

Monkeywrenching Drives Me Nuts

George French states his case against ecotage

George French

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MONKEY WRENCHING is the eco-terrorist response to the rape of the Earth. It includes such activities as vandalising machinery, blowing up dams and spiking trees to prevent logging. The theory and practice of monkey wrenching has a mixed ancestry. It includes Luddism, the anti-Vietnam protest movement and Greenpeace. The eco-terrorist is dedicated to the overthrow of the western 'world-view' which mistakenly claims that the rape of the earth is natural and inevitable.

There are a number of problems with monkey wrenching that seem to get pasted over by the enthusiasm and satisfaction such actions can generate. Close examination of these problems bring into question the arguments in favour of monkey wrenching as currently practiced. Rather than helping to dismantle the dominant paradigm monkey wrenching only sustains and reproduces it.

The first problem is that the use of aggression and violence is seen as legitimate. Yet the eco-terrorist world view is about the end of human violence and the break out of peace. Eco-centric development can be measured by the degree to which it reduces human aggression and increases compassion. In this context every act of aggression and violence undertaken by eco-terrorists merely adds to the sum of such acts already happening around the globe. Hating the dominant paradigm and wanting to give it a real kick in the teeth merely adds to the monumental amount of hate that already exists.

A second problem with eco-terrorism is that it is reactive rather than proactive. The military-industrial-capitalist complex decides which bit of the earth it will next rape and the eco-terrorist scuttles off in pursuit. It results in the dominant forces setting the agenda while eco-terrorists must act and think on the hoof. This reactive element means that eco-terrorism can be accommodated within the dominant ideology. Logging machines threatened with destruction can be insured, thereby propping up the money market which feeds on destruction. The replacement logging machines involve yet more industrial production, which brings about yet more rape of the earth.

A third problem with eco-terrorism gravitates around the populist act of spiking trees to prevent their logging, and the ecocentric notion that trees, like all living things, have inviolable rights. Hammering home large bits of metal into trees undoubtedly invades their rights but is justified by : arguing that it is better to be spiked than logged. The eco-terrorist claims that the means justifies the end or consequential values must dominate deontological values. But is the eco-terrorist not supposed to be opposed to means/end way of thinking in the west. The spiking of trees is legitimised in the same way the allies justified the saturation bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In sum, bad actions may need to be committed in order to secure a just end. I think such an argument leads down the well worn road to fascism.

The final reason why monkey wrenching drives me nuts is that it traps one in the dominant world view. Rather than realizing and articulating a new ecocentric 'form of life' — which must be incommensurate with existing 'reality' — eco-terrorists pore over logging machines in order to discover the best way to disable it. They scan the media and planning applications for new signs of earth abuse when they should be creating a new reality. In consequence eco-terrorists have an 'anti' reputation in the sense that they seem to know what they don't like but are very vague on the specifics of a new paradigm. Eco-terrorism may have a nominal impact on the material rape of the earth but fails to subvert the psychic forces which precipitate it.

But all is not lost because any eco-terrorist worth her salt knows that a 'settlement with nature' consists of global reforestation with humans living in anarcho-communalist woodland

cultures. In this context the truly radical act is the planting of trees. Trees are the cutting edge of ecological and social transformation. Global reforestation will heal the earth, secure the well-being of future generations and bring to an end the Malthusian notion of scarcity. On this foundation we can build truly human scale community which generate, rather than destroy, genetic diversity. The politics of the tree are that it provides a radical, yet non-violent solution, to our crisis of consciousness and environment. The promotion of a tree-centred culture undermines the dominant ideology which makes the rape of the earth seem normal, even beautiful. The western world view oppresses us by making us believe that the tree can only be pet, status symbol, leisure facility or merely dead wood. The eco-terrorist must expose this fallacy by vigorously articulating the benefits of post modernist wood centred cultures and planting lots of trees. In the UK a 'settlement with nature' demands the planting of 5 billion trees so don't waste any time swapping your wrench for a sapling.

Forward With the Earth Liberation Front!

GA's editor PNR argues we must defend the Earth by all means necessary.

GEORGE'S VISION of a settlement with nature through the retribalisation and reforestation of the Earth is consistent with GA's goals. Only small communities can organise themselves free of hierarchy and silvaculture is the best means for these communities to achieve the self-sufficiency needed to maintain their decision-making autonomy.

But ethics aren't relevant to a biocentric perspective -morality is uniquely human — and an ethic of nonviolence isn't directly relevant to green anarchist means and ends. The dominant ideology — that a hierarchy of being exists, with those at the top having an inalienable right to exploit those beneath them — legitimises the State's monopoly of violence and the State in turn maintains the dominant ideology through its laws and the means available to it to inculcate and enforce them. By empowering ourselves, we reduce the State's rationale for existence. Our goal is the autonomous existence of all beings, our means are by superseding the power monopolies that prevent this.

It's simplistic, however, to argue that the State does not set the agenda. Tree planters risk being treated as trespassers and their trees, once grown on another's land, risking turned into timber to the profit of the landowner. If tree planters challenge the dominant ideology, they engage in a power struggle with the hierarchy. Their actions are as "reactive" to the destruction of the Earth as others using different resistance tactics, and are as illegitimate in the eyes of the State.

Defending trees already grown and integrated into the existing ecosystem is at least as important as planting more. Tree hugging and sitting are more likely to play a role in ecological resistance in UK than spiking — most trees in this country are destroyed because they stand in the way of 'progress and development' rather than for timber — but the practice itself has been unfairly maligned in the past and should be defended.

Unless copper spikes — which poison trees — are used, they suffer no harm. It's pretty anthropomorphic to think a tree — which has no nervous system — experiences spiking as a human being would and hysterical to equate this necessary 'vaccination' with fascism, carpet bombing an open city or nuclear attack!

Sea Shepherd captain Paul Watson wrote to Earth First! Journal last year claiming to have invented the technique in the early-1980s. Anyone who has read Ecodefense knows that spikes should be hammered in above head-height and an anonymous claim of responsibility made afterwards. The idea is to stop logging, not injure loggers. In over a decade of spiking, EF! has never injured anyone. Such 'area denial' can't be insured against and many thousands of acres of old growth forest have been saved from the sawmill by it. As the ALF have shown, wholesale economic sabotage doesn't prop up the banks at no cost to the exploiter anyway — the tur trade was crushed and the Dewhurst chain is being smashed by such tactics as a result in the rising costs of security and insurance premiums.

The decision to drop tree spiking in the 1990 Redwoods Summer campaign was made for specific, local reasons. The California Redwoods covered a small area patrolled by trigger-happy maniacs and owned by timber companies who didn't give a shit for the safety of sawmill workers. The false equation between Foremanism and tree spiking is shown up by Live Wild Or Die! continuing to advocate such tactics where Californian-type conditions do not apply. As anarchists, they rightly argue direct action is always more empowering than lobbying with your arse.

As of this April's Brighton Gathering, EF!UK has decided to confine itself to civil disobedience, to attract numbers and publicise their case. It falls to the Earth Liberation Front to directly intervene where they cannot. EF!UK will publicly "neither condemn nor condone" the ELF. Direct action is needed to create a free society in harmony with nature, so why not follow EF!UK's example?

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<www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/collections/public_archive/6345.pdf>

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