

**ROD'S
EXPERIENCE
WITH
GOVERNMENT
HARASSMENT**

Rod Cornado

As animal liberationists, it is important to recognize that, in society's eyes, we support terrorism. Of course our actions and those of the A.L.F. have never resulted in even one injury let alone death, yet the Department of Justice labels the A.L.F. as a domestic terrorist organization. The laws of the land have decided that private property shall take precedence over life and, as such, any actions to preserve life are likely to be deemed criminal.

Feds Cry "Terrorism"

This is not something unique to the animal liberation movement. Ploughshares activists, many of whom are Catholic priests, for many years have attacked the equipment of the U.S. military death machine whose sole intent is killing people and, as a result, have served long prison sentences. Earth First! activists, whose only targets were ski-lifts and powerlines serving mines and pump stations, were infiltrated for two years by an FBI agent who then busted them in the act of cutting down a powerline in Arizona in 1989.

All of this means that the nonviolent actions we participate in and support are likely to be viewed by the federal government as the work of extremists who may employ terrorism to achieve their goals. Of course, this same charge has historically applied to America's colonialist, anti-slavery advocates, African American community organizers, American Indian Movement members, anti-Vietnam war activists and now us. And, as proven in 1973 in Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the U.S. federal law enforcement community and military forces are prepared and willing to use deadly force to stop their own citizens they deemed as enemies of the state. Now, we can argue till we're blue in the face that we're not real terrorists and those in the labs, slaughterhouses, fur farms, hunting blinds, factory farms, military and police forces are; but our voices matter little to the big money interests who place politicians, the police and judges in power - those who just so happen to be the very same people we oppose. The pharmaceutical, medical, agricultural/"food," military, timber, mining and petrol chemical industries control the courts, Congress and the media, so it's best if we just recognize the likelihood of our beliefs being criminalized and prepare for the government repression which has already began.

First Encounter

My first encounter with the FBI was in 1988 after the A.L.F. and Animal Rights Militia (ARM) had firebombed a veal processor, a slaughterhouse, a poultry plant and a butcher shop in Santa Clara County, California. FBI agents wanted to speak with me because of the obvious escalation in illegal animal liberation activities, my history with Sea Shepherd and my arrest in Canada for A.L.F. smash attacks.

My first mistake was just talking to the FBI. I felt I had nothing to hide. The agent was cordial and simply asked if I had been approached by the A.L.F. or ARM, asking to be recruited or to be their spokesperson. I said no. But, as I was willing to talk, his calls persisted. Finally, he asked me to come down to his office and tell him about Sea Shepherd's 1986 raid on the Icelandic whaling industry - an action for which I had accepted personal responsibility.

The FBI agent said that Iceland was soon to file an extradition application and that it would be in my best interest to cooperate. He asserted that if I didn't cooperate, the FBI would be forced to arrest me if the extradition order was granted. The agent also said that if I made a signed statement, it would help to show the courts that I was cooperative, which would help me should I be officially charged.

Noncooperation With the Feds

I called his bluff and refused and never heard from him again. I now realize that, had I made the official statement he was requesting, it would have been used against me in the grand jury proceedings when federal prosecutors were trying to convince jurors that I was a criminal. What might appear as a harmless confirmation of a publicly known fact can easily haunt you in the future as a sworn statement made to a federal agent. That is why we should never speak to the FBI.

In 1989, I was contacted again by the FBI who asked me point-blank what I knew about the A.L.F. I told the agent to either present a subpoena or a warrant. He asked where I could be served a subpoena; I gave him my address and never heard from him again.

When you know your right to remain silent, you make the FBI's job ten times harder. In 1990 the FBI approached my parents. They were accompanied by a man who my mom said "looked just like one of your friends, with long hair and a beard." The agents showed my mother photos of activists and asked if she had seen any of them hanging around with me. The FBI said the activists were suspects in the firebombing of an army recruitment center. They asked that I contact them, which I did in the hopes that by seeing the photos, I could then warn the activists that they were under surveillance.

When I realized it was a stupid idea to try to beat the FBI at their own game, I canceled my meeting with them. Likewise, no activists should feel they can gain information by talking with the FBI. The moment you begin talking to the FBI, the more they will approach you, knowing you will talk. There will always be two agents, as one is trained in asking questions while the other will evaluate your body language for subliminal messages as to which subjects you are comfortable discussing and which ones trouble you. So even though you may say nothing, the FBI are still able to gather intelligence.

Narcs Among Us

In 1990, the Earth Night Action Group toppled powerlines from a coal-fired power plant and the FBI was swarming Northern California. They were successful in pressuring the former girlfriend of an animal rights activist into being wired with a recording device to try to gather information from other activists about the sabotage. That is why activists should never openly speculate as to who might have done what action both in person or on the phone, as we are only doing the FBI's job for them.

Once the FBI has associated a particular illegal act with a political idealism or cause, then the way is paved for surveillance, wire-taps, grand jury subpoenas and other forms of governmental repression of the individuals or groups associated with that cause. Once again, we can be outraged at this and scream bloody murder that our civil rights are being violated but, in doing so, it's not going to change a damn thing.

We either can accept that the A.L.F., animal liberation and earth defense in general, are major targets for police repression and act accordingly, or we can go back to supporting only the ineffective tactics controlled and allowed by our opposition. But, there is no room in any legitimate, illegal, direct action struggle for those who want to be seen as militants who talk the talk but don't walk the walk. Those are the people who bring down the heat yet can't stand the fire. Prove to the animals and the earth where your heart lies and to no other.

Feds Target Visible Warriors

Later in 1990, two Earth First! organizers were the targets of a car-bomb. Following the assassination attempt, the two victims themselves were accused of transporting explosives and, while the real bombers went free, myself and many other Northern California activists began to be questioned and put under police surveillance. During this time, Santa Cruz County was seen in the government's eyes as "a breeding ground for eco-terrorists."

A sympathetic reporter even told us of seeing "an eco-terrorist's flow chart" in the Sheriff's Department, listing as "eco-terrorists," any activists who had been arrested for civil disobedience. No evidence of actual criminal involvement was necessary; just the willingness to get arrested for earth defense and animal liberation was enough for you to be seen as a potential terrorist. There is every reason to believe that when investigating A.L.F. activities, the FBI first surveys activists with CD arrest records.

The FBI sees it as a logical progression that one will first protest, do CD and then commit illegal direct action. I have seen A.L.F. activists who never had any encounters with law enforcement officials nor even had their names mentioned by the FBI, all because they never went to demos and never did CD.

Witch Hunts

In 1991, A.L.F. actions moved to the Northwest and with them the FBI's focus on animal liberation investigations. Grand juries were convened in Oregon and Washington to investigate arson attacks on fur industry targets. At this time, the Coalition Against Fur Farms (CAFF) and PETA were the only organizations speaking out in defense of the A.L.F. and, as a result, made easy targets for the FBI. The FBI repression of the animal rights movement from 1987 to 1991 had the chilling effect of silencing previously vocal supporters of the A.L.F..

My own situation may seem grim, but considering that after five Federal grand juries that lasted over four years, subpoenaed over 70 individuals and investigated six major A.L.F. raids, the fact that I was the only activist indicted and only received four and one-half years - I believe it shows that we did pretty good. And my indictment would have not been possible had it not been for preventable mistakes I made which resulted in providing the Feds with physical evidence.

Stand Strong, Speak Up, Act

If you are to be a vocal A.L.F. supporter, turn the tables on interviewers or editors. When doing interviews or writing letters to the editor, refuse to acknowledge A.L.F. actions as violent or terrorist. I often respond with the question that if the media and police are so concerned with violence and terrorism, why not ask the same questions to those who operate in the light of day with human blood on their hands like the ATF, FBI, U.S. military, police and arms manufacturers. That usually shuts them up.

We cannot let the FBI or anyone else intimidate us away from supporting actions which cause no harm, yet save countless lives. All that is necessary is that we educate ourselves with the intimidation tactics of our opposition and familiarize ourselves with what few rights we have left. Remember that there is nothing illegal about opposing government and police repression of our movement or any other that fights for peace and justice.

The Bill of Rights guarantees our obligation to overthrow any government of our own that no longer respects the rights of its citizens. It is important that we learn the lessons that our counterparts in Britain have learned. Despite major police repression, the A.L.F. continues to be a force to be reckoned with in the U.K. All that prevents us from creating the same in the U.S. is our degree of willingness to take greater personal responsibility, overcome our fears and sacrifice a little bit of our own comfort and freedom.

Just remember: whatever we go through, and I say this even as someone who must sit in prison for four years, that whatever we as First World human beings go through in courts, jails or prisons, it is little compared to what political activists in other countries endure to fight for their beliefs. It is also nothing compared to the animals whose freedom lies in our own hands.

The FBI, ATF, police and corporations are the ones with blood on their hands and they try to intimidate us with harassment, injury, imprisonment or death. What is most fearful is doing nothing as our one earth and her animal children are ruthlessly exploited and destroyed. Remember that and good luck!

gassed up. I radioed my friend about it and instructed them to meet us at a pre-arranged destination. When they did, they were frantic because they had surprised that same car who had pulled off the road at another location, with the lights off.

The area where we met was very remote and, as we talked, we could see the approaching headlights of the car behind us; the lights went off before the car reached us. It is my conclusion that, with the aid of a satellite tracking device, the FBI were using my friend as bait to lead them to me while I was on the run.

Help the Underground Resistance

Two things are required by any movement sincere about its attempts to sustain an underground resistance. The first is a structure to support those warriors who choose to live life in the underground away from all above-ground politics and who can be supported financially and morally by their legal counterparts. Every legitimate revolutionary struggle has this structure.

The other requirement is the uniform recognition by above-ground supporters that one must refuse to speak about other activists to any law enforcement agency. Of equal importance is an understanding and acceptance to never speculate over the phone or computer as to who might be an A.L.F. member or how you heard so-and-so talking to so-and-so about how he or she wanted to strike a particular animal abuse target.

We must remember that the consequences of such actions could easily result in your own subpoenaing to a grand jury or, even worse, your targeting by the grand jury, as well as endangering other activists. Speaking with law enforcement officials can provide investigators with enough information to obtain search warrants and authorization for phone- and wire-taps. All these things are made much easier to obtain in light of President Clinton's recent signing of "anti-terrorism" legislation.

A grand jury will be convened to gather information with the hopes of presenting enough evidence to issue an indictment. In the case of A.L.F. actions, a grand jury will attempt to prove a suspect's association with animal rights and then, hopefully, use testimony from various sources to prove that there is reasonable cause to believe an individual committed a crime. Articles, letters, press releases and statements all can be used against you. It is your job to prove your innocence rather than their responsibility to prove your guilt. Standard statements of support of A.L.F. actions can be seen by the usual conservative grand jurors as incriminating. All this should not intimidate you away from supporting or joining the A.L.F. - just be careful of what you say and be even more careful about what you do.

A.L.F. Betrayed

In this way, the A.L.F. was abandoned by all but a few. Where in the past it had become popular to support the A.L.F. - now, with the price of that support being FBI harassment, the A.L.F. was left with few to defend their actions to the movement and media.

What frustrated me the most during this time (while I both participated in A.L.F. actions and publicly defended them), was the fact that other activists would whisper to me their support yet were afraid to pen an article about the A.L.F. and their anti-fur farm raids, let alone participate or offer physical or financial support.

It must be said that, for all the criticisms I've heard about PETA, they at least were not afraid to voice public support for the A.L.F. and report A.L.F. raids in their newsletters and to the media. And, when activists were subpoenaed to the grand juries, PETA offered financial and legal support where others had failed.

As the coordinator for CAFF, I wrote numerous articles for the Animal's Voice and the Earth First! Journal about the A.L.F.'s recent raids. I also gave media interviews much in the same fashion as SOAR and CAFT now does.

Investigations Focus

Following these actions, the FBI's focus shifted to me. Had a wider body of vocal and visible support been evident for the A.L.F. during 1991, I might have been able to last longer as an A.L.F. activist. Had more activists been aware of their rights and not been afraid of the FBI, especially when they themselves were not even guilty of any crimes, the government would have seen widespread support for the A.L.F. and not known where to begin its investigations.

I'll be the first to admit that, as an A.L.F. activist, I should have been the last person to publicly defend them and their actions. But with the evidence we had gathered over the last year of fur farm animal abuse and with A.L.F. attacks on that same industry, I felt it was necessary for someone to explain the A.L.F.'s actions and not miss an opportunity to strike an additional blow to the fur industry through the media.

FBI Terrorize Family, Friends

By fall of 1991, the FBI had returned to my parents home and work, accusing me of being an A.L.F. member and telling them that I was working with explosives. The FBI tried to intimidate my family into cooperating by telling them that I needed to be stopped before someone was injured or killed. By this time, the FBI had realized that I myself would not talk with them. They began to focus pressure on my family, friends, and former girlfriend.

By the beginning of 1992, the FBI upgraded its A.L.F. investigations when a package, containing stolen records from a mink research lab that had been torched, was intercepted. The package was addressed to the house of a former PETA employee. When a search warrant was executed night-vision goggles, radios, balaclavas and maps of labs in Louisiana were found.

It had always been known that if the FBI could make a connection between the A.L.F. and PETA, they could be destroyed by Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations (RICO) laws. The government was already planning on charging the A.L.F. under the RICO law as it also covers arson, interstate transportation and organizing the committing of a crime. This was and probably still is one of the goals of the FBI.

Feds Close In

While I watched as friends and other activists were served subpoenas, and PETA was targeted for their alleged association with the A.L.F., the rest of the animal rights movement began to waver. Individuals and groups saw what was happening to vocal supporters of the A.L.F. and chose to remain silent.

One individual who was subpoenaed to the grand jury told me that the questions asked were solely about me. One by one, CAFF activists were harassed and subpoenaed, as well as former roommates, journalists who had interviewed me and Earth First! activists. Certain activists were threatened with having their children taken from them by the FBI and, in southern Oregon, a former home of mine was raided with a helicopter by the FBI and ATF, despite the fact that the Feds had been saying that I was only a "person of interest" and not the subject of an arrest warrant. An activist who had purchased my car was subpoenaed and harassed and the marine mammal protection ship, "Sea Shepherd," was raided by the FBI and ATF and twice by U.S. Customs when it was suspected I was aboard.

The Pressure Mounts

Far from what happened to me, what was most despicable was the treatment of activists' parents and families who were targets of grand juries:

One family I had visited in Michigan was specifically targeted. A family friend, with whom we had dinner, was approached by the FBI and told that if he was able to get an activist to speak a suspect's full name (only the suspect's first name was known) on the telephone, the Feds would pay his police academy tuition. He refused.

The sister-in-law of a suspect was approached at her work and told that if she helped the FBI she would be eligible for a \$35,000 reward. She refused.

The FBI staked out the church where an activist's father ministered and, at one point, threatened the church's secretary with imprisonment, accusing the church of hiding fugitives.

Non-Cooperation: Our Best Defense

What angered the FBI most was the stubbornness of people they tried to question. Individual activists' families and friends complicated the FBI's job by refusing to answer any questions without a subpoena. My parents were targeted by a particularly vile agent who stopped by their house to show them my wanted poster and to tell them that, if they really loved me, they would tell him where I was before some fur farmer or local cop shot me.

Another time, the FBI arrested a Guatemalan refugee who worked for my family, handcuffing him and dragging him downtown. When my father protested, the FBI released him, apologizing that they had mistakenly thought he was me. Later it was discovered that when my parents were away on vacation, their house was broken into and a floor plan was drawn-up for future surveillance.

Finally, when my mother was served with a subpoena to the grand jury, she answered her door telling the agent she wouldn't talk to him because she was already taking medication for the stress they were causing. The agent replied, "This ought to help your stress," and handed her a subpoena.

By tracing phone records from calls I had made with a credit card, one by one, the FBI questioned everyone with whom I had come in contact. Of course, the attention directed on me was in a large part due to the fact that I was the subject of a grand jury investigation, rather than someone subpoenaed to testify.

To this day, I have never been questioned by the FBI or a grand jury. Those who were called to testify either answered a few simple questions and were granted immunity from prosecution or refused to testify. By the time of my arrest in 1994, four people had spent between five and six months in jail for refusing to testify. Meanwhile I avoided more close calls with the FBI.

Close Call

In one particularly chilling incident, activists visited me in one of my hideouts. I had instructed them not to drive their own vehicle for fear that a satellite tracking device might be placed on the vehicle, as one activist was a known acquaintance of mine.

The activists met me at a previously agreed location, driving their own vehicle. We left the vehicle 30 miles from where I was staying, my anger overtaken by my joy at seeing a friend. When we picked up the vehicle a few days later, I instructed the driver to follow me at a distance and maintain an open channel on our radios.

We gassed up at different gas stations. But, as we were leaving a small town, I noticed a late-model American car in perfect condition but with mud splattered all over it. The car was backed into a road bank; I recognized it as one of the few cars to have passed us in the small town where we had