

A Review of 'Eco Terror: The Violent Agenda to Save Nature'

Robert McTague

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Arnold, Ron. *Eco Terror: The Violent Agenda to Save Nature - The World of the Unabomber*. Bellevue, WA: Free Enterprise Press, 1997.

Terrorism for the sake of rescuing the ecological environment is a relatively recent phenomenon on the American political landscape. Shortly after the First Earth Day in 1970, isolated incidences of ecological terrorism (or ecoterrorism) began to occur, largely in the western United States. At first ecoterrorism was sporadic and unsystematic, but by the mid-1980s it had rapidly grown as a destructive force. Today some organizations, such as Earth First, the Earth Liberation Front, the Animal Rights Militia and the Animal Liberation Front, have all but institutionalized this terrorism. Arnold's book provides an exposé of the dozens of groups and thousands of individuals who blur the lines between legitimate special interest politics and underground activity. For example, in chapter 6, we watch the legal group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (P.E.T.A.), acting as an extremely reliable mouthpiece for illegal Animal Liberation Front violence. Overall, this work serves as an alarm and a call to recognize ecoterrorism as a well-entrenched and ever growing threat to civil society and the rule of law.

Although the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski is prominently featured, he is by no means the study's central concern. Only the first three chapters are centered around Kaczynski while the final four chapters consider the broader context of ecoterrorism. Arnold demonstrates that the Unabomber, as a serial murderer, is merely the worst case scenario in a growing trend. Generally, the Unabomber drama serves as an effective framing device to expose the ideology behind a ruthless environmental agenda. The Unabomber, along with radical environmentalists, shares a belief in deep ecology, which "gives humans no central place in the universe, much less their industrial civilization." (p. 7)

Against the popular notion that Kaczynski acted as an isolated individual, Arnold uncovers reliable evidence to suggest that Kaczynski took his cue from radical environmentalists. The most damning evidence linking Kaczynski to outside organizations is that he located his last two victims in Earth First associated journals. In 1990, the underground journal *Live Wild or Die*, run by and paid for by Earth Firsters, printed an "Eco-Fucker Hit List" targeting 100 organizations who supported the wise use movement (a pro-industry group). Kaczynski used a specialized list of the 11 most despised organizations to select the California Forestry Association for his April 1995 bombing, which killed Gil Murray. This list, found in Kaczynski's cabin, contained outdated contact person and organization names that Kaczynski unknowingly used. Also found in his cabin was an *Earth First* journal that erroneously criticized the Burson-Marsteller ad agency for helping to restore Exxon's image after the Valdez disaster. Kaczynski responded by sending the agency a mail bomb that killed Thomas Mosser in December 1994, his second killing indirectly implicating Earth First.

Like Kaczynski, many radical environmentalists feel that our present industrialized civilization is beyond repair because of the ecological problems it has created. Chapter 2 skillfully analyzes Kaczynski's *Manifesto* as typical of radical environmentalists who

tend to misguidedly seek utopias somewhere in history before the industrial revolution. In chapter 3 Arnold aptly shows the striking similarities between Kaczynski's *Manifesto* and Earth First co-founder Dave Foreman's *Confessions of an EcoWarrior*. In chapters 6 and 7, Arnold examines how biocentric environmentalists, who grant the earth priority over humanity, anticipate an apocalypse that will ultimately destroy human life. Since radical biocentrists blame industrialization for destroying their most valued substance, the earth, many do not hesitate to "alleviate" this problem through destructive actions against perpetrators and their property. Ecoterrorist techniques include everything from pipe bombs, tree spikes, livestock slaughter, and property damage to death threats, "liberation" of laboratory animals, burning select businesses, and "monkeywrenching" or sabotaging industries that use nature. All told, these activities have cost much loss of life and countless millions in business losses just within the last 30 years – with no end in sight.

In general, Arnold's work suffers from some of the defects inherent in a journalistic format. Frequently he gives factual descriptions of events, but neglects to include much probing analysis. A lack of scholarly interpretation is especially glaring in chapter 1, which covers the Unabomber's last bombing, and chapter 4, which details hundreds of ecoterrorist actions. Also troubling is that the non-linear and non-chronological structure produces unnecessary repetition of subjects from slightly different angles. On the other hand, Arnold's extensive research, which mainly includes newspapers, government reports, court documents, television transcripts, journals and personal interviews, makes this study an essential source on radical environmentalism and ecoterrorism. In addition, Arnold's activism as a leader of the wise use movement adds an intensely personal touch that contributes to a consistently lively tone. In this introduction to the world of ecoterrorism, Arnold's preference for fact over interpretation makes for a well-documented book packed with details but short on theory.

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