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RESIGNATION STATEMENT

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Final Statement of Leslie James Pickering as Spokesperson for the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office Earth First! Journal June/July 2002

More than any other event in my life, the actions of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) have been the most eye-opening, inspirational and empowering. The actions of the ELF have restored a hope in me that had otherwise been beaten into submission by the oppressive cycle of daily life within contemporary American civilization.

When I was a teenager in suburban New York state, I, like many of my peers, would do almost anything thinkable to break the mundane reality of my existence. One of the activities that drew my attention was attending loud, angry, independent music events. These events appealed to me because they were welcoming atmospheres for me and my peers to vent our legitimate frustrations with the social and political situations we had been born into and forced to swallow. At one of the first of these shows I attended, I was handed some literature about an organization called the Animal Liberation Front (ALF).

At first, I didn't think much of it—a souvenir to bring home—and I stuffed it in my backpack. It wasn't until I had the time to look it over that I realized the implications these stapled photocopies would have on my life. It turned out that the ALF was an underground organization that struggled for the freedom of animals by “liberating” them from factory farms, vivisection labs and other abusive institutions. The ALF was a group of fugitives who broke the law to fight for freedom, much like many of our cultural heroes: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, the Boston Tea Partiers, Robin Hood, etc. I was fascinated.

At this point, I naturally had an appreciation for nature, but I was not especially what one would call an “animal lover,” nor have I ever been. I had never considered being a vegetarian and had no awareness of any popular movement for animal rights. The tactics of the ALF simply made sense to me on an honest and fundamental level, based on my natural instincts for self defense and the little that I had learned about revolutionary/social movements from school and conversations. My fascination with this sensational organization soon led me to learn of the popular movements for the freedom of animals and environmentalism and later to study any and all revolutionary/social movements that I could

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scrounge up information on.

In 1997, the ELF began taking “direct actions” similar to the actions of the ALF. From the onset, the direct actions of the ELF were causing millions in damages to corporations and government agencies that were profiting from destroying the Earth. The actions and existence of the ELF created an enormous wave of attention across the U.S., as authorities fruitlessly scrambled for evidence, often barely beginning one investigation before the ELF would strike again.

I have been privileged to be in the position of spokesperson for the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office (NAELFPO) since the spring of 2000. The press office has been referred to by the media as a “clearinghouse” for the anonymous communiqués of the ELF. For me personally, it has been an opportunity to publicly speak my belief in direct action and to help the movement gain the public’s attention and support.

I support the actions of the ELF and the ALF wholeheartedly. I unwaveringly support revolutionary action to bring about the liberation of the Earth and its animal nations, including the liberation of the human race. I feel that illegal actions, like those of the ELF and ALF, are 100 percent necessary for liberation, and I hope to see the continuation and the rapid escalation of their activities until the Earth and all of us who live here are free of institutionalized oppression.

That being said, shortly after co-founding the NAELFPO, I vowed to speak the truth about the ELF. I have since done the best job I could with limited resources and opportunities to fulfill this promise, and I will continue to do so. However, I have come to realize that being in the position of spokesperson for the organization has presented me with difficulties in speaking this truth.

There is an existing diversity of opinions among those who support the activity of the ELF on the manner in which the underground organization should be represented. I am only able to honestly represent the movement in the light in which it appears to me, which is not necessarily the same light in which all others who support the ELF view it.

As I see it, the ELF is a loose network of clandestine guerrilla groups that are a part of a larger movement struggling for global revolutionary change. The tactics that they engage in, which many consider nonviolent sabotage,

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are a direct result of their analysis of the oppression they struggle against and the level of activity they perceive to be effective within the particular context of their actions.

I see and personally hope that there is no proof that the movement in general should view the tactics of the ELF as the end-all of action for liberation. I see absolutely no logic in a judgment that struggle perceived as nonviolent is the only legitimate kind to be waged. In addition, I have no problem admitting that I personally do not consider the actions of the ELF and ALF as nonviolent, as any dictionary will clearly spell out.

Again, this does not mean that I do not wholeheartedly support all of these actions, only that I do not consider them nonviolent and do not believe nonviolence is the only legitimate means by which to struggle for liberation.

Any dictionary will tell you that violence is, more or less, any act that aggressively harms or threatens harm to anyone or anything. Therefore, if actions were truly nonviolent, they would fail to even threaten harm to anything, which I certainly do not consider to be the case with the ELF. The entire intention of the ELF is to bring about liberation through engaging in effective acts of sabotage against oppressive institutions. To not even threaten harm to these institutions would therefore be failure.

But regardless of what the dictionary says, I believe that attaching the nonviolence label to these actions is based on a misguided understanding of public opinion and fear of a liberal backlash that comes anyway. I also believe the blind endorsement of this label is counterrevolutionary. Any notion that alleged nonviolence is the only way by which to achieve liberation is ill-informed and condemning of the many other effective tactics that have, can and must be put into practice in successful revolutionary movements.

Throughout history, liberation has been achieved through a healthy balance of a variety of tactics, many which have been considered nonviolent and many which have been considered violent. Even the most popular examples of nonviolent resistance were far from existing in a vacuum. During the same periods that Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were waging their nonviolent struggles, numerous other organizations were struggling for the same liberation through what were considered violent means—undeniably having a massive effect on the progression

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of the overall movements. In fact, I've yet to find a historical example of a successful revolutionary movement that consisted strictly of nonviolent activity, and I do not believe that one is possible in our contemporary setting.

Recently, I appeared on a short television spot regarding the February 12 hearing held by the Congressional Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health. Also on this clip appeared an unnamed representative of an unnamed organization allegedly from the mainstream environmental movement.

Among other less interesting things, he said, "Violence, when used in this country, is simply wrong."

I have found that a lot of the ideological basis for nonviolence in the U.S. is fundamentally nationalist.

Why is it that when it comes to clearly violent struggle outside the borders of the U.S.-- such as that waged by the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico-- the majority of liberals are quick to lend their ideological support, while those same liberals adamantly condemn the actions of the ELF and ALF here within the borders of such a powerful and oppressive government? I believe this is because they have been brainwashed by the system into buying the line that within U.S. borders, somehow revolutionary change can magically be achieved through reformist activity. I think we need to wake up and realize that the U.S. is a global power, force-feeding its suicidal capitalist American Dream down the throats of everyone on the face of the planet. Revolutionary change has never been achieved through reformist activity and is certainly not going to be handed to us on a silver platter by the U.S. government.

I have also found that almost all of the popular cheerleaders of nonviolence are/were strongly religious people who endorsed the tactic because of their religious beliefs, not necessarily because of its effectiveness in bringing about revolutionary change. Recognizing the connection of nonviolence to religion was important to me, because it helped me realize the larger intentions of the philosophy.

The belief that one species, the human race, can somehow live an entirely nonviolent existence on this planet-- when it is perfectly clear that no species throughout all of nature is capable of this-- is blatantly

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anthropocentric. The belief that humans are separate and somehow exempt from the laws of nature is a major cause of the disastrous imbalance that our species now suffers from.

Often it seems that blind adherence to nonviolence philosophy is based on a reactionary denial of the level of resistance that it'll take to bring about revolutionary change. When many begin to comprehend the level of oppression we face today, nonviolence philosophy gains appeal as a very comfortable Heaven/fairyland where liberation can be achieved strictly through personal changes. I consider this state of denial a kind of psychological illness common among liberal North Americans. I strongly feel that anyone hypnotizing the people with the nonviolence-as-gospel dog-and-pony show is a criminal, disarming us in a time when we desperately need to defend ourselves.

This denial of what really needs to happen to liberate the Earth and ourselves from the deadly path that the system is leading us all down is a major factor in our inability to achieve that liberation. The outright condemnation of violent revolutionary action in America needs to come to an end before a true revolution can effectively take place. The system knows this, and its pigs are working harder than ever to brainwash the public by calling the ELF “terrorists” and the Pentagon a “force for freedom.”

More than anything, I simply recognize the right and, at times, the necessity and duty of all people to defend ourselves when taking a beating, to fight for our very lives. This right is not only extended to those being crushed by the hands of this beast, but also to those of us being digested in its belly.

In addition to the nonviolence issue, I do not believe that the actions of the ELF are strictly environmental in their scope. It has probably already become clear that I recognize the actions of the ELF as acts of revolution, not reform. I have attempted to express this in every piece of literature, interview, public presentation and conversation that has occurred as a result of my participation in the NAELFPO—and increasingly so in recent months.

I cannot perceive the Earth without conjuring up images of all life taking root within this atmosphere. The liberation of the Earth equals the liberation of every one of us. And as I see it, the liberation of the Earth and the liberation of all species of the Earth is the goal of the ELF.

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I do not see the organization as simply an environmental group satisfied with the economic damages it inflicts and attention it draws from each of its individual actions. I do not see the ELF as only caring about the oppression caused by Vail Resorts, Inc. and Boise Cascade. These are just platforms for a much larger message to get out on a global scale, and that message is, “We’re not taking anymore.”

I see the objectives of any revolutionary movement for liberation being to off the oppressor, to smash the system of oppression and to create a free and just society in its place. I see no exception to this in the case of the ELF, and I certainly do not hope that I am wrong.

Currently, the FBI considers the ELF and the ALF the “number one priority” among domestic terrorist threats. This is nothing new; the same thing has been said about revolutionary organizations in the past that the system perceived as a threat. This is, however, a noteworthy point in the struggle for liberation: It is recognition from the oppressor. The system does perceive this movement as a threat and is using an increasing amount of its resources to stomp it out. This is a point at which the struggle needs to evolve in order to survive, so as not to suffer the same fate as revolutionary struggles of previous generations.

This system has clearly proven itself to value its “progress” above and beyond anyone and anything. It represents a pursuit of profits and property at the expense of the people, the natural elements of the Earth that sustain our lives and of the planet as a whole. This “American Dream” is a death wish, and we cannot allow it to nail our coffins shut.

The struggle must constantly assess and reassess the oppressor and the oppressor’s perception of the struggle. New tactical directions must evolve with these assessments. I, for one, have begun to question the power and use of any official press office for an autonomous organization or movement. If the purpose of a press office is to draw much-needed attention to a movement, then is there a point at which that press office is no longer needed or practical? Where is the point at which, within the context of an existing movement, the direct actions of the movement are able to speak for themselves?

I recognize that all forms of institutional oppression flow from the same source, the institution, the system that dictates nearly every facet of our lives under its twisted objectives. Therefore, I am not an environmentalist;

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I am not an activist; I'm not a reformist or any form of liberal. I am a revolutionary. I advocate the return of all power to the hands of the people by any means necessary on a global scale. I see anything short of this as failure and as disastrous. And I'm not about to deny this reality because of any existing atmosphere of opinion within the popular liberal environmental movement. To deny this reality is to limit the ability of this movement to evolve into one that truly has the capacity to achieve the objective of liberation.

Arguing for a nonviolent, single-issue revolution has placed us in a position of hypocrisy and has allowed us to be backed into corners with our arguments. I believe that the movement hasn't gained the public support that it needs to be successful because the intelligent public can see these glaring holes in our arguments. I have found that public opinion is not as the media represents it, and it is far from what liberals perceive it to be.

I recognize that the only way to build a successful revolutionary movement is to present a sound and powerful argument, backed up by effective action. I believe that once this movement is presented to the oppressed peoples of the Earth, public support will be powerfully behind it.

Nonviolence, economic sabotage and armed propaganda are tactics, not strategies, not gospel and certainly not the only effective actions to be taken as part of a successful revolutionary movement. Like the tools of a toolbox, each has a specific use and specific results. Depending on the job you have, you choose a tool (or a set of tools) from your toolbox. You don't choose only the tools that fit most comfortably in your hand or that are the prettiest; you choose the ones that'll get the job done. Sometimes these tools do fit comfortably in your hands, but most of the time they give you blisters. No matter what, though, at the end of the day, the objective is always to have the job completed. It's idiotic to shun the sledgehammer when you're working to knock down a wall,

Our arguments and actions need to be sound, thorough and brutally honest. We need to awaken from our coma and struggle for a realistic, not utopian, solution. No matter how uncomfortable this may seem to many of us, it's nothing compared to what will happen if we don't and what is happening already.

Long live the Earth Liberation Front! Long Live the Animal Liberation

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Front! Down with this insane system that plagues the Earth and its peoples! Revolution is liberation!

With this statement I officially resign from my role with the NAELFPO, but I am by no means silencing myself. I intend to continue with increasing effort to struggle for revolutionary change without being bound to any dogmatic atmospheres of opinions. I encourage and welcome communication of any kind and can be reached at leslie@arissa.org.

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Leslie James Pickering quit high school at seventeen to struggle against “this system that stops at nothing to profit from the destruction of everything.” After five years of continuous civil disobedience and protest, he grew frustrated with the lack of results in his activity and helped to found the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office (NAELFPO) in early 2000.

He served as press officer with the NAELFPO until his final resignation in summer of 2002. During this period, the NAELFPO sustained two raids by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), responded to half a dozen grand jury subpoenas; conducted public presentations; produced booklets, newspapers, magazines, and a video on the ELF and handled the release of dozens of ELF communiqués.

Through the NAELFPO, Pickering was the editor of *Resistance, the Journal of the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office*, as well as many other independently-produced materials regarding the Earth Liberation Front. Pickering served twice as ELF Spokesperson, handling countless local, national, international, corporate and independent media inquiries, which resulted in coverage in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Rolling Stone* magazine and many more.

He has also appeared in televised interviews with the ABC, NBC, CNN, FOX, CBC and BBC networks, as well as National Geographic TV and

many others. He has given lectures at various conferences and at Lewis & Clark College, Saint Michael's University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Bard College, Yale University, New York University and many other institutions of learning.

In 2003, Pickering resigned from the NAELFPO, issuing a lengthy statement renouncing nonviolence philosophy and single issue-politics, but he continues to support the ELF as a component of a revolutionary movement. He is now involved in an emerging revolutionary effort known as Arissa.

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