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Community Under Siege

Judi Bari

*Speech given at the Cinco de Mayo/May 5th gathering in
Booneville, California. Footnotes added by Jym Dyer*

I came of age during the Vietnam era, and I've known for a long time that the system is enforced by violence. Some of my earliest political experiences were of 20-year-old national guardsmen beating my 18-year-old non-violent friends senseless and bloody. I didn't think I had any delusions about how thin the veneer of civility is in this country. But I have to admit that I was totally unprepared for the sheer horror of being bombed and maimed while organizing for Redwood Summer last year.

The bombing represented the end of innocence for our movement. Sure, we had seen violence before, but this was different. The logger who broke Mem Hill's nose, the log truck driver who ran me off the road — themselves victims of the timber industry — in the heat of the moment, took their anger out on us. But whoever put that bomb in my car was a cold and premeditated killer. And the FBI's attempt to frame me and Darryl [Cherney] for the bombing made us realize what we are up against. Not only are they willing to use lethal force to protect their "right" to level whole ecosystems for private profit, they

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are also backed by the full power of the government's secret police.

The man in charge of my and Darryl's case at the FBI is Richard W. Held, chief of the San Francisco office. He went on TV last summer to say that Darryl and I were the only suspects in the bomb attack that nearly took my life. Richard Held became notorious in the 1970's for his active role in COINTELPRO, an outrageous and illegal FBI program to disrupt and destroy any group that challenged the powers-that-be.

COINTELPRO's method was to foment internal discord in activist groups, isolate and discredit them, terrorize them, and assassinate their leaders. The best known example of this was Black Panther Fred Hampton, who was murdered by the FBI as he slept in his bed in a Chicago apartment in 1969. And there were many, many others.

But back to Richard Held, the man in charge of my bombing case. His personal role in COINTELPRO began in the early 70's in Los Angeles, where he ordered insulting cartoons to be drawn and sent, supposedly from one faction to another, among the L.A. Black Panthers. This heated up antagonisms between the factions so much that, with a little help from FBI infiltrators, they erupted into shooting wars that left two Panthers dead.

Held was also on hand in Pine Ridge, South Dakota in 1975 to help direct the FBI's reign of terror against the American Indian Movement (AIM). In this case the FBI took advantage of existing divisions in the native community to hook up with a vigilante groups called GOONS, or Guardians of the Oglala Nation. These local thugs were armed by the FBI and guaranteed that they would not be prosecuted for crimes against AIM members. They attacked over 300 AIM people and killed 70 of them. Not one of these crimes was solved because, said the FBI, they "didn't have enough manpower." The Pine Ridge campaign ended with a military sweep of the reservation by

200 SWAT trained agents, and with the framing and jailing of Leonard Peltier.

Another of Richard Held's accomplishments was in San Diego, where he was instrumental in organizing an FBI-funded right wing paramilitary group called the Secret Army Organization (SAO). The SAO bombed the Guild Theater, a black community project, and tried to assassinate Peter Bohmer, a radical professor at San Diego State. They missed and severely wounded his associate, Paula Thorpe. By the way, the assassination symbol of the SAO was the rifle scope and crosshairs.

In 1978 Richard Held was transferred to Puerto Rico where he oversaw the FBI execution of two Independentista leaders who were made to kneel, then were shot in the head. Held stayed on until 1985, when he stage-managed an island-wide SWAT assault by 300 agents who busted in doors and rounded up activists.

For all his good work, Richard Held was then promoted to be in charge of the San Francisco FBI, where he still works today. And I don't know if the FBI had anything to do with putting that bomb in my car, but I know for certain that they tried to frame me for it and made sure the real bomber wasn't found. They removed my whole floorboard with a blowtorch and sent it to their crime lab in Washington DC, thereby destroying the evidence that would prove they were lying about the location of the bomb.¹ They lied about finding nails in the car that matched the nails in the bomb. And when someone calling himself "The Lord's Avenger" wrote a letter describing the bomb in exact detail and taking credit for it, their "investigation" consisted of raiding my house once again to try to find a typewriter that matched the letter, which of course they

¹Shortly after the bombing, the FBI was telling reporters that the bomb was located on the back seat of Bari's car. This would support the claim that Bari and Cherney were knowingly transporting a bomb. However, Bari's injuries leave no doubt that the bomb was in fact located under the driver's seat.

didn't. This whole time they kept putting out selected press releases so the highly cooperative press could make me look like a bomber when they knew perfectly well that I was the victim of an assassination attempt.

With this knowledge of how the FBI operates, when I look at what's going on in our movement I can only conclude that we are under attack by a COINTELPRO-type operation. Earth First! is definitely a target. We know that the FBI has spent at least \$3 million to infiltrate and disrupt Earth First! in Arizona and Montana, not even including what they've done in Northern California. In Arizona, admitted FBI agent provocateur Michael Fain infiltrated their group for two years, winning the activists' trust and friendship. Then he led them to try to sabotage a power line, and got them busted for it by the FBI. This is the supposed "Earth First! plot to destroy nuclear power plants" that the mainstream press keeps talking about. There was no plot. Just some naive people who were misled by the FBI. And Dave Foreman wasn't even there. They arrested him in his bed at 5 a.m. and led him out in his underwear.²

In Montana the FBI targeted an environmental studies professor named Ron Erikson, saying he and his Earth First! students were responsible for a tree spiking incident. They raided people's houses and forced them to give fingerprints, handwriting and hair samples. Yet even after a Grand Jury investigation, they found no evidence at all to link Erickson or his students with any tree-spiking. But they discredited him professionally and terrorized the Earth First!ers.

²Foreman's actual complicity is probably best expressed by Fain himself, who was musing into his tape recorder: "I don't really look for them to be doing a lot of hurting people. [Foreman] isn't really the guy we need to pop — I mean in terms of an actual perpetrator. This is the guy we need to pop to send a message. And that's all we're really doing... Uh-oh. We don't need that on tape. Hoo boy." Of the other defendants, two had never been involved with Earth First!, one had attended one EF! meeting, and one actually did attend EF! events — as a folksinger.

are ready to work with you and talk to you any time. You can reach us at the MEC at 707/486-1660.

Our entire community is under siege, and that includes the forest itself, not just the people who defend it. If we back down to timber and police terror, they will continue to destroy the redwood forest and its life support system. We are already seeing the climate changes that go with deforestation, including the 5-year drought and killing frosts. How much longer can they cut like this before the ecosystem collapses?

If we stand together, I think we can make the difference. In Humboldt County, MAXXAM is on the verge of financial collapse from its own junk bonds. And LP and GP are almost done in Mendocino County. They've cut the good stuff, and now they're fighting to take 20-year-old baby third-growth trees in a last mop-up operation before they leave. How much is this chip-cut worth to them? Economically those trees barely pay their way out of the woods. But biologically they mean the difference between whether the forest can ever recover, or whether it will end up converted to vineyards, subdivisions, or desert.

That's why we're not backing down. We're tired and we're scared, but the timber industry is tired too. ***And the darkest hour is just before the dawn.***

intimidation to anyone who would oppose the timber industry or the New World Order.

There are many more examples, but the pattern is clear. John Muir once said, “*Tug on anything in nature and you will find it connected to everything else.*” I would say that the same is true of the corporate state. Because all we ever tried to do here is save a few trees and protect our communities from the ravages of a few out-of-town corporations. And we have found this incredible array of forces lined up against us with the timber industry. So as the new logging season gets underway, with tensions rising again, we had better figure out how to deal with this COINTELPRO style assault we face. Of course one of the first things we should do is to educate ourselves, and that’s why I’m saying all this. But we also have to counter their attempts to marginalize, isolate and intimidate us.

It’s important to remember why Earth First! is targeted, and that is because we are effective. In spite of our shock and horror at the bombing last May, we didn’t back down. 3000 people from all over the country came to Redwood Summer and chained themselves to logging equipment, hugged trees, blocked logging roads and marched through timber towns. Sure we made mistakes. But in spite of incredible provocation we maintained our presence and non-violence throughout the summer. The Forest Forever voter initiative made a state-wide issue of redwood slaughter, but Redwood Summer made it national and international. Together we are the cause of the current political push to save Headwaters Forest and reform logging practices.

People in the environmental movement who are not Earth First!ers should remember that we are all affected. If you allow us to be isolated, if it’s not okay to be an Earth First!er this year, then next year it won’t be okay to be in the Sierra Club. Don’t believe the incendiary stuff you read and here about us in the corporate press. You know us. We are your neighbors, and we

So I would be crazy not to assume that the FBI has had its hand in the events up here, both before and after the bombing. But whether it’s the FBI or just the timber industry, I know for sure that the *techniques* of COINTELPRO have been used here in an attempt to disrupt us, discredit us, create a climate of fear, and derail our attempts to save the redwoods. Here are some examples of standard COINTELPRO practices that have shown up in our community:

Black Propaganda — This term refers to information that appears to come from one source (EF!) but actually comes from another source (FBI or timber). The fake press releases that were distributed before the bombing fit this category. They claimed to be from Earth First! and called for violence against timber workers, but one had no contact name or number at all, and the other spelled Darryl’s name wrong.³ An even more frightening example of black propaganda came from the right wing anti- environmental group the Sahara Club. In April 1990 they printed a diagram of how to make a bomb, claiming it was from an Earth First! terrorism manual. Of course there is no such manual printed, distributed by, or legitimately associated with us. But by distributing it as an EF! manual the Sahara Club could simultaneously get out info on how to make bombs while inciting hatred against EF!

Grey Propaganda — This term refers to damaging information whose source is not clear. Under this category I would place the recent front-page article in the San Francisco Examiner in which an “ex-CIA agent” claims, with no evidence or details whatsoever, that Earth First! has “clandestine cells of highly educated scientists” working to develop a virus to wipe out the human race.

³One timber firm, PALCO, distributed copies of this phony press release to its employees, even though it is indicated in one of their memos that they themselves were unsure that it was produced by EF!, given the misspelling of Cherney’s name.

Intimidation — This certainly describes the many death threats we activists have gotten, including the SAO style rifle scope and cross hairs threat that I received a month before I was bombed. Or the man who walked up to Darryl Cherney in Arcata and said “get a good look at my face, because I’m the one who’s gonna kill you.” Death threats have continued as recently as last night at 3 a.m., when an anonymous caller told Anna Marie [Stenberg] “this bomb’s for you.” Even a 15-year old Willits high school anti-war organizer got a call saying “We know you had Judi Bari speak at your rally. We’re not afraid to kill someone, you know.”

Harassment — This includes harassment of community people who support us, and is designed to drive those people away. Not only was my house red-tagged by the building department, following an anonymous complaint after the bombing, but so was my landlord’s. A non-activist friend who let me stay at her house had the FBI visit her place of employment and talk to her boss. My entire neighborhood was threatened with having their houses burned down when I moved back here last August.

Surveillance — The purpose of surveillance is as much to create paranoia as to gain information. And in case I had any doubts that I was still being watched, a few weeks ago an Oakland cop (the FBI’s front men) told a reporter that he knew I had just returned from U.C. Santa Barbara, and that he presumed a series of pipe bombs that mysteriously appeared on campus a few days before I got there were connected to me.

Vigilantes — Although certainly on a smaller and less lethal scale, the FBI and local law enforcement have used similar tactics to those used against AIM in Pine Ridge South Dakota. They have encouraged vigilantes by sending a clear message that crimes against Earth First!ers will not be prosecuted, including the bombing of me. At least a dozen Redwood Summer people were assaulted (not counting incidents at the demonstrations), and two were beaten into unconsciousness and left

in remote areas. Only one person was arrested for doing anything against us, and that was the man who planted a fake bomb in the Arcata Action Center, who was arrested only because the EF!ers pursued him into a bar to catch him. Several gyppo logging companies paid hourly wages for armed men to lie in wait in the woods for EF!ers last summer hoping to catch us sabbing equipment. They had instructions to shoot, with a bonus to be paid if they got one of us. Retired logger Ed Knight described it on KQED as “vigilantism at its worst.”

Local Police Complicity — This includes Mendocino County D.A. Susan Massini, who wouldn’t prosecute for Mem Hill’s broken nose or for me being rammed by the log truck. And Sheriff Shea, who tried to whip up fear and hatred of Earth First! by calling for an emergency ordinance to restrict the size of our picket signs, using a video of a Palestinian student demonstration in Beverly Hills 10 years ago to “prove” how we would use our signs as weapons. And Sgt. Satterswhite who, like the FBI in Pine Ridge, told me he “didn’t have the manpower to investigate” the death threats against me. And the Ukiah police who, just one month ago, refused to apprehend a man who came to the Mendocino Environmental Center and threatened Gary Ball with physical violence, said he was going to burn down the MEC, and raged in biblical terms saying I deserved to be bombed and should be bombed again.

Local Government Complicity — This includes Mendocino County Supervisor Marilyn Butcher, who promoted the lynch-mob mentality last year when she publicly responded to the death threats against me by saying “You brought it on yourself, Judi.” And it includes Humboldt Co. Supervisor Harry Pritchard who, just a few weeks ago, called us terrorists and said one of us would get killed if we didn’t stop “taking food out of people’s mouths.” And it includes the city governments of both Ukiah and Willits, which recently bypassed all public channels to allow the apparently permanent installation of yellow ribbons on our public streets, a not-so-subtle message of