey claims that his total opposition to immigration is not racist because the majority of working-class Americans are opposed to ‘illegal’ immigration. This proves nothing. As Marx pointed out, the dominant ideas of any class society are those of its ruling class. This

means, that in periods of a downturn in class struggle, workers will tend to accept the racist, sexist arguments put forward by the reactionary bastards who run this, and every other, country. It is our responsibility to counter these ideas with solid, working-class politics... Only the solidarity of ‘foreign’ and ‘native’ labor can win. All immigration controls are inherently racist and serve to strengthen the capitalist state...

“Only Stalinists and liberals drool over the promise of bigger and better industry. As revolutionaries, we call for an end to the enormous waste of resources and the overproduction of goods that results from capitalist competition. While we cannot retreat to a pre-capitalist utopia, we can avoid the deepening cesspool of capitalism. Wealth and technology, in the hands of the working-class, will be used to promote and defend life, not to produce more wealth for parasites. Mr. Abbey’s pessimism is a shoddy addition to the tradition of the IWW and the socialist movement in general.”⁴⁹

In his defense, Ed Abbey was no reactionary. It would be more accurate to say that he was ignorant of many issues, but at times, even he was capable of lucid, class analysis, as evidenced by his review of the book *Fear at Work: Job Blackmail, Labor, and the Environment*, by Richard Kazis and Richard L. Grossman in the *Beltane* / May 1, 1988 issue of the *Earth First! Journal*, where he spoke favorably of Earth First!ers and unions (such as the OCAW) making alliances over common issues, oddly enough, at almost exactly the same time the IWW started the discussion on combining efforts with Earth First! to begin with. One can only guess how Abbey would have responded to the ongoing criticisms from the IWW, because he passed away on March 14, 1989, while they were still circulating.⁵⁰

The most frustrating aspect of the apparently unbridgeable chasm between Earth First! and the IWW was that the two most adversarial factions had little direct connection to the struggles actually taking place in Humboldt and Mendocino Counties. Even the *Earth First! Journal* took little notice of King’s and Cherney’s attempts to build bridges with the workers on the North Coast. The Wobblies critical of Earth

⁴⁷ “Edward Abbey Strikes Back”, letter to the editor, by Ed Abbey, *Industrial Worker*, March 1989; It must be pointed out that Bookchin – for all of his faults and there are many, including his tendency to engage in nasty responses to his critics and his dubious dismissal of class struggle near the end of his life—has received a rather unfair blanket condemnation from many Earth First!ers, including Judi Bari, despite the fact that he stated, for the record, that he considered Earth First! “among the most courageous people in the environmental movement today, that I earnestly support their efforts to preserve what little is left of our original habitat, and I reject any attempt to characterize them as ‘terrorists,’ ‘fascists,’ and the like.”, as stated in both the *Earth First! Journal*, August 1, 1990 and the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, September 19, 1990.

⁴⁸ Abbey, March 1989, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Letter to the editor by Steve Nelson, *Industrial Worker*, May 1989.

⁵⁰ The *Earth First! Journal*’s *Beltane* / May 1989 edition included a special, four-page pull-out tribute to the late author.

First! meanwhile focused mainly on Dave Foreman's and Ed Abbey's less than sympathetic attitudes towards timber workers which were largely colored by pro-management front groups like TEAM and WECARE. For their own part, Franklin Rosemont did not report on Cherney and King anywhere in the two *Industrial Worker* issues covering Earth First! at all either! *Indirectly*, the discussion had been sparked by the injury to George Alexander due to a spiked log and inadequate safety conditions in L-P's Cloverdale mill, but the context of that incident likewise wasn't discussed. An organizing effort by the IWW would have been most beneficial in northwestern California, but no mention of the IWW's proposed alliance with Earth First! was made in either the Beltane (May 1), 1988 *Earth First! Journal* or the three issues that followed it.⁵¹ The two sides were focusing on all of the wrong areas, and on all of the worst aspects of Earth First! and timber workers rather than the far greater common ground that actually existed.

All was not lost however. Two IWW organizing drives began at the environmental canvass operations of Greenpeace in Seattle and SANE in Oregon, but both drives soon petered out.⁵² The IWW would organize several recycling shops in Berkeley, but these took place later. Finally, in November, Earth First! noticed that the IWW had been discussing an alliance with them, and there was a good reason for this. Despite all of the wrong turns and acrimonious debate, the two were indeed in the process of uniting for real, right where that combination was needed most, in the redwood forests of California. There was new Earth First! organizer and IWW member leading it. Her name was Judi Bari.

⁵¹ The *Earth First! Journal* is published on the pagan holidays of northern Europe, specifically, Brigid (February 2), Eostar (basis of the word "Easter"; March 20 / Vernal Equinox), Beltane (May 1 / May Day), Litha (June 21 / Summer Solstice), Lughnasadh (August 1), Mabon (September 22 / Autumnal Equinox), Samhain (November 1), and Yule (December 21 / Winter Solstice). These dates correspond to the seasonal progressions in Earth's northern hemisphere; the equinoxes and solstices are reversed in Earth's southern hemisphere, of course.

⁵² "Seattle Greenpeace Phoners Organize to Resist Management Clamp-Down", *Industrial Worker*, August 1988; "Greenpeace Closes Seattle Phone Bank In Response to IWW Organizing Drive", *Industrial Worker*, September 1988, and "Portland, Oregon Sane Fundraisers Organize IWW Shop", *Industrial Worker*, October 1988.

Earth First! Maid

New lyrics by Darryl Cherney, 1988, based loosely on "Union Maid" by Woodie Guthrie; Tune: "Redwing" by Kerry Mills. Featured on They Sure Don't Make Hippies Like They Used To.

There once was an Earth First! maid,
Who never was afraid,
Of the chainsaw boys with their phallic toys,
And their bulldozers that cut the grade.
The one thing that she liked,
Was a tree that had been spiked,
And when the security goons come round,
She never could be found.

chorus

*No you can't scare me I'm working for the forest,
I'm working for the forest, I'm working for the forest,
No you can't scare me I'm working for the forest,
I'm working for the forest, 'till the day I die.*

Her heart would really ache,
When they'd plant a survey stake,
So when night would fall, she'd pull them all,
And chuck them in the middle of a lake.
Her battery powered drill,
Made a sound so sweet and shrill,
And as their radiators leaked,
The engines would be tweaked.

Chorus

The one thing she could trust,
To turn a logging truck to rust,
Was a can of coke right down the choke,
One turn of the key and watch it bust,
She'll defend her mother dear,
From the rapist profiteers,
'Cause to give up now would be the worst,
When she knows the Earth comes first.

Chorus