

Ted Kaczynski's Correspondence with Donald R. Liddick

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Donald's Preamble

In order to further assess the future of the animal rights and radical environmental movements, I solicited responses from two individuals [...] well-positioned to draw conclusions about the likelihood of success for radical environmentalism [...] In 1978 Kaczynski began an eighteen-year one-man terror campaign—his mail bombs killed three people and injured twenty-three others. His last two victims, both of whom died, could be perceived as anti-environmentalists. Thomas Mosser was an executive at Burson-Marsteller, whom Kaczynski claimed in an anonymous letter to the *New York Times* was responsible for helping to clean up the image of the Exxon Corporation after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. Gilbert Murray, the president of the California Forestry Association, was also killed by a Kaczynski bomb (although the target had been William Dennison of the Timber Association of California). Ron Arnold, author of *Ecoterror*, documents evidence that suggests Kaczynski was influenced by Earth First! and chose at least one of his victims from *Live Wild or Die!* magazine's "EcoFucker hit list." Although Arnold cites a media account where Kaczynski is said to have voiced support for the 1998 ELF arson of a ski lodge in Vail, Colorado, in his letter to me Kaczynski disavows all connections to the radical environmentalists and even states that groups like ELF should be resisted (though not for the reasons offered by the law enforcement community or private commercial interests). Kaczynski does share with green anarchists and some radical environmentalists a desire for the downfall of modern technological civilization. At any rate, his background qualifies him to offer an informed opinion on the future of radical underground environmental activism.¹

1. Letter Extract from Donald R. Liddick to Ted

1. The stated objectives of groups like ALF and ELF is to cause economic damage to organizations that harm the environment and non-human animals. I'm interested in what you see as the long-range goal for those who participate in direct actions in defense of the Earth. Where do you see things going for the environmental and animal rights movements? Is there any hope for your movement, and the planet? Ultimately, how do you see things ending up?
2. How did you become interested in the animal rights/environmental movement? Tell me something about your personal background (education, family, political beliefs, influences, etc.). Please feel free to elaborate.
3. This question is hypothetical, and should in no way reflect any activities you have participated in, or plan to participate in. I am asking for your opinion—something that may be freely expressed and is protected by the First Amendment

¹ Arnold, *Ecoterror*; Long, *Animal Rights*.

to the United States Constitution. ... Do you feel that illegal direct actions are an acceptable way of trying to change behaviors relating to the environment and non-human animals? If you do feel that illegal actions are appropriate, how do you justify (in your own words) actions that are against the law?

2. Letter from Ted to Donald R. Liddick

I trust you've received my note dated December 16, 2005. Here I will give you my answers to the three questions that you sent me with your letter postmarked November 7, 2005.

First I need to state my conviction that destructiveness toward the natural world is built into technological civilization. It may be feasible to palliate that destructiveness to a limited extent, but in the long run there will be no way of controlling it. Consequently, wild nature, or the biosphere (or whatever you choose to call it), cannot be saved by anything short of the dissolution of technological civilization. It follows that if we want to save the biosphere, then the only really effective actions we can take are those designed to promote the breakdown of technological civilization.

Of course, every civilization breaks down eventually, and technological civilization will do so too. But if technological civilization lasts long enough, then there will be nothing left after it is gone. On the other hand, if technological civilization breaks down soon enough, much will be saved. So the objective must be to bring about the collapse of technological civilization at the earliest possible moment. This point of view underlies my answers to your questions.

To answer your questions in order:

1. (a) You ask what I "see as the long-range goal for those who participate in direct actions in defense of the Earth." I take it you are asking about the long-range goal of ELF, ALF, and those who subscribe approximately to their ideology. Since I am not one of these people, I am not qualified to state their goal for them. But from what I know of this ideological sector, I won't be surprised if most of your respondents state goals that are fuddled, or unrealistic, or both. I also think that the *stated* goals of people who belong to this sector do not necessarily coincide with their *real* goals. I don't doubt that these people *believe* that their stated goals are their real goals, but I would argue that in many cases their real goal is not to save the environment or to protect animals but to satisfy their own psychological needs. See the discussion of leftist psychology in the so-called "Unabomber Manifesto," *Industrial Society and Its Future*.

The foregoing notwithstanding, I speculate that among people who carry out illegal actions in defense of the environment (*not* among animal-rights activists), the stated goals of at least a significant minority do coincide roughly with their real goals. I base this conjecture on the fact that there are very good reasons, connected with the welfare of all human beings, for protecting our environment. The system's response to

environmental problems has been feeble at best, so it is only to be expected that some people should grow sufficiently worried, frustrated, or angry to become “extremists” in defense of the environment.

I would also speculate that the people who work “in the field,” that is, the people who repeatedly take the risk of engaging personally in illegal actions, have (on average) a stronger commitment to accomplishing practical results and are less interested in ideology than are activists who adopt primarily political methods. A relative lack of interest in ideology would suggest a more genuine commitment to defending the environment; people seeking mainly to satisfy their own psychological needs would be more likely to develop elaborate ideological rationalizations.

(b) You ask where I “see things going for the environmental and animal-rights movements.” Here I assume you are referring not to the legal, conventional movements as represented for example by the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, or the Humane Society, but to the extreme movements represented by ELF and ALF.

I don’t have any detailed knowledge of these movements, and even if I did I wouldn’t venture to make any *specific* predictions about their future. In general terms I predict that these movements will never accomplish anything substantial. The extreme environmental movement may contribute to some palliation of modern society’s abuse of the environment, but will not have a decisive effect. The extreme animal-rights movement probably will succeed only to the extent that a tendency toward more humane treatment of animals may already be [sic] predetermined by powerful social trends in modern society. There certainly is in our society a long-term trend in the direction of a more compassionate attitude toward animals. Even conservatives advocate more humane treatment of animals. See George F. Will’s column in *Newsweek*, 7/18/05, page 66. It’s true that there are economic forces that push in the opposite direction, and I suppose it’s conceivable, though not likely, that the extreme animal-rights movement might tilt the balance in favor of humane treatment and against economic incentives for ruthless exploitation of animals. But even if this happens it will not be of decisive importance for the future of the world.

I should add at this point that I’m not particularly interested in animal rights. Of course, I do not like to know, for example, that many chickens spend their lives in cages so small that the birds can’t even turn around, but this is not a matter of special concern to me. As I’ve already implied, I don’t think the question of animal rights will be of much significance for the overall development of modern society in the years to come.

So, in summary, I see the environmental and animal-rights movements as futile, at least with respect to any issues that are of fundamental importance for the future of the world. As I indicated at the beginning of this letter, *the* fundamental issue is the survival or collapse of technological civilization.

(c) You ask whether I see any hope for the extreme environmental and animal rights movements. No, I do not. The reason why I see the futility of these movements as incurable is that they are under the domination of what the Unabomber Manifesto calls

“the left,” or what some others have called “the adversary culture.” (See Paul Hollander’s book, *The Survival of the Adversary Culture*). Roughly, “the left” comprises people who are fixated on such issues as racism, sexism, neocolonialism, gay rights, animal rights, indigenous people’s rights, etc., etc. These people like to think of themselves as rebels or revolutionaries, but they wouldn’t really want to overturn the existing structure of society. They have in fact achieved a relatively comfortable adjustment to the present society, which allows them to satisfy their psychological needs by playing at rebellion as long as they stay within certain limits (of course, not all of them do so), and as long as they espouse causes that are consistent with the well-being of technological society. Unquestionably, technological society is benefited by the suppression of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., and by moderate measures for protection of the environment. On the other hand, if technological civilization collapses, many, many people will die, and the survivors will have to live under conditions that will seem exceedingly harsh to those accustomed to the soft life of modern society. In the struggle for survival, no one will care about the leftists’ favorite issues, such as gender equality, kindness to animals, or the right of homosexuals to marry.

Thus the leftists would have nothing to gain, and a great deal to lose, through the collapse of technological civilization, and most leftists— even including many of those who like to *talk* about such a collapse, would not actually want to see technological civilization break down. (“When the old order begins to fall apart, many of the vociferous men of words, who prayed so long for the day, are in a funk. The first glimpse of the face of anarchy frightens them out of their wits.” Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*). Furthermore, the values of the left are essentially the soft values of modern society: women, homosexuals, and animals are to be protected, poor people are to be cared for, workers are to be given easy conditions and decent wages, etc., etc. A movement dominated by these soft values could never take the frankly brutal and reckless measures needed to bring down the technoindustrial system, nor would such a movement be prepared to accept the harsh consequences of the collapse of the system.

No doubt there are some individuals, and possibly even whole factions in the environmental/animal rights movement who genuinely do want to see the collapse of technological civilization, who would be willing to accept the frightening consequences of such a collapse, and might even be prepared to take the brutal measures needed to bring it about. But scattered individuals and small factions cannot constitute an effective revolutionary force as long as they remain part of a movement that is dominated by the left and its values.

The revolutionary pretensions of the left are good for a laugh. What isn’t so funny is the fact that the existence of the left serves to impede the emergence of a *real* revolutionary movement. Leftists love causes— *any* causes, as long as they don’t have a specifically right-wing character. So as soon as any movement of resistance begins to form, leftists come swarming to it in droves until the movement becomes swamped with leftists, is absorbed into the “adversary culture,” and is thereby rendered ineffectual.

The history of Earth First! provides a nice example of this phenomenon. Martha F. Lee has documented the process in her book, *Earth First!: Environmental Apocalypse*.

Thus, those who are seriously interested in saving wild nature must rigorously separate themselves from the left—that includes separating themselves from ELF, ALF, the green anarchists, the anarchoprimitivists, and so forth—and they must form a new movement of their own, which will have to take measures to exclude leftists. The new movement will need to discard the soft values of the left and adopt hard values. It will have to place the highest value on courage, skill, effort, endurance—and on freedom, but not the pampered freedom of the modern man or woman to whom society gives a long leash. Instead, the movement must value the self-reliant freedom of the rugged survivalist, and it will have to *glory* in the hard life to be expected following the dissolution of technological civilization.

(d) You ask how, “ultimately,” I see things ending up. I think I’ve answered that question already: If technological civilization breaks down in the relatively near future, then much will be saved. But if technological civilization lasts too long, then, when it does eventually break down, there will be nothing left to save.

2. (a) You ask how I became interested in the animal-rights/ environmental movement. As I’ve already made clear, I’m not interested in the animal rights/environmental movement, except to the extent that I view it as an adversary to be resisted.

(b) You ask about my “personal background (education, family, political beliefs, influences, etc.)” Education: B.A., mathematics, Harvard, 1962. Ph.D., mathematics, University of Michigan, 1967. Family: working-class to lower middle-class. Political beliefs: If the term “politics” is construed in a narrow sense, then I’m not interested in politics. If the term is more broadly construed, then my political beliefs are those that have already been outlined in this letter. Influences: No comment.

3. (a) You are perhaps a wee bit careless in telling your respondents that their opinions about “illegal direct actions” “may be freely expressed” and are “protected by the First Amendment.” Expressions of opinion about illegal action are protected by the First Amendment only if they do not constitute actual *incitement* of illegal action. See *Yates v. United States*, 354 U.S. 298, 313-334 (1957); *Nowak v. United States*, 356 U.S. 660, 666-67 (1958); *Kingsley Corp. v. Regents of U. of N.Y.*, 360 U.S. 684, 689 (1959); *Scales v. United States*, 367 U.S. 203 (1961); *Noto v. United States*, 367 U.S. 290, 297-98 (1961); *Carroll v. Commissioners of Princess Anne*, 393 U.S. 175, 180 (1968); *Hess v. Indiana*, 414 U.S. 105, 108-09 (1973); *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition*, 535 U.S., 234, 253 (2002). The line between incitement and protected expression of opinion about illegal action is difficult to define precisely, and it won’t be surprising if some of the opinions expressed by your respondents constitute, in the eyes of some people, incitement of illegal action.

Here I will be very careful to avoid incitement, and will stay well within the area protected by the First Amendment.

(b) You ask whether “illegal actions are an acceptable way of trying to change behaviors relating to the environment and nonhuman animals”; I doubt that illegal direct

actions, on the scale currently practiced, are highly effective in changing behaviors related to the environment and nonhuman animals. I do think that illegal direct actions may turn out to be a necessary part of a revolutionary program designed to bring down technological civilization.

(c) You ask how I would justify actions that are against the law. Law is a code of behavior designed to preserve the structure of a given society. If one believes that a society should *not* be preserved, then one has no reason to obey its laws—provided that one is willing to accept the personal risk involved in breaking the law.

The Ted K Archive

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