

Vail, Colorado arson attack: The reactionary implications of 'eco-terrorism'

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The arson attack at a Vail, Colorado ski resort October 19, apparently carried out by members of the so-called Earth Liberation Front, was a reactionary political act. Contrary to media claims that groups encouraging so-called 'eco-terrorism,' like the ELF, Earth First! and the Animal Liberation Front, are 'left-wing,' such organizations are deeply misanthropic and view contemporary society itself with suspicion and hostility.

The fires, which destroyed a ski patrol headquarters building, a skier shelter, a mountaintop restaurant and several chairlifts, causing some \$12 million in damage, were set to protest the Vail ski resort's 880-acre expansion, called Category III, into the Two Elk Roadless Area. The week before a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit by environmentalists seeking an injunction against the expansion.

Vail, located in the Rocky Mountains, is one of the busiest ski resorts in the world, attracting more than one and a half million skiers annually. Vail Resorts is a massive corporation, which has invested more than \$200 million in the area since it went public two years ago. Its virtual monopoly over economic life in the region has angered some residents, particularly operators of small businesses who have been squeezed out.

In its communiqué, the ELF declared: 'Vail, Inc. is already the largest ski operation in North America and now wants to expand even further. The 12 miles of roads and 885 acres of clearcuts will ruin the last, best lynx habitat in the state. Putting profits ahead of Colorado's wildlife will not be tolerated.'

The Front was reportedly formed as a breakaway from Earth First! in 1992 at a rally in Brighton, England. Its founders were frustrated with the 'legalistic' tactics of mainstream environmentalism and

set out to create an organization devoted to acts of sabotage and terrorism. The underground group has claimed responsibility for a number of actions in Europe and US, generally involving arson. It has claimed responsibility for a fire that destroyed horse pens in eastern Oregon and fires at a US Forest Service installation in the same state, as well as the release of 300 mink from a research fur farm. The ELF has no organizational structure or membership; anyone carrying out an act of sabotage, or 'monkeywrenching,' in line with its outlook can claim to be a representative of the group.

The ideology of the Earth Liberation Front, Earth First! and similar organizations is profoundly pessimistic and anti-social. Earth First! in its policy statements asserts that the source of environmental damage is 'human civilization,' which has 'declared war on large mammals.' Rejecting the 'anthropocentric (human-centered) world view,' its advocates declare that 'the ideas and manifestations of industrial civilization are anti-Earth, anti-woman and anti-liberty.'

If 'human civilization' is the problem, then clearly the answer is less civilization. The anti-scientific, anti-rationalist core of this argument is clear. Support for these movements comes from a layer of the population that is repelled by the reality of modern capitalism, but sees no basis for transforming society in a progressive and humane fashion, and is generally hostile to the only social force capable of carrying through such a change, the working class.

The targets of this hostility toward modern society are often those living in urban centers, who are viewed as a rapidly-multiplying mass, threatening to consume the earth's resources. The logic of this outlook pushes its proponents in the direction of extreme right-wing and even neo-fascist elements. There is an ideological link

between the bleak pronouncements of Earth First!, Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski's rambling attacks on technology and the paranoid views of survivalist and Militia movements.

Earlier this year a controversy erupted in the Sierra Club, one of the country's largest conservation groups, when a proposition was put to a vote advocating a drastic reduction in US population growth and curbs on immigration. Some of those involved in the Sierra Club initiative had been active in promoting the passage of Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot measure in California that denied health, education and other public benefits to immigrants. The proposition was ultimately defeated by a 60-40 margin. The Wilderness Society, another conservation group, already has made reducing immigration rates its official policy. Right-wing outfits like The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) make an open appeal to environmentalists.

Certain individuals are not shy about spelling out the logic of their views. Dave Foreman, a founder of Earth First! and advocate of curbs on immigration, is a prominent figure in these circles. In the late 1980s, while famine stalked Ethiopia, he declared, 'The best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance.' He wrote to one critic: 'Call it fascist if you like, but I am more interested in bears, rain forests, and whales than in people.'

In their neo-Malthusian attacks on 'human civilization,' Earth First! and ELF leave out one item, the present *form* of social organization, capitalism, whose unplanned and profit-driven character is primarily responsible for the massive damage that has been done and the very real threat of environmental catastrophe.

These forces share basic assumptions with their 'pro-business' opponents who decry any environmental regulation as an unconscionable attack on free enterprise and the rights of property-owners. Both accept the sanctity of the market and the notion that economic development can only be unplanned and destructive, with the environmentalists arguing that the process must be halted and the anti-regulation forces contending that the destruction is the inevitable price of progress. Neither side in the debate can conceive of a civilization planning out its development, taking into account both human needs and the laws and limits of nature, in a rational fashion. For that, a revolutionary,

socialist vision is required.



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