

THE URBANIZATION OF EARTH FIRST! NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE MOVEMENT

BY BOB GREENBERG

The Minnehaha Free State symbolizes a necessary turn off from the forest road Earth First! has been following for nearly two decades. Grandma Earth is not dying. She is being murdered, and, as Utah Phillips says, the men and women who are murdering her have names and addresses. These are the same people who are exploiting the working poor for profit in the cities, and our struggles are made one through common enemies: the multinational corporations who exploit all life and the rich that own them.

Earth First! must be present on the prairie, in the desert and at the ends of lonely, frozen forest roads to physically stop the destruction. But by also reaching out to the disenfranchised in the city, we can build strong relationships that are critical to organizing a mass movement. While many of us have been victims of state-sponsored brutality and oppression in the forests, residents of cities are often the victims of this same brutality and oppression. Poverty has been criminalized in the city just as efforts are being made to systematically criminalize activities in the forests that save Grandma Earth from the profit-crazed ruling class. From Idaho, where it is quite literally illegal to be an Earth Firster, to the North Coast of California where nonviolent protesters in Congressman Frank Riggs' office had pepper spray applied directly to their eyes, we have the chance to make links between these issues, to bring on a revolution, to set people's wills free and release the grip the State has on everyone's life.

As the year 2000 approaches, each and every one of us needs to think about organizing for this opportunity to destroy the corporate-capitalist hold on power and dream of replacing it with our vision of eco-anarchism, community self-determination, playfulness and industrial collapse. The triumph of creative nonviolence over state-sponsored terrorism would bring freedom of choice and balance to communities once again. There are lessons to be learned from the history of the Black Panthers, MOVE, the American Indian Movement (AIM) and even the White Panther Party. Although each of these movements is unique, understanding their goals and tactics will help us develop useful models

for ecologically-oriented urban campaigns.

Minneapolis has one of the largest urban American Indian populations in the United States, yet federal money goes mostly to the reservations leaving very little assistance granted to the urban Native Americans who are up against systemic discrimination, poverty, police oppression and are struggling to simply survive. In response to this state of affairs, AIM in Minneapolis has created a support network to help the urban American Indian population maintain its culture. AIM works to provide housing, education, social services, security patrol, recreation, job training and placement. They have realized these services are necessary for strengthening a sense of community. AIM helps people on the fringe of society who have been murdered, coerced, or misled into assimilation to realize the power we all wield when we join together towards a common goal. AIM understands it is necessary to make sure people are fed, housed, spiritually inspired, educated, entertained and their culture maintained.

AIM has been vigilant in addressing the issues that define the community, such as spiritual and cultural rediscovery, celebration and ceremony, repatriation of land and the return of human remains and artifacts. The lesson is that people are more likely to be motivated to action if their basic needs are met.

For the first time in an urban area, Earth Firsters in the US have created an ongoing land occupation that works towards realizing these shared goals. The Minnehaha Free State meets people's basic needs, is culturally diverse and provides hope. We have established a sovereign

nation that operates by consensus and have built cross-cultural alliances that have energized and activated many people. Artists and activists from all over the country have visited our community, including Mitch Walking Elk, Robert Hoyt, Casey Neill, ThunderNation, Dennis Banks and Whiteship of Peace from Japan. Free Staters have supported peace activist actions, publicly denounced the bombing of Iraq, supported Mumia, joined protests against police brutality, spoken out at hearings to save the buffalo and participated in Critical Mass bike blockades. We are supporting other struggles and being supported in return.

The powers-that-be could not allow the Minnehaha Free State to survive because of the rebellion, hope, and imagination it inspired; so last December 600 cops raided it, torturing people for acting as if they were in a free country. They tried

our spirits because we were a living symbol to the larger community of the alternative to the homogenized, neatly over-packaged, corporate, consumer culture that is destroying the Earth. We forced them to take the mask of democracy off and expose the face of fascism that truly rules here.

Our experience in Minneapolis has led us to believe it would be wise for all of us to create communities and develop infrastructures that will meet the basic

"If we organize effectively enough we can build the mass movement necessary to incite cultural revolution, de-industrialization, radical redistribution of wealth and peace."

needs of a culture of creative resistance in city neighborhoods throughout the nation. If we build geographically concentrated communities of people who share a common vision, we stand a greater chance of sustaining ourselves through certain state oppression, potential starvation and potentially violent chaos. If we are surrounded by people we love and trust in land-based communities within the city, we will be much more able to respond to the changing conditions of the world. We will be prepared, rather than left reeling and reacting to crisis.

We can join squatters in reclaiming homes to provide housing. We can work with Food not Bombs on their turf, as they have always supported our forests actions. Guerrilla gardeners should reclaim empty city lots, creating beauty and food. Anarcho-punks, artists and radical theatre troops can provide entertainment, supplying not only bread but circuses as well. It is important for our movement to be able to provide for our basic needs if we want to build a brighter future. If we organize effectively and densely enough we can build the mass movement necessary to incite cultural revolution, de-industrialization, radical redistribution of wealth and hopefully bring about peace.

Urban organizing, in conjunction with forest activism, may be Grandma Earth's best bet for survival and our best bet for destroying the control the capitalist patriarchy has over the web of life. We have both the opportunity and the imperative to build these communities. Only with the nurturing and support that true communities like the Minnehaha Free State have to offer will our movement thrive as a source of inspiration and a wellspring of active resistance.



DEAR S#IT FER BRAINZ!

Dear EF!

Answer: A vacation.

Question: What do the yokels in my area of the country call sitting on the front porch with a 6-pack and a bug zapper?

They also get their kicks by running over turtles in the road. But I've got an idea that should curb their penchant for turtle-cakes. Shape mud in the form of a turtle and fill it with large nails. When it dries, disguise it with black, brown and green spray paint. Then place it in the road on the yellow line within 100 feet of a four way stop. That way, no one will be going too fast, and only the jerks wanting to kill a turtle will have to change a tire.

Sincerely,

—MARK LYNCH

Greetings, extend her thanx to all at Earth First! for the support they have continued to give to the Green Belt Movement. We at GBM are grateful to you and thank you for raising awareness of our struggle with the Karura Forest in the *Journal* for Earth First! (Sometimes I feel that one exclamation point is not enough) :-). Thank you.

—MUTA, GREEN BELT MOVEMENT,
NAIROBI, KENYA.

Ted Kaczynski to John Zerzan
November 29, 1998
Dear (John),

Yes; send me a copy of your new book.

Concerning EF!, my suggestion is that the real revolutionaries among them should with-

draw from the existing EF! and form their own movement, which would exclude mere reformers, liberals, leftists, etc. who are afraid of "alienating the middle class." (Imagine how the war against Hitler would have turned out if Allied soldiers had been afraid of "alienating the Nazis.") Such a splinter EF! movement might start small, but I have a feeling that it would grow pretty rapidly.

I suggest that one of the biggest mistakes modern American revolutionaries make is that, in the name of "tolerance," they let anyone and everyone of a vaguely rebellious disposition join their movements. The result is that they get diluted, or even swamped, by large numbers of make-believe revolution-

aries for whom rebellion is only a game. Even if it sounds "intolerant," revolutionaries must form a movement that is exclusive to the extent that it incorporates none but real revolutionaries. Only in this way can the movement have cohesion and the capacity for vigorous action.

Feel free to pass this note on to the editor of the *EF! Journal*. She can publish it if she likes.

Best regards,

—TED KACZYNSKI
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81226-8500.

Dear SFB,

Great to see the "open letter on political division within EF!" I agree with the 75 at the organiz-

ers conference. Those who think that non-violence is always attainable are watching too much tele-tubbie! There's some bad people afoot who will do bad things to you as it is their only means of expression. Are you ready for them? Have you seen the Klan in action when they know the police will not intervene? Seen the video of the Greensboro massacre? We've got some ultra right-wing red necks round these parts who won't hesitate to dish out abuse as the rapture is imminent anyhow! Don't be anyone's punching bag, friends. Ramona Africa stated that accepting violence to one's person is a form of condoning it. She's right!

—FREEBIRD IN N.C.

continued on page 26