

By Julia Gilden

A REACTIONARY DIRT BIKERS' CLUB BASED IN Southern California has called on its members to "talk some sense" into the leaders of Redwood Summer, Earth First!'s two-month-long protest against the timber industry.

Sahara Club founder and senior editor for *Dirt Biker* magazine Rick Sieman, who calls his organization a "direct reaction" group,

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admits that eradicating Earth First! is part of his agenda on fighting for dirt bikers' rights in the desert wilderness. Sieman says his hatred for Earth First! began three years ago when his son was in a biking accident during which he could have been decapitated by a piano wire strung between two Joshua trees in the middle of the southeastern California desert. He says his son saw the wire and avoided it, but that the two trees the wire was strung between had "EF" written on them in orange paint.

Jim Dodson, chairman of the off-road-vehicle committee for the Southern California branch of the Sierra Club, questions Sieman's story about his son's accident. "People [like Earth Firsters] aren't going around stringing wires between trees unless it's on their own property and they have had problems with trespassers," he says.

Dodson, a former Earth Firster who now works as a budget analyst for a government contractor, says Earth First! developed as a reaction to oil and timber consumption and rampant subdivision sprawl in the Sunbelt. But, he adds, the organization's days of direct-action tactics are long past.

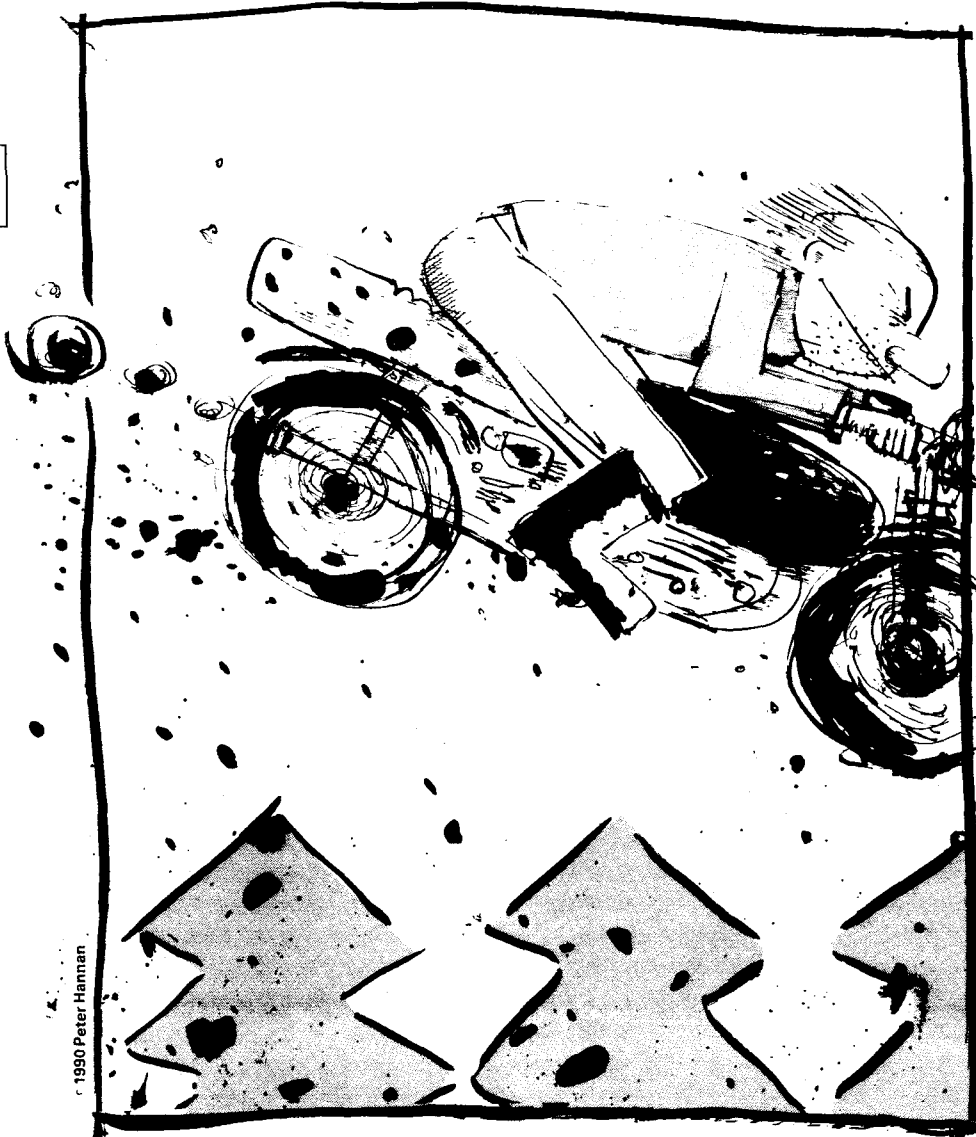
Earth First! co-founder Mike Roselle says his group's offices in Northern California have received threatening letters in recent months signed "The Stompers" and "The Committee for the Death of Earth First!," and that some of the letters contain rhetoric strikingly similar to that in newsletters distributed by the Sahara Club.

According to Roselle, Earth First! has a policy of not claiming responsibility for destructive acts against property that any members might engage in. Roselle, who admits to an Earth First! philosophy of direct action against property (but not people), says the usually highly publicized actions have been designed primarily to focus media attention on environmental abuses. He says that, unlike the Sahara Club, Earth First! has never endorsed violence against people and that in recent years "Earth First! has grown up. We've moved away from direct action and redefined ourselves more as a civil-disobedience group."

Paying the piper: While Sieman acknowledges that the language in the Sahara Club's newsletters, distributed to about 5,000 members, is hate-filled, he claims the club does not endorse violent action among its members.

But Sieman's threat to Earth Firsters in a recent radio broadcast seems to support Earth First!'s claim that its members have been targeted for physical violence by the organization. "We're letting people know who and where you [Earth Firsters] are," said Sieman on KFI-AM's "Joe Crummey Talk Show" in Los Angeles. "And if they take some appropriate action and if it scares the living hell out of you, then it's time to pay the

Dirt bikers' treadmarks on road to Redwood Summer



piper."

Producer Eric Braverman said the June 28 radio show, which pitted Sieman against Earth First! spokesman Mark Williams, came about as a result of the many hate calls he received from Sahara Club members after an earlier interview with Earth Firster Peter Braveler.

Braverman said the confrontation between Williams and Sieman—during which each claimed the other's group to be a menace to society—produced the highest

volume of phone calls the show has ever had from members of each organization. "I've never seen two groups that hated each other more," said Crummey, whose show is broadcast throughout the western U.S. and as far east as Chicago.

"People in Earth First! are the leftover shreds of humanity, with a high percentage of homosexuals," charged Sieman during the show. Sahara Club members who infiltrated Earth First!, he added, found a bunch of fumbling anarchists. Williams responded that because Earth First! is more of a movement than an organization, infiltration is no feat. He accused Sieman's organization of abusing wilderness areas and added that the Japanese, who export dirt bikes to the U.S., don't allow them to be used in Japanese wilderness.

Moderate counterparts: The Sahara Club is to the American Motorcycle Association (AMA) what Earth First! is to the Sierra Club: each organization believes it has a better chance than its moderate counterpart of bringing about change via anti-social tactics.

Sieman says his club wants to keep public lands open to recreational bikers. Rick Hammel, who coordinates the AMA's activities in the eastern California deserts with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the government agency that oversees wilderness areas in the West, agrees with Sieman's concept, but he says his club advocates fighting land-use restrictions through state and federal lobbying efforts. Hammel says the Sahara Club is not recognized by the AMA—

Sieman calls the AMA "a bunch of wimps."

Since it was founded three years ago, the Sahara Club claims to have gained support from about two dozen motorcycle stores, mail-order businesses and racing organizations. Members are motorcyclists and all-terrain-vehicle users from all over the country, with the majority living in Southern California, according to Sieman. He says a select group of "big, ugly desert racers" forms a kind of elite strike force within the club and that they are "ready to go anywhere and do whatever is needed to the enemy."

Sieman says the Sahara Club was originally formed to battle Senate Bill S11, which, if passed, would designate large portions of the Californian deserts as wilderness areas off-limits to vehicles with wheels. Sieman says bikers are unpopular with the BLM; the Sierra Club; the Audubon Society; and Sen. Alan Cranston (D-CA), the author of S11, as well as with Earth First!.

While Sieman denies he might be inciting Sahara Club members to retaliatory acts for alleged infringements against dirt bikers, his newsletter urges members to "kick some ecosuckfaces."

Firing loose cannons: Both Roselle and Sieman admit that the types of actions each organization endorses have the potential to attract "loose cannons," who might, with the tacit approval of the organization, engage in destructive acts that would be supported by the organization's philosophy if not acknowledged by the organization.

The last loose cannon Earth First! attracted turned out to be an FBI agent.

According to Dodson, Earth First! founder Dave Forman is busy these days defending himself against FBI charges that he conspired to blow up power lines in Arizona—charges that even FBI agent Mike Tait says were brought mainly "to send a message" to environmentalists with subversive ideas. Forman says he was set up and merely gave money to the undercover FBI agent who said he was planning an unnamed "ecodefense project."

Roselle says Earth First! does give money to groups and individuals for environmental actions, doesn't ask too many questions and doesn't really want to know how the money is spent. Sieman says he feels roughly the same about how Sahara Club members interpret his newsletters. According to Dodson, Sieman doesn't fully comprehend the potential for violence among Sahara Club members.

Dodson says he thinks both groups have in common a vision of an anarchistic, stateless society. Their notions about how land should be used, he adds, are fundamentally different. Earth First!'s mission is to defend land against human domination, opposing the Sahara Club's contention that land exists for humans to use.

"Both use their own versions of direct action, which can be compared to a vigilante posse concept that has been lurking for years in the extreme right," says Dodson.

Early Earth Firsters came out of a right-wing background, adds Dodson. "They weren't pacifists. They were more western Ed Abbey types, more rugged individuals."

Another similarity Dodson sees between the two groups is an aversion to big government and to social, communal problem-solving. "They both have predator mindsets, but Earth First! happens to believe in protecting land," he says. According to Dodson, the Sierra Club approves of Earth First! as a force to the left

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of the mainstream environmental organization. "But their cavalier attitude has led to a vendetta against them by the Sahara Club,"

he adds.

While Sieman maintains his organization commits no violent acts, new member Scott Troser says he was surprised to find the club

newsletters so full of vitriol and no longer shows them to potential members. He says his next dues contribution will be to the AMA instead, where the fight to keep public lands

open will be fought the slow way—through the legislature and in the courts. ☐

Julia Gilden is currently a reporter for the *Imperial Valley Press* in El Centro, Calif.

It's not easy being green: feds blind to reactionary hate crimes

Environmentalists who once joked about reactionaries declaring "open season" on them now charge that an increase in crimes of property destruction and threats of personal violence by right-wing extremists is being met with lax investigation by law-enforcement officials.

Citing the apparent failure of local police and FBI agents to vigorously and fairly pursue investigations of crimes against environmentally aligned organizations and individuals, coalitions of environmentalists have begun forming to demand reliable public protection against hate crimes.

Shortly before Earth First!'s "Redwood Summer" protest began in Northern California to denounce resource-depleting logging practices, organizers Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney were victims of a planted pipe bomb that left Bari severely wounded (see *In These Times*, June 6). Earth First! co-founder Mike Roselle said he was not surprised at the FBI's conclusion that the Earth Firsters must have bombed themselves, since the organization has learned to expect little law-enforcement protection or prosecution for hate crimes against environmentalists who have come to be regarded as subversive by the government.

Instead, environmental groups are banding together to mount their own investigation of the bomb that exploded in

Bari's car in June in Oakland. Acting on behalf of Earth First!, Greenpeace has hired a private detective to investigate the case further.

Last month, a coalition of 50 environmental organizations and California legislators formed a committee calling for a congressional investigation into the FBI's attempt to "blame the victim." The coalition list, which reads like a who's who of environmental and civil-rights guardians, includes: Greenpeace, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), SANE/Freeze, Earth Island Institute, International Indian Treaty Council, COINTELPRO Survivors, California Democratic Party Central Committee, Third World Network, Green Party Organizing Committee of California, Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA) and California state Assemblyman Tom Bates.

A separate demand for a congressional investigation into the Earth First! incident was made in July by the big five—the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, the Audubon Society and the National Parks and Conservation Association.

The unwillingness of law-enforcement agencies to thoroughly investigate crimes against environmentalists may directly contribute to a rise in hate crimes against organizers in other parts of the country, say members of allegedly targeted organizations.

The office of University of Oregon American Indian professor Rob Proudfoot was blown up with a pipe bomb last spring, according to Doug Norlen of the Wilderness Council. He says an Aryan Nations white-supremacist group is suspected by local environmentalists of planting the pipe bomb because of that group's objection to Proudfoot's course syllabus covering "multicultural links to environmental issues."

"Furthermore, we are convinced the skinheads in Oregon have a regional network, like the Aryan Nations white supremacists," adds Norlen. "We are expecting them to step up actions against environmental groups as well."

Norlen expects no protection from the establishment. "Sen. [Mark] Hatfield [R-OR] gets into such tirades against environmental groups that it lends support to an anti-environmental mentality," he says. "It creates a climate that gives permission to violent extremists to do anything they want with little chance of being pursued by the law."

Rob Anderson, assistant editor of the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, a progressive weekly in Northern California, says his newspaper's office was broken into and printing equipment was smashed last year. "Law enforcement is slack in the

county," he says. "There was no investigation and no prosecution. It gives vigilantes permission to go ahead."

According to Anderson, the original name for Redwood Summer was "Mississippi Summer in the Redwoods," chosen because of similarly relaxed law-enforcement investigations of vigilante hate crimes against blacks in the South in the '60s.

Norlen says a rise in right-wing extremist activities against Earth Firsters coincided with Bari's labor union organizing activities last winter among loggers and environmentalists, a new direction for Earth First! (see *In These Times*, Oct. 25, 1989). Bari established the first Earth First! branch of the International Workers of the World last spring. (Earth First! has long employed many tactics first popularized by the Wobblies 80 years ago, such as tree-spiking and sit-ins.)

According to co-founder Roselle, there has been a mutual distrust between Earth First! and law-enforcement officials since the organization was founded. But, say environmentalists, any groups that try to obstruct outdated U.S. traditions of turf-management techniques such as Indian genocide or corporate resource raiding may find themselves unprotected—if not outright targeted—by the government for eradication. —J.G.

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