

INTRODUCTION

EARTH LIBERATION FRONT 1997-2002

In the summer of 1996 I joined a newly-founded organization in Portland, Oregon called Liberation Collective. The philosophical basis of the organization at that point was that all forms of institutional oppression are born of a single cause: the system. If it were not for the capitalism, racism, sexism, imperialism that the system perpetrates upon world and each one of us, then there would be no clear cuts, no vivisection, no Persian Gulf War, no Nike corporation. Our objective was “linking social justice movements to end all oppression,” but our methods of achieving this righteous goal, however, were not so successful. For the most part we conducted attention-getting acts of civil disobedience and protests around vivisection and various other single issues and ran information tables that looked like a haphazard collage of every liberal handbill under the sun.

During approximately the same period, a group of unknown individuals was building another organization with a similar philosophy but very different methods. When The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) took its first action in the U.S., I remember the exuberance and the resurgence of hope that raced through me and many others in the movement. I had been very interested in the underground actions of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) for a number of years, actively researched all the information I could find about the organization and even did significant fundraising for the ALF press office and support group. I imagined the potential of an organization using tactics similar to those of the ALF, but whose objectives went beyond the liberation of animals to the liberation of the entire Earth. Now, not only had this organization come into being but it also sent its first communiqué to our Liberation Collective.

Through the Liberation Collective, Craig Rosebraugh in particular handled the release of numerous ELF communiqués, from the first on November 29, 1997 until the official formation of the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office (NAELFPO) in early 2000.

Internal conflict caused Rosebraugh, myself, and a handful of other members to leave the Liberation Collective early in 2000. Reflecting on our years with the collective, and now free to put our energy elsewhere, Rosebraugh and I concluded that the handling of ELF communiqués was extremely valuable work, and we thus founded the NAELFPO.

From the start, the NAELFPO was forced to deal with FBI raids and grand jury subpoenas, in addition to handling ELF communiqués. At first I put my energy as Press Officer into the production of ELF support literature

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(such as much of what is reprinted here) and organizing against ELF-related grand juries. Rosebraugh continued handling ELF communiqués more directly and dealing with the local, national and international media as an official Spokesperson. Time passed and these roles broke down, as Rosebraugh grew increasingly frustrated with the media and I reluctantly stepped in front of the cameras. By the time of the second raid on the NAELFPO on April 5, 2001, we more equally shared the duties of Press Officer and Spokesperson.

On September 5, 2001, just days before the infamous 9/11 terrorist attacks, Rosebraugh and I jointly released a stepping down statement. While in reality our reasoning for stepping down was more akin to the politics of my final resignation statement (chapter 8) we decided to focus on relevant yet less pressing issues by releasing the following statement:

ELF Press Officers Step Down Sept. 5, 2001

Portland, OR - Both Craig Rosebraugh and Leslie James Pickering have stepped down from their duties as press officers for the North American Earth Liberation Front. Both have stated that if the Earth Liberation Front is to be a viable movement, public concentrations of support must not be centered on one or two people. The two have maintained that the ELF is one of the greatest demonstrations of the power the people can have if they so desire to take it. They sincerely wish to express their gratitude to all those who have expressed some form of support over the years and to the courageous individuals that have been involved in ELF actions.

After September 11, it became very clear that voices in opposition to the system were more needed than ever, due to massive nationalist and anti-terrorist propaganda. In addition, a House Subcommittee Hearing on Eco-terrorism-- to which Rosebraugh had been subpoenaed (chapter 6)-- was to be held on February 12th, 2002.

On February 2, 2002, I temporarily returned to my position as spokesperson for the NAELFPO, stating in part,

Those who struggle for revolutionary change in North

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America will not be intimidated by the system's alleged 'War on Terrorism,' its so-called Patriot Act or their 'House Subcommittee hearing on Eco-Terrorism'. If anything, these only exemplify the dire need for a revolutionary movement struggling on the side of the people here in North America. Direct action taken by the Earth Liberation Front, and similar underground organizations, is part of a larger struggle for revolutionary change. The system has long proven that it values profits and property over life, and this underground response is the voice and fist of the people rising in self-defense.

During this second bout as Spokesperson, I received increased criticism, as Rosebraugh was no longer working with me and I had decided to take a more honest and radical approach than I had done in the past. I no longer publicly proclaimed the ELF as a nonviolent organization, and I openly implemented the ELF as part of an urgently-needed revolutionary movement. A percentage of this criticism came from supporters of the ELF, who proclaimed that I was taking the attention away from environmentalist issues and taking too extreme of a stance. I knew my second term with the NAELFPO had run its course and released a substantial 'resignation statement' published in the June-July 2002 issue of the *Earth First! Journal* and elsewhere (chapter 8).

I have since been working with Arissa, an emerging effort to build a truly revolutionary movement in the US.



The communiqués (chapter 1) are the only words passed on to us from the guerrillas of the Earth Liberation Front. I take them as I would the wisdom of an elder or the brilliance of a child. Their knowledge, while not unquestionable, is invaluable. They display the sincerity, the desperation, the love and the anger of the revolutionaries, who armed themselves with not only the firebomb, but the pen as well.

The Frequently Asked Questions booklet (chapter 2) was published to give a deeper understanding of the ELF than would ever be allowed through the mainstream media. This also represented a bold, first step taken by the NAELFPO to attempt to define the "ideology" of the loose-

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knit underground cells as that of a revolutionary organization. While for editorial reasons it is the second chapter of this book, it may be important to note that it was published between the fourth and fifth issues of *Resistance*.

The three issues of *Resistance* that were published under the NAELFPO (chapters 3, 4 & 5) display the political line at their respective dates of publication. They also give information on various ELF-related legal events such as grand jury appearances. Not all articles and images from the original issues are reprinted in this book.

The 2/12/02 Subcommittee booklet (chapter 6) displays the unadulterated opinions of some of the people who are affected the most by the ELF through their presumably honest Congressional testimonies. Some are targets of the ELF who have suffered economically and psychologically from their actions. Some, as representatives of districts in which the ELF has struck, consider themselves victims. Others have taken it upon themselves to attempt to extinguish the flames of the ELF either as federal agents of repression or representatives of nonprofit organizations fronting for industry interests.

Craig Rosebraugh's statement gives a unique view into the making of a revolutionary in contemporary American society, and, in a more abstract way, a birthing of a homegrown guerrilla organization. The questions posed to him by the subcommittee show the intent and focus of the system and his responses to them display intelligence, honesty, strength and even humor.

The Guerrilla News Network interview (chapter 7) is literally one of thousands conducted during the times I was involved with the NAELFPO. But due to the timing of the interview and the integrity of the journalists, it gives a much deeper look into the political and personal issues involving the ELF and myself. In it I express personal opinions on revolution that I had previously held back due to pressure from the larger movement, which enjoyed the perception of the ELF as a nonviolent environmental organization.

In my resignation statement (chapter 8) I address the issues of nonviolence and single-issue politics directly, refusing to bow to what I continue to see as a disturbing and extremely self-defeatist trend in radical politics. Rather than continue in what I had grown to understand is a counterproductive

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direction, I resigned from my position as spokesperson for the NAELFPO and began searching for the next step towards liberation.

It is the case with this book that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Nearly all of the information herein has been previously printed but has grown difficult to obtain, as it was published with limited resources in relatively small quantities. This book is being published not only for posterity, but more to display an evolution in the ideology and tactics of the struggle that is not easily noticeable in studying any of the original publications on their own.

Whether under the cover of darkness, in the spotlight of the media or under pressures of the U.S. government, a lot has evolved over the last five years. A better understanding of this ideological and tactical evolution is of great value to us both now and as the struggle progresses into the future.

In particular, by studying the combined texts in this book, you will see an increasingly revolutionary assessment of the oppression from which we suffer and the liberation for which we strive. The struggle continues.



This book is not about where I feel the Earth Liberation Front succeeded and failed, or where I think the movement should go from here, although those are topics we should all be thinking about. This book has been reprinted because it is an important resource for understanding an important time and place in recent American history. These pages contain the texts of documents representing and influencing a movement that grew so significant as to be named the number-one domestic priority of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This book is intended to give a brief glimpse into how things really were.

One of the first things I learned when I got involved in the struggle was how the movement deals with the media. I was to understand that how a movement is represented to the public helps determine how much support it gets, and proper handling of the media is expected to follow unwritten rules.

There was an ongoing debate within the movement over the theory that 'any media is good media.' The system would continue to pretend that life on Earth was in no danger unless we exposed the truth, and no matter how bad the media made us look, there would be at least one

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person out there somewhere who would see through the hype and get the message, which is one more person than we had before... or so the theory goes. Opposing viewpoints were that negative coverage taints the entire movement and radicals should either not bother with the mass media or go mainstream.

I'm sure it was assumed, because the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office got so much bad press, that we followed the 'any media was good media' theory, but in reality I don't think we even had a stance on it. We were given a task and were just trying to do the best we could against the odds. When you're down with the struggle you do whatever you can, regardless of skill-level or odds.

We always assumed that the mass media was not on our side. It was expected that our most inarticulate statements would be the ones to show up in the news, so we tried our best to improve our articulation and to speak in sound bites. The idea was that if you only gave them short, concise statements, then that's all they would have to work with. Sometimes I would just ignore their questions and give a pre-rehearsed statement as if it were an answer. In our case this could work because when a million-dollar building burns to the ground they don't have a choice but to do a story on it, so they'd have to work with whatever we gave them. But there were numerous misquotes and completely fabricated statements (especially in the print media who rarely did more than jot down a few notes during interviews).

It's a rigged game. A two-minute debate edited and directed by your opponent. They layer your face with make-up and sit you under bright lights with cameras glaring from every angle. You try not to shake from nervousness and keep your focus, but you feel like you're going to pass out. They call you a violent terrorist, ask you incredibly leading questions, and then edit your responses out of their context and broadcast it to the nation. Even if they can't make you look stupid they are going to make you look crazy.

I can't complain though, because we were asking for it. Earth Liberation Front actions were sensational, so we never expected that the notoriously sensational US media wouldn't sensationalize their coverage. Our strategy evolved with the experience of being burned time and time again, and after a while I learned that we did hold a card or two in our hands.

Reporters are suckers for a big story, and the more radical we came off, the bigger the story. It was as if they didn't realize that part of our objective was to get attention and they were giving it to us, or maybe more that they didn't care because it sold so well.

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We learned to play the rebel card. I tried to look cool, play cool, and I'd have them meet me in obscure little cafes or street corners instead of going their production studios. They would make a statement about terrorism and violence expecting me to argue against it, but instead I'd tell them about how they ain't seen nothing yet, and they'd be speechless, if only for a moment.

We never won. The major networks never ran a story about how the ELF is a modern day Robin Hood, and we never expected that they would. I don't think there was a single piece in the major media that didn't scream slanderous exaggerations of violence and terrorism, but at times you would swear there was a news editor out there trying to make us look cool, and more and more communiqués came, and the movement grew.

When the FBI first knocked on our door in 1997 I was nineteen. I was a high school dropout and a runaway looking for a revolution. The intensity of the government surveillance and harassment that followed helped shape the way we grew to see the world, and we'll never be the same.

Looking back over the documents published in this book is embarrassing. I never paid much attention in my public school English classes. I never had much of an interest in writing or public speaking until I went to work with the Press Office. My political analysis during those years was even more simplistic than it is today.

The first thing to cross my mind when re-reading this rhetoric is how inaccessible it is to outsiders. If you weren't throwing tear gas canisters back at riot police and sitting in old growth redwoods in the Pacific Northwest in the late 1990s the documents in this book just weren't written for you.

But it's real. These are the documents that came out during those first five hot years of the Earth Liberation Front. They are being republished because they are a resource necessary to understand a significant social justice struggle that is almost always misunderstood. We need to know our true past to find our true future.