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## **Eco Wobblies: Revolutionary Ecology and the Development of Earth First!-IWW Local #1, 1989-1994**

### **Abstract**

Environmental historians have shown that the development of the modern environmental movement has been marked by a perceived tension between the interests and attitudes of workers and those of environmental activists. This paper details an important exception to that trend. In late 1989 members of the radical environmental group Earth First! joined with lumber workers in Northern California to form Earth First!-IWW Local #1. In the words of Local #1 leader Judi Bari, this labor union acted as a “bridge between environmentalists and timber workers.” This essay examines the factors that brought workers and environmental activists together in this short-lived experiment in what some have termed “green syndicalism.” This essay utilizes archival documentary evidence and the accounts of movement activists to demonstrate a more complex relationship between Earth First! and the IWW (and between labor and environmentalism in general), with deeper historical roots than has been previously understood. In doing so, this essay challenges the assumptions of the environment versus labor dichotomy and suggests the potential for solidarity and cooperation between environmentalists and workers.

### **Introduction**

“The first step is to stop blaming the loggers and millworkers for the destruction of the planet. The timber companies treat them the same way they treat the forest—as objects to exploit for maximum profit. We can’t form an alliance by saying, ‘Hey worker, come help save the trees.’ We have to recognize that their working conditions are not separate from or subordinate to the rape of the forest. They are part and parcel of the same thing.”  
 —Judi Bari, “Timber Wars,” *Industrial Worker*, 1989<sup>1</sup>

On Sunday, November 19, 1989, the Mendocino-Humboldt General Membership Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) held its first official meeting. Among the fourteen people in attendance (out of a total of twenty-four dues paying members) were leaders from the

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<sup>1</sup> Judi Bari, “Timber Wars: *Industrial Worker*, October, 1989” in *Timber Wars: The Writings Subpoenaed by the FBI* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), 14-15.

North Coast chapter of the radical environmental group Earth First!. With the slogan “no compromise in defense of Mother Earth,” these Earth First! activists were determined to save as much of the area’s remaining old growth redwood forests as possible from what appeared to be imminent destruction at the hands of logging companies. They were joined by a number of dissident loggers and millworkers who had grown increasingly dissatisfied with what they saw as exploitive and dangerous working conditions, and who were worried about the security of their jobs as a result of unsustainable “clearcutting” in the region. Despite their many differences, these seemingly disparate groups were bonded through their shared interests and guided by leaders who preached biocentrism, worker control of industry, and a philosophy of “revolutionary ecology.”<sup>2</sup>

As some environmental historians have shown (see literature review below), the development of the modern environmental movement has often been marked by tension and conflict between workers and environmental activists. The activity of Earth First!-IWW Local #1 (as the Mendocino-Humboldt branch of the IWW came to be known) serves as an important exception to that trend. This essay examines the factors that brought workers and environmental activists together in this short-lived experiment in what has been termed “green syndicalism.” Utilizing archival documentary evidence and the accounts of movement activists, this essay works to highlight the shared histories and common interests of lumber workers and environmentalists. It uncovers more deeply rooted historical connections between the IWW and

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<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Founding Meeting of Earth First!/IWW Local #1, Recorded by Judi Bari, November 19, 1989, IWW Environmental Unionism Caucus, accessed March 21, 2017. <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/JudiBari/Minutes%20of%20the%20founding%20meeting%20of%20IWW%20Local%20%231>; Ongerth, Steve, “Chapter 28: Letting the Cat Out of the Bag,” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*. Industrial Workers of the World, 2010. accessed March 22, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/28>.

Earth First! than is generally understood. It also challenges previous narratives that, while rightly emphasizing the importance of key leaders such as Judi Bari, often neglect the agency and capacity of rank and file workers. In essence, through a detailed and multi-faceted discussion of the development of Earth First!-IWW Local #1, this essay challenges the assumptions of the environment versus labor dichotomy. This essay will also briefly discuss the various factors that worked to divide workers and environmental activists, and to disrupt the organizing efforts of Earth First!-IWW Local #1. However, a detailed analysis of these various disruptive factors (such as lumber industry propaganda, divisions between different groups of environmentalists, state repression, “business unionism,” etc.) is outside of the scope of this essay.

### **Literature Review**

For a variety of reasons, the story of Earth First!-IWW Local #1 has been generally ignored by academic historians, although it has been examined to some extent by journalists, activist intellectuals, and scholars in other fields. The most comprehensive study on the topic is *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, written by IWW activist Steve Ongerth and published online in 2010. In this study Ongerth makes use of both documentary evidence as well as personal interviews he conducted with movement activists in order to provide unique information about the origins of the coalition between the IWW and Earth First!, and about the various actions and campaigns initiated under the Earth First!-IWW Local #1 banner. The present study builds upon Ongerth’s work by utilizing many of the details laid out in *Redwood Uprising* in its analysis and historical interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Ongerth, *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*. Industrial Workers of the World, 2010. accessed March 22, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising>.

This paper is also informed by a number of books that trace the histories of Earth First! and the IWW. These include political scientist Martha Lee's *Earth First! Environmental Apocalypse*, veteran IWW organizer and labor publisher Fred Thompson's *The I.W.W.: Its First Fifty Years*, and prominent labor historian Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*. These latter two books elucidate and analyze the efforts of early twentieth century IWW activists to organize and revolutionize lumber workers. Missing from these texts however, is any sort of analysis of the links between loggers' interests and environmental concerns. My research paper builds upon these books by demonstrating that early twentieth century IWW workers and organizers were driven by notions (however incomplete) of conservation and preservation, and by critiques of the capitalist mode of development as being environmentally destructive and unsustainable.<sup>4</sup>

This paper also draws from the conceptual framework and analysis of sociologist Jeffrey Shantz who wrote a number of academic journal articles on the topic of Earth First!-IWW Local #1 published between 1999 and 2004. Among these are "Ecology and Class: The Green Syndicalism of IWW/Earth First Local 1," published in *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* in 1999, and "Radical Ecology and Class Struggle: A Re-Consideration," published in *Critical Sociology* in 2004. These two articles detail the ecological understandings,

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<sup>4</sup> Originally published in 1955, Thompson's book was updated with a new chapter and republished in 1975 under the title *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years (1905-1975): The History of an Effort to Organize the Working Class*; Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West*, (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001); Matthew S. May, *Soapbox Rebellion: The Hobo Orator Union and the Free Speech Fights of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1909-1916*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013); Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969); Fred Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years (1905-1975): The History of an Effort to Organize the Working Class* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1976); Martha F. Lee, *Earth First: Environmental Apocalypse* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

ethical convictions, and strategic frameworks that inspired and guided the organizing work of Earth First!-IWW Local #1 activists. By explicating the origins and meaning of ideas of “radical ecology” and “green syndicalism,” Shantz work helps to contextualize Earth First!-IWW Local #1 within broader environmentalist and labor traditions. In addition to drawing upon Shantz’ work, this paper also challenges certain elements of it. By highlighting the independent organizing of rank and file lumber workers, for example, this paper tells a story that contrasts in important ways with Shantz’ often narrow focus on the role of Earth First! organizer Judi Bari in instigating and driving Earth First!-IWW Local #1 activism.<sup>5</sup>

This paper tells a story that also contrasts in some ways with the conclusions of environmental historians such as Robert Gottlieb and Richard White, who have demonstrated that the development of the modern environmental movement has been marked by problematic positions on questions of work, leisure, and socio-economic class, and a tension between the perceived interests and attitudes of workers and those of environmental activists. By analyzing an important exception to that general historical trend, this paper suggests strategies for how environmental activists can answer Gottlieb’s challenge to “reconnect and reenvision the

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<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey A. Shantz and Barry D. Adam, “Ecology and Class: The Green Syndicalism of IWW/Earth First! Local 1” in *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 19, no 7 (1999): 43-72; “Judi Bari and ‘The Feminization of Earth First!’: The Convergence of Class, Gender, and Radical Environmentalism,” in *Feminist Review*, no 70 (2002): 105-122; Jeffrey Shantz, “The Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney Lawsuit Against the FBI and Oakland Police: A Landmark Victory,” in *Feminist Review* no 73 (2003): 166-171; Jeff Shantz, “Radical Ecology and Class Struggle: A Re-Consideration,” in *Critical Sociology* 30, no 3 (2004): 691-710; Jeff Shantz, “Solidarity in the Woods: Redwood Summer and Alliances Among Radical Ecology and Timber Workers,” in *Environments*, (2002).

question of the environment in the context of community, place, family, and daily life needs and concerns.”<sup>6</sup>

### **The Roots of Wobbly Environmentalism**

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded as a radical anti-capitalist labor union in 1905. Its founding convention in Chicago included the participation of such labor and socialist movement stalwarts as Lucy Parsons, Mother Jones, and Eugene Debs, among others. Over the next two decades the IWW saw sustained national growth as it gained new members (commonly referred to as “Wobblies”) among workers in factories, farms, mills, and mines. For a variety of reasons, including both state repression and internal strife, by the mid-1930s the IWW was in severe decline. Over the next few decades the group’s membership continued to fall, with a drop from tens of thousands of dues paying members at its height in the early twentieth century to a low of one hundred and fifteen dues paying members in 1961. After reaching this nadir, the IWW underwent a slow renewal beginning with the rise of the New Left in the 1960s and continuing to the present day. By 2016 the group had roughly four thousand dues paying members.<sup>7</sup>

From its earliest years until its dramatic decline in the 1930s, the IWW organized timber workers (especially in parts of Northern California and the Pacific Northwest) to fight against what they called the “Lumber Trusts,” the forces of capital that controlled the lumber industry

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on the tensions between environmentalism and labor see: Robert Gottlieb, “Chapter 8: A Question of Class: The Workplace Experience” in *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Kindle Edition: 2005), and Richard White, ““Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?”: Work and Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996); Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring* (Kindle Locations 4336-4341).

<sup>7</sup> Fred Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years (1905-1975): The History of an Effort to Organize the Working Class*, (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1976), 201.

and exploited land and labor alike. During this time the IWW lumber workers union engaged in a number of intense organizing campaigns that at times resulted in violent retribution from capital and state forces. These included the famed 1916 Everett Massacre, wherein a deputized vigilante mob killed nearly a dozen IWW workers and injured scores more during a shingle workers strike in Everett, Washington.<sup>8</sup>

Literature from this period shows that the IWW was not entirely unconcerned with issues of environmental destruction. For example, an article in a 1919 issue of the IWW publication *One Big Union Monthly* titled “Lumber Workers Taking Control of Their Industry,” IWW organizer and millworker D.S. Dietz argues for worker self-management of the logging industry. As part of his argument, Dietz suggests that more sustainable logging practices would surely result from greater worker control. While essentially advocating for a type of forest conservation, the author’s concerns seems based mostly on the economic interests of the workers (i.e. sustainable logging as a means to ensure sustainable employment). As such, the almost singular focus on jobs in this article seemingly demonstrates a lack of concern for the impact of logging practices on non-human species (let alone the overall forest ecosystem). Nonetheless, this argument would reemerge in the late 1980s in the rhetoric of Earth First!-IWW Local #1 organizers who were seeking to demonstrate common cause with lumber workers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Walker C. Smith, *The Everett Massacre: A History of the Class Struggle in the Lumber Industry* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971); Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969), 339-343; Fred Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years (1905-1975): The History of an Effort to Organize the Working Class* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1976), 106-107, 229.

<sup>9</sup> D.S. Dietz, “Lumber Workers Taking Control of Their Industry,” *One Big Union Monthly*, Vol. 1, No. 8, October 1919: 44-45.

In a book titled *The Everett Massacre*, originally published in 1921 by the IWW Publishing Bureau, IWW member Walker C. Smith details the protracted struggle between Wobblies and state and capital forces leading up to the 1916 massacre in Everett, Washington. While he clearly illustrates the negative impact of environmental destruction wrought by capitalist logging practices, Smith is also highly critical of federal forest conservation efforts. Accusing the National Forest Reserves system and the US Forest Service of ultimately serving the interests of the “lumber trusts,” Walker asks, “Why then should conservation, or the threat of it, disturb the serenity of the lumber trust?...And so it happens that the government’s forest policy has added fabulous wealth and prestige and power to the rulers of the lumber kingdom.”<sup>10</sup>

In an article titled “How Long Can It Last,” printed in the IWW publication *The Industrial Pioneer* in 1925, Canadian IWW member E.L. Chicanot decries the environmental destruction wrought by the deforestation of large parts of Canada. Chicanot lays much of the blame for this destruction on consumer demand for newsprint. A caption to an accompanying image of a tree sardonically reads, “Beautiful young trees await transformation into Mutt and Jeff Cartoons.” Another image shows the destructive results of a “clearcut” forest, with the caption, “Cut Over Land in Canada. A Forest Gone to Waste—Made Into Chicago Tribune Editorials.” More generally, Chicanot points to an irrational capitalist economic system as the main culprit behind this environmental devastation. This theme would be later taken up by IWW leaders in their efforts to reach out to both radical environmentalists and rank and file lumber workers during the late 1980s<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Walker C. Smith, *The Everett Massacre*, 13-17, 19.

<sup>11</sup> E.L. Chicanot, “How Long Can It Last?,” *The Industrial Pioneer*, December 1925:15-18.



## The Roots of the Earth First!-IWW Alliance

Founded in 1980 by a small number of radical environmental activists, Earth First! was not so much a formal organization as it was a loose network of activists and local protest organizations. Thus unlike the IWW, with its formal democratic structures, the Earth First! movement developed with no group bylaws, no officers, and no meaningful standard for identifying formal membership. Early Earth First! leaders such as Dave Foreman and Mike Roselle drew from diverse and sometimes divergent influences, including ecological thinkers such as Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Rachel Carson, and Henry David Thoreau, among others; Edward Abbey, author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (a popular novel about a group of environmental activists who engage in a campaign of eco-sabotage); and conservative early nineteenth century philosopher Thomas Malthus (who advocated efforts to control population growth). The varied and often contradictory nature of these influences were manifest in the pages of *Earth First! Journal*, a monthly publication edited for most of the 1980s by Dave Foreman.<sup>12</sup>

Dave Foreman and other early Earth First! leaders often promoted conservative and misanthropic views considered antithetical to IWW principles. They also rejected the IWW's leftwing analysis and syndicalist program. Yet at the same time, Foreman and other early Earth First! leaders drew inspiration from their understanding of the IWW's historical impact and use of tactics. Foreman in particular admired the IWW's protest methods, such as militant direct action and sabotage, etc. He also admired what he perceived as the group's history of advocacy for both small scale industry and population reduction, having once said that the IWW was "the

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<sup>12</sup> Mike Roselle, *Tree Spiker: From Earth First! to Lowbagging: My Struggle in Radical Environmental Action* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 41; Martha F. Lee, *Earth First: Environmental Apocalypse* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 31-36, 53-54.

only group in the history of North American labor to have been consistently on the side of the Earth against its commercial and industrial despoilers.” The influence of the IWW is manifest in several Earth First! publications throughout the early 1980s. For example, the image of the IWW Sabocat (a black cat that represented “sabotage”) was often reprinted in early issues of *Earth First! Journal*. As well, in 1986 Earth First! activists published a book of songs titled *The Little Green Songbook*, the name chosen as an homage to *The Little Red Songbook* that the IWW had published since 1909. In 1985 Dave Foreman co-edited the book *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* with an anonymous co-editor using the pseudonym Bill Haywood, a reference to the prominent IWW leader and co-founder “Big Bill” Haywood. The term “monkeywrenching” appears throughout Earth First! literature, its use a reference to the tactic of industrial sabotage championed by the IWW. Edward Abbey, who wrote *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and the forward to *Ecodefense*, himself acknowledged the influence of the Wobblies on his own worldview as his father Paul Revere Abbey was a longtime member of the IWW.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly the IWW influenced the development of Earth First! By 1988 it seemed that Earth First! had also begun to influence the IWW. During the 1980s a small number of longtime IWW leaders (such as artists Franklin and Penelope Rosemont, oilfield worker Gary Cox, and folk singer Utah Phillips) increasingly came into contact and corresponded with a small number of Earth First! leaders (such as Dave Foreman and Roger Featherstone). By the late 1980s a small but not insignificant number of rank and file IWW members had become active in various

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<sup>13</sup> Martha F. Lee, *Earth First: Environmental Apocalypse*, 120-121, 184; Steve Ongerth, *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*; Johnny Sagebrush and Friends, *The Earth First! Li'l Green Songbook* (Ned Ludd Books, 1986); Dave Foreman and Bill Haywood, editors, *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* (Ned Ludd Books, 1985)

Earth First! campaigns. By 1988 it was clear that some IWW leaders wanted to bring the two groups closer together.<sup>14</sup>

That certain IWW leaders were interested in building a coalition with Earth First! became clear in May 1988 with the publication of an issue of the IWW monthly newspaper *Industrial Worker* (edited at the time by Earth First! supporter Franklin Rosemont) that featured six separate articles related to Earth First! activism. One of these articles, titled “Earth First!ers, Meet the IWW: Notes on Wobbly Environmentalism,” seems clearly intended as an IWW pitch aimed at courting the support of Earth First! activists. This article features a rather generous reading of early twentieth century IWW literature to present a somewhat exaggerated account of the group’s supposed longtime concern with environmental destruction. The press run of the May 1988 *Industrial Worker* was increased from the standard 3,000 copies to nearly 10,000 copies, and efforts were made to distribute this publication at Earth First! gatherings and headquarters throughout that summer.<sup>15</sup>

This publication generated both positive and negative responses from the IWW membership. In particular, some IWW members were concerned by what they perceived as the racism and misanthropy manifest in controversial public statements attributed to Earth First! figures Dave Foreman, Roger Featherstone, and Edward Abbey, and took exception to the *Industrial Worker* being used to associate with those leaders. While somewhat controversial

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<sup>14</sup> Steve Ongerth, “Chapter Ten: Fellow Workers, Meet Earth First!” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/10>.

<sup>15</sup> Franklin Rosemont, “Earth First!ers, Meet the IWW: Notes on Wobbly Environmentalism,” *Industrial Worker*, May 1988; Steve Ongerth, “Chapter Ten: Fellow Workers, Meet Earth First!” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/10>.

within the ranks of the IWW, this publication generated generally positive responses among Earth First! members. These outreach efforts would soon yield results among the members of the North Coast Earth First! chapter.<sup>16</sup>

Coincidentally, unaware of the dialog taking place between members of Earth First! and the IWW, around this same time North Coast Earth First! new recruit Judi Bari had begun making plans to organize an educational workshop on the history of the IWW and its lessons for environmental activists. While new to Earth First! activism, Bari had been active as a shop steward and rank-and-file union activist a decade earlier with both the Retail Clerks Union and the Postal Workers Union. When she first began making plans for this workshop (to be held at the upcoming annual Earth First Round River Rendezvous in September 1988), Bari had been under the assumption that the IWW was no longer in existence. It was only after she announced her plans that she was given a copy of the May 1988 *Industrial Worker* by fellow Earth First! leader Darryl Cherney. Astonished to learn that the IWW was not only still active but was making direct overtures to the radical environmental movement, Bari quickly contacted the IWW headquarters in Chicago to ask for help in organizing the workshop. With help from IWW members Gary Cox and Mark Ross (whose travel to Northern California from Chicago and Montana, respectively, had been financed by the IWW General Executive Board), this workshop perhaps represented the beginning of Earth First!-IWW Local #1, which would officially form just shy of a year later.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Steve Ongerth, “Chapter Ten: Fellow Workers, Meet Earth First!” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/10>.

<sup>17</sup> Steve Ongerth, “Chapter Eleven: I Knew Nothin’ Till I Met Judi” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/11>.

## **The Logging Industry and the State of the Workers in Mendocino and Humboldt Counties**

The logging industry in Mendocino and Humboldt counties in the 1980s was dominated by three major companies: Louisiana Pacific, Georgia Pacific, and Pacific Lumber. While facing somewhat different specific circumstances at each of these companies, timber workers throughout the region also faced shared challenges related to work safety, increasing austerity, and the fear that unchecked “clearcutting” practices threatened the long-term viability of the industry in the area.

Earth First! organizer Judi Bari once described Louisiana Pacific as “absolutely the most crass company in the country.” Louisiana Pacific had long been criticized for its rapacious “clearcutting” logging practices. In order to maximize production, in the late 1980s the company began harvesting young trees less than six-inch in diameter (what loggers jokingly referred to as “pecker poles”). Bari publicly denounced these practices, explaining the danger inherent in the monoculture plantations that the company said would replace the naturally growing forests:

Not only is Louisiana Pacific clearcutting, but now they’re even taking the debris from the forest floor, leaving nothing to replenish the soil. The nineteen year rotation tree farms Louisiana Pacific envisions will make Mendocino County a desert in three generations.

Louisiana Pacific president Harry Merlo drew further ire with a response perceived as insensitive and tone-deaf, saying:

You know, it always annoyed me to leave anything on the ground when I log our own lands... There shouldn’t be anything left in the ground... We need everything that’s out

there... We log to infinity. Because we need it all; it's ours. It's out there, and we need it all; now.<sup>18</sup>

Many Louisiana Pacific workers had at one point been union members, but by 1986 the company had managed to break up the unions in most of its mills. Judi Bari later explained that while the workforce had been left “still scattered and disorganized,” the company had also “left a vast pool of resentment.” This feeling was likely intensified in late November 1988 when the company announced the closure of a lumber mill in Potter Valley in Mendocino County that employed 132 full-time workers and had been operating for nearly fifty years. Just weeks later the company announced the closure of another mill, this one a facility in Red Bluff (Tehama County) that employed nearly one hundred people. As the mill in Red Bluff was one of the few remaining unionized Louisiana Pacific worksites, some workers suggested the closure was related to the company's anti-union agenda. In both cases, however, company officials made statement that shifted blame to the environmental movement, pointing to increased costs associated with Forest Service regulations and environmentalist initiated lawsuits.<sup>19</sup>

Georgia Pacific millworkers faced a different challenge. While formally members the International Woodworkers of America (IWA), during the 1980s many workers grew increasingly dissatisfied with this union. Much of the unrest stemmed from years of company

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<sup>18</sup> Steve Ongerth, “Chapter Seventeen: Logging to Infinity” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, [https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/17#\\_ftn46](https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/17#_ftn46); Judi Bari, “Timber Wars: *Industrial Worker*, October, 1989” in *Timber Wars: The Writings Subpoenaed by the FBI* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), 17.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Ongerth, “Chapter Thirteen: They're Closing Down the Mill in Potter Valley” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/13>; Judi Bari, “Timber Wars: *Industrial Worker*, October, 1989” in *Timber Wars: The Writings Subpoenaed by the FBI* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), 17.

austerity measures that for many workers had resulted in wage reductions of nearly twenty-five percent. As Judi Bari later explained:

The millworkers were furious and voted by an eighty-eight percent margin to strike. But the union, assisted by a federal “mediator,” squashed the strike vote by telling the workers they would all get fired if they went out. They then eliminated the radicals from the vote counting committee, took a re-vote, and passed the contract.<sup>20</sup>

Workers at Georgia Pacific mills were also worried about what they saw as dangerous working conditions coupled with a lack of union support for their grievances. As early as 1982 workers were complaining about being forced to work with dangerous chemicals—such as pentachlorophenol (PCP) and tetrachlorophenol (TCP)—without being given the proper safety equipment. Two years later the workers threatened to strike over this issue, until the company negotiated a settlement that included the installation of failsafe mechanisms on company equipment. In early 1989 a major incident occurred at a Georgia Pacific mill in Fort Bragg in Mendocino County that for many workers truly revealed the feckless nature of their union. In February 1989 a spill occurred that resulted in two workers being doused in a chemical shower that included high levels of toxic polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB). The company initially denied that the workers had been exposed to PCB, and took efforts to conceal and coverup the existence of these chemicals. Meanwhile, as the spill had not been thoroughly cleaned or contained, other workers continued to be exposed to high levels of toxic chemicals. After management refused to take action, and union representatives refused to advocate on the workers’ behalf, some of these workers finally decided to take independent action. It was only after workers contacted both

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<sup>20</sup> Judi Bari, “Timber Wars: *Industrial Worker*, October, 1989” in *Timber Wars: The Writings Subpoenaed by the FBI* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), 14-15; Steve Ongerth, “Chapter Fourteen: Mother Jones at the Georgia Pacific Mill” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/14>

federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) representatives and the local fire department that Georgia Pacific management finally decided to close down the worksite and test the remaining spill. Rather than support these workers, IWA representatives continued to provide cover for the company. In a radio interview IWA representative Don Nelson downplayed the union's culpability in the incident, saying "According to our records there was no way we could have known PCBs were at that site." He even provided cover for the company, going so far as to say that he believed Georgia Pacific had since made a "real effort" to eliminate PCB laden equipment.<sup>21</sup>

While never having a unionized workforce, Pacific Lumber had long enjoyed a reputation for high wages, good benefits, and sustainable logging practices. From the 1930s until 1986, Pacific Lumber had been a locally based, family-run operation. As a result of its conservation practices, by the 1980s Pacific Lumber was the owner of massive holdings of relatively uncut redwood forest. All of this changed in 1986 after Pacific Lumber was acquired by Maxxam Corporation in a controversial hostile takeover financed with "junk bonds." Under the leadership of Charles Hurwitz, Maxxam quickly moved to terminate Pacific Lumber's pension plan (in large part to pay off debts incurred in the takeover). Hurwitz also increased production quotas and for the first time in decades Pacific Lumber instituted clearcutting practices that put at risk nearly one-hundred-thousand acres of relatively undisturbed forest (at the time constituting nearly seventy-five percent of the world's remaining privately owned redwoods). While increased production meant steady work in the short-term, many Pacific Lumber workers began

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<sup>21</sup> Steve Ongerth, "Chapter Fourteen: Mother Jones at the Georgia Pacific Mill" in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*; Judi Bari, "Timber Wars: Industrial Worker, October, 1989" in *Timber Wars: The Writings Subpoenaed by the FBI* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), 15.



to worry about what effect the move from selective cutting to clearcutting would have on the sustainability of the company and the long-term future of their employment. As one unnamed Pacific Lumber millworker succinctly stated: “without the trees, there are no jobs.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Workers and Environmentalists Unite**

At the same time that Judi Bari and other North Coast Earth First! members were beginning to grapple with the need to build an alliance with timber workers, many of these workers were themselves beginning to think about organizing for change. Despite the prevalence of anti-environmentalist propaganda at their workplaces and in the mass media, many of these workers were also beginning to feel more sympathetic and open towards Bari and her Earth First! comrades. By the end of 1989—after nearly a year of independent worker organizing, clandestine communication between Bari and select workers, and public acts of solidarity with workers by Earth First! activists—a worker-environmentalist coalition emerged through the formation of Earth First!-IWW Local #1.

Shortly after news broke of the hostile take over of Pacific Lumber in 1986, a number of workers decided to organize in resistance to Maxxam. However, rather than organize a union they began to pursue an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP), a means by which they hoped to collectively buy the company back in order to save their jobs and their communities. While the chief organizers of this effort claimed to have met with hundreds of interested workers, by mid-1989 their efforts seemed to be floundering. Part of the problem was that many while

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<sup>22</sup> John J. Berger, *Forests Forever: Their Ecology, Restoration, and Protection* (San Francisco: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2008), 167; Judi Bari, “Timber Wars,” 15-17; Steve Ongerth, “Chapter 12 : The Day of the Living Dead Hurwitzes,” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 18, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/12>.

workers privately expressed enthusiasm for the idea, few were willing to do so publicly out of a fear of company reprisals. Many were willing to speak anonymously to the local press however. “It’s the talk of the town,” one unnamed worker told a reporter from the *Eureka Times Standard* in September 1988. Another worker said, “I can’t stop thinking about it. We sit around the living room and talk about buying the Pacific Lumber Company.” Regardless, Hurwitz and Maxxam maintained the position that they would never sell the company, and so to many workers the ESOP plan seemed doomed to fail from the start.<sup>23</sup>

By June 1989, as the ESOP dream finally seemed to have died, a handful of current and former Pacific Lumber workers had reached out to Judi Bari, who at that point had been publicly calling for the creation of a worker-environmentalist alliance for several months. Bari’s own outreach took many forms, including through articles she wrote for the *Anderson Valley Advertiser* (a local alternative weekly newspaper) and through a monthly community radio program she hosted that at times featured the voices of local timber workers. She both made personal contact with and at times made impassioned speeches directed towards workers during direct action protests that blocked their paths. Her message was consistent: while their motivations might differ, workers and environmentalists had a shared interest in protecting the forests.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Marie Gravelle, “P-L Workers Dream of Ownership, But Some Worry about Risking Jobs”, *Eureka Times-Standard*, September 15, 1988; Judi Bari, “Timber Wars,” 16-17; Steve Ongerth, “Chapter 12 : The Day of the Living Dead Hurwitzes,” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*.

<sup>24</sup> Steve Ongerth, “Chapter 21 : You Fucking Commie Hippies!,” in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 19, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/21>.

The Pacific Lumber workers who responded to that message (such as Kelly Bettiga, Pete Kayes, John Maurer, and Lester Reynolds, among others) at first did so surreptitiously. Together with Bari and fellow Earth First! leader Darryl Cherney, this group began publishing an irreverent alternative Pacific Lumber company newsletter titled *Timberlyin'*. The name was chosen as a way to mock the official company newsletter *Timberline*. Under the banner read the caption "REALLY Published By and For the Employees of the Pacific Lumber Company." The back page announced that "*Timberlyin'* is the official unofficial paper of the rank-and-file of Palcotraz." This publication was similar to and likely inspired by *Postal Strife*, an alternative newsletter Bari and her coworkers published during the 1970s when she served as a union leader at the Washington Bulk Mail facility. In the pages of *Timberlyin'* were cartoons and articles dealing with the ESOP campaign, dissatisfaction with the company's health plan, and information about complaints of unsafe working conditions. The newsletter garnered mixed responses from the workforce, as is evidenced by two letters published in the second issue in October 1989. The first letter lauded the publishing of the newsletter and urged its creators to stand strong against "those arrogant mush heads" that ran the company. The other letter anonymously read: "I would appreciate it if you and your staff would get your heads out of the jock strap long enough to remove my name from your mailing list."<sup>25</sup>

At the same time that Bari and Cherney were beginning to work with disgruntled Pacific Lumber workers, they were also beginning to make contact with a number of Georgia Pacific

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<sup>25</sup> *Timberlyin'*, June/July 1989, Hydesville, CA, [https://ecology.iww.org/PDF/TL/Timberlyin\\_June-July89.pdf](https://ecology.iww.org/PDF/TL/Timberlyin_June-July89.pdf); *Timberlyin'*, October 1989, Hydesville, CA [https://ecology.iww.org/PDF/TL/Timberlyin\\_Oct89.pdf](https://ecology.iww.org/PDF/TL/Timberlyin_Oct89.pdf); Steve Ongerth, "Chapter 20 : Timberlyin'," in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 19, 2017, <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/20>.

mill workers. Still upset about their union's response to the PCB spill, some Georgia Pacific workers became incensed at a proposed twenty-five percent increase in union dues. In response to a union leaflet that argued the dues increase was necessary "to maintain the ability of our union to function," several rank and file members decided to produce their own leaflet. Led by mill maintenance janitors Julie Wiles and Cheryl Jones, this group included several workers who had been directly affected by the recent PCB spill, as well as Bari and Cherney. Their leaflet pointed out that while union officers' wages had recently increased by sixty-nine percent, the average raise for the workforce was just three percent. This bothered IWA representative Don Nelson so much that he pressured company officials to have Wiles arrested one day as she was distributing fliers on company property. This tactic apparently backfired, as in early November 1989 the membership voted against the dues increase by a margin of nearly two to one.

Bari also began assisting a group of Georgia Pacific mill workers with their continuing struggles over the recent PCB spill. The company had appealed an OSHA ruling against them, and in response (and without the consent of the affected workers) IWA representatives agreed to a reduction in the fine from \$14,000 to \$3,000 and to afterwards drop the matter. Despite this, the workers wanted to continue the fight. It was at this point that Judi Bari proposed the formation of Earth First!-IWW Local #1. The workers no longer wanted the IWA to represent their case, and the appeals judge had ruled that the workers needed to be represented by an official labor union. For Bari the logical solution was for the workers to be represented by the IWW.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Earth First!/IWW Local #1 Letters to OSHA on behalf of IWA Rank and File Millworker, IWW Environmental Unionism Caucus, accessed March 21, 2017 <https://ecology.iww.org/texts/JudiBari/IWW%20Local%201%20Letters%20to%20OSHA>; Steve Ongerth, "Chapter 26 : They Weren't Gonna Have No Wobbly Runnin' Their Logging Show," in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*, accessed May 19, 2017, [https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/26#\\_ftn24](https://ecology.iww.org/texts/SteveOngerth/RedwoodUprising/26#_ftn24).

Since no IWW local existed (despite several local Earth First! members having recently joined the organization), Bari argued that they should officially form one. Among the members of this new organization were Georgia Pacific workers who had been affected by the PCB spill, such as Treva VandenBosch, Ron Atkinson, and Joe Valdao. Julie Wiles, who had been arrested for leafletting outside of a Georgia Pacific mill also became a member. A number of Pacific Lumber workers also joined, such as Pete Kayes, Kelly Bettiga, John Maurer, and Lester Reynolds, all of whom had worked on *Timberlyin'* with Bari. Unfortunately Bari was unable to establish any meaningful contacts with any Louisiana Pacific workers.<sup>27</sup>

### **Repression**

In some ways the formation of Earth First!-IWW Local #1 in late November 1989 seems more like a culmination than a beginning. To be certain the group engaged in a flurry of activity over the following months and through the spring of 1990. However, a tragedy struck on May 24, 1990 that significantly disrupted the work of Earth First!-IWW Local #1. On that day both Cherney and Bari were driving through Oakland California—having just left an event where they were speaking about the struggles of loggers and environmentalists in the redwood forests—when a pipe bomb exploded in their car. Both Cherney and Bari were critically injured. However as the bomb had been planted directly underneath Bari's seat, her injuries were much more extensive. Bizarrely, the FBI and the Oakland police immediately accused Cherney and Bari of making and knowingly transporting the bomb in their car (calling it an accidental detonation), and both were arrested while still in the hospital. Charges against the two were eventually dropped due to lack of evidence, but not before a narrative of their guilt had already been crafted

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<sup>27</sup> Steve Ongerth, "Chapter 26 : They Weren't Gonna Have No Wobbly Runnin' Their Logging Show," in *Redwood Uprising: From One Big Union to Earth First! and the Bombing of Judi Bari*.

and promulgated in the media. This widely presented image of Bari and her comrades as so-called “eco-terrorists,” coupled with ongoing anti-environmentalist company propaganda, severely impacted the work of Earth First!-IWW Local #1. Over the next few years, Bari and other Earth First! activists continued to provide solidarity support to loggers and millworkers, while at the same time taking direct action to stop destruction of the forest ecosystem. Yet while Bari’s to social and environmental commitments never wavered, her pace of activity slowed significantly following the bombing. Accordingly, the work of the Earth First!-IWW Local #1 declined as well. The group had essentially ceased to exist by the time of Bari’s death from breast cancer in 1997.<sup>28</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This essay agrees with Jeffrey Shantz’ assertion that the history Earth First!-IWW Local #1 is “significant in the questions it poses regarding the possibilities (and problems) for a radical convergence of social movements.” Shantz and others argue that “Greens should pay more attention to anarcho-syndicalist ideas,” a suggestion that Judi Bari and other Earth First!-IWW Local #1 activists might agree with. Bari at times had to contend with prominent voices within her own movement who questioned the wisdom of a worker-environmentalist alliance. Yet by

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<sup>28</sup> In 2002 Cherney and Bari’s estate won a federal civil rights lawsuit against the FBI and the Oakland police. The court ruled that these agencies had conspired to violate their First and Fourth Amendment rights as a result of false allegations and a refusal to fully investigate the bombing.

arguing against the misanthropic views of Earth First! leaders like Dave Foreman, Judi Bari outlined an environmental philosophy that she called Revolutionary Ecology.<sup>29</sup>

Fundamental to this perspective was the idea of biocentrism. Bari explained:

Deep ecology, or biocentrism, is the belief that nature does not exist to serve humans. Rather, humans are part of nature, one species among many. All species have a right to exist for their own sake, regardless of their usefulness to humans. And biodiversity is a value in itself, essential for the flourishing of both human and nonhuman life.<sup>30</sup>

While biocentrism, and its incompatibility with both capitalist and state socialist systems, was a central component of Bari's worldview, she did not believe that biocentrism itself was necessarily an inherently revolutionary philosophy. To really challenge the social structures that perpetuated capitalist ecological destruction, Bari argued, environmentalists needed to broaden their focus beyond the protection of "wilderness." As Bari explained:

To define our movement as being concerned with "wilderness only," as Earth First! did in the 1980s, is self defeating. You cannot seriously address the destruction of wilderness without addressing the society that is destroying it. It's about time for the ecology movement (and I'm not just talking about Earth First! here) to stop considering itself as separate from the social justice movement. The same power that manifests itself as resource extraction in the countryside manifests itself as racism, classism, and human exploitation in the city. The ecology movement must recognize that we are just one front in a long, proud, history of resistance.<sup>31</sup>

By calling for the unification of lumber workers and environmentalists, despite the ultimate failure of her efforts, Judi Bari demonstrated the possibility for future worker-

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<sup>29</sup> Bari also drew the ire of some Earth First! activists, when she denounced "tree spiking" (a form of sabotage that carried a certain amount of risk for loggers); Judi Bari, "The Secret History of Tree Spiking," *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, February 17, 1993, accessed May 19, 2017, <https://iww.org/history/library/Bari/TreeSpiking1>. Jeffrey A. Shantz and Barry D. Adam, "Ecology and Class: The Green Syndicalism of IWW/Earth First! Local 1" in *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 19, no 7 (1999): 44; Judi Bari, "Why I Am Not A Misanthrope: AVA, January 9, 1991," *Timber Wars*, 82-84.

<sup>30</sup> Judy Bari, *Revolutionary Ecology: Biocentrism & Deep Ecology*, 1995, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://www.judibari.org/revolutionary-ecology.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

environmentalist cooperation. By examining the deep historical roots of the Earth First!-IWW Local #1 alliance, and by highlighting the grassroots efforts of lumber workers in the process of the creation of Earth First!-IWW Local #1, this essay has hopefully worked to demonstrate a similar lesson. In analyzing this important exception to the environment-labor dichotomy, this paper suggests that it is possible to “reconnect and reenvision the question of the environment in the context of community, place, family, and daily life needs and concerns.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring* (Kindle Locations 4336-4341).



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