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## **Exemplars and Influences: transnational flows in the environmental movement**

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### **Abstract**

Transnational flows of ideas are examined through consideration of Green parties, Friends of the Earth, and Earth First!, which represent, respectively, the highly institutionalised, the semi-institutionalised and the resolutely non-institutionalised dimensions of environmental activism. The focus is upon the English-speaking countries: US, UK and Australia. Particular attention is paid to Australian cases, both as transmitters and recipients of examples. The influence of Australian examples on Europeans has been overstated in the case of Green parties, was negligible in the case of Friends of the Earth, but surprisingly considerable in the case of Earth First!. Non-violent direct action in Australian rainforests influenced Earth First! in both the US and UK. In each case, the flow of influence was mediated by individuals, and outcomes were shaped by the contexts of the recipients.

## **Introduction**

Ideas travel. But they do not always travel in straight lines. The people who are their bearers are rarely single-minded; rather, they carry and sometimes transmit all sorts of other ideas that are in varying ways and to varying degrees discrepant one with another. Because the people who carry and transmit them are in different ways connected to various, sometimes overlapping, sometimes discrete social networks, ideas are not only transmitted in variants of their pure, original form, but they become, in these diverse transmuted forms, instantiated in social practices that are embedded in differing institutional contexts. These institutional contexts are themselves the cumulative products of past practice, influenced by other ideas from other times and contexts. Shaped by and shaping relationships of power and influence, institutions facilitate or constrain the reception of new ideas and at least partly determine the elements of those ideas that resonate with actors in a particular institutional milieu and that appear capable of informing effective action. Thus ideas travel, but they do not travel under conditions of their creator's choosing, and the destinations at which they arrive differ in all kinds of unsuspected ways, with the result that when ideas inspire action in particular places, that action is apt to vary considerably from one location to another.

So it is with ideas about environmental action. Ideas about action to address environmental ills have travelled from one country to another, and have inspired forms of action and organisation that, despite their often adopting the same names, vary substantially in ways that reflect the peculiarities of their

destinations. My discussion of these cases is not symmetrical, because I am especially interested in the role of the Australian instances, both as recipient of ideas originating elsewhere, and as transmitter of ideas to other countries.

I consider three different forms of environmental action: one that quickly became formally institutionalised; one that became relatively institutionalised in only one of the countries considered; and one that deliberately resisted even minimal institutionalisation. I briefly consider the case of Green parties, which, because they seek to become players in institutionalised politics, necessarily become relatively institutionalised to the extent that they are successful. Green parties are also interesting because their experience upsets simple assertions about the diffusion of ideas and strategies, and because it clearly shows the impacts of receiving contexts upon outcomes. My focus, however, is principally upon one less institutionalised environmental organisation—Friends of the Earth—and one—Earth First!—that deliberately avoided and successfully escaped institutionalisation.

I am especially concerned with these manifestations of environmentalism in the US, UK and Australia. The flow of ideas and people between the countries of the English-speaking world is relatively easy and influences and interactions are consequently frequent. Yet, at least in respect of environmental activism and green politics, they tend to have been remarked only in passing. Because organisational labels travel easily, it is often assumed that activities similarly labeled in two or more countries are empirically similar, when in fact they are almost always significantly different. I will consider some of these *faux amis* of

environmental movement politics in the attempt to trace transnational influences and the sources of differences among the various national cases. I will also consider the development of forms of environmental activism and the various issues that have been the focus of environmental concern. The ideas and practices associated with environmental movements and NGOs have been diffused by various means, including direct personal contacts and correspondence, as well as by mass media and by new media of communication.

### **Green parties**

The development of Green parties has sometimes been claimed as an instance of a flow, not from the core to the periphery, but in the opposite direction, from the periphery to the core. It is widely accepted that the first green party on the planet was formed in Australia in 1972: The United Tasmania Group (UTG). Yet, while it was formed to contest the Tasmanian government's destruction of wilderness in the pursuit of economic development, it did not call itself "green"; the name "Green Independents" was adopted in 1991, and "Tasmanian Greens" in 1992. The UTG originated in protest against the planned flooding of the iconic Lake Pedder as part of a hydro-generation scheme, but it was not simply a single issue party; its "New Ethic", "based on the four pillars of Ecology, Social Justice,

Participatory Democracy and Peace, became the cornerstone of green politics thereafter”.<sup>1</sup>

It has sometimes been claimed, usually by Australians, that it was developments in Australia that exported the “green” label to environmental politics in Europe.<sup>2</sup> In particular, it has been claimed that the German activist Petra Kelly was so impressed, during her 1977 visit to Australia, by the Green Bans imposed by the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation (BLF) in Sydney that they inspired her to campaign for the formation of a Green party in Germany.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps what most impressed Kelly was the spectacle of working men campaigning for environmental protection in practical and effective ways, in response to calls for protection from local communities confronted with threats to their environment, but it is doubtful whether that could have inspired the formation in Germany of a new party or, indeed, the decision to label it “green”.

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Milne, “Green Politics”, *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, 2006.  
<[http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/G/Green%20Politics.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/G/Green%20Politics.htm)>, accessed 14 April 2015. See also Bob Brown and Peter Singer, *The Greens* (Melbourne, 1996), pp.68-70.

<sup>2</sup> Senator Bob Brown claimed this in his maiden speech, 21 March 1997. See also Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union: environmental activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation* (Sydney, 1998), pp.9-10.

<sup>3</sup> See also contributions by Chris McConville and Astrid Kirchhof in this volume.

After all, there were plenty of other factors driving in that direction in the ferment of German extra-parliamentary politics in those years.

From the early 1970s, “citizens’ initiatives” (*Bürgerinitiativen*) proliferated across Germany and in 1972, a Federal Alliance of Citizens' Initiatives for Environmental Protection (*Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz* (BBU)) was founded, quickly embraced hundreds of local groups and rapidly became Germany’s most visible environmental organisation.<sup>4</sup> Although the BBU itself was politically non-partisan, some activists and groups were less inhibited, and began to contest local elections. Grassroots Green Lists for Environmental Protection (*Grüne Liste Umweltschutz*) first successfully entered the political arena at community level in 1977.<sup>5</sup> Green Lists were thereby emboldened to contest state elections as early as 1978, and first entered a state legislature in Bremen in 1979.<sup>6</sup> These developments predate the use of the label *Die Grünen* in the 1979 elections for the European Parliament, and the formation of the national political party, *Die Grünen*, in 1980. Even after the formation of *Die*

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<sup>4</sup> William T. Markham, “Networking local environmental groups in Germany: The rise and fall of the federal alliance of citizens' initiatives for environmental protection (BBU)”, *Environmental Politics*, Vol.14,5(2005), pp.667-85.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Scharf, *The German Greens: challenging the consensus* (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green and Beyond*, (Cambridge, 1993), p.189.

*Grünen*, well into the 1980s both conservative and radical left environmentalist factions employed the label “Green”.<sup>7</sup>

The rapid rise of the German Greens and, especially, their success in winning seats in the national parliament in 1983, inspired others. Yet the spread of Green parties was by no means a simple case of diffusion of ideas from the German exemplar. Environmentalism and/or ecologism had already made its entrance onto the political stage long before the formation of *Die Grünen*: in England in 1973, when environmentalists, including the founder-editor of *The Ecologist* magazine, Edward Goldsmith, formed a party called “People”, which became the Ecology Party in 1975 and the Green Party in 1987<sup>8</sup>; and in France, where the ecologist, René Dumont, stood for the Presidency in 1974, and local “ecological” groups and micro-parties campaigned in local and national elections, culminating in the formation in 1981 of *Les Verts*—*parti écologiste* (The Greens— ecologist party) out of the *Mouvement d’écologie politique* (Movement of political ecology).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Scharf, *The German Greens*, p.66.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Rootes, “Britain: Greens in a cold climate”, in Dick Richardson and Chris Rootes, eds, *The Green Challenge: the development of Green parties in Europe*, (London, 1995), pp.66-90.

<sup>9</sup> Alastair Cole and Brian Doherty, “France: *Pas comme les autres*— the French Greens at the crossroads”, in Richardson and Rootes, eds, *The Green Challenge*, p. 49.



Parties addressing environmental issues, along with a range of other issues and radical ideas about the forms of political organisation, emerged in many places at around the same time. It was less a matter of diffusion or emulation of exemplars than a diffuse response to the milieu of the post-1968 social movements—the “new” social movements as they would come, confusingly, to be labelled. Thus it was not so much the idea of a Green party that Germany transmitted to the world, but the labeling of such parties as “Green”.

Yet the German party was by no means typical of European Greens. Formed in the very peculiar conditions of German politics at the end of the 1970s, *Die Grünen* was an electorally expedient coalition of environmentalists, pacifists, anti-nuclear campaigners, feminists and supporters of other social movements, as well as politically homeless leftists of various persuasions, from democratic socialists to Maoists. Considered too infected with radical leftism for the taste of many other European Greens, *Die Grünen* was not in the mid-1980s even a member of the Green group in the European Parliament, instead forming a separate grouping with Dutch leftists and Italian marxists.<sup>10</sup>

The German example clearly inspired Australians, not only environmentalists but also, especially in Sydney and Adelaide, the socialist left. Yet, despite the urging of Petra Kelly, during her second visit to Australia in 1984, that they

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<sup>10</sup> Dick Richardson, “The Green challenge”, in Richardson and Rootes, eds. *The Green Challenge*, (London, 1995), pp.4-22.

should form a national Green party, local activists resisted.<sup>11</sup> Nuclear issues, critically important in the German (and several other European cases), continued to be salient in Australia because Australia was one of the world's more important sources of uranium.<sup>12</sup> Opposition to, and dismay at the Australian Labor Party's (ALP) continuing support for uranium mining, and Australia's role in the nuclear fuel cycle, stimulated the formation of the Nuclear Disarmament Party (NDP), which fielded candidates for the Senate in several states in the 1984 federal elections. In Western Australia, where the NDP was especially committed to grassroots participation, peace activist Jo Vallentine was elected as an NDP Senator.<sup>13</sup> Plagued by divisions, and the close attention of far-left groups, the NDP quickly faded, but still Australian activists decided at a national conference in 1986 not to form a Green party.

The formation of the Australian Greens in 1992 was principally the initiative of Drew Hutton, an environmental activist come to green politics from left-libertarian activism in Queensland, and Bob Brown, an environmental activist

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<sup>11</sup> Brown and Singer, *The Greens*, pp.83-4.

<sup>12</sup> Something of which Germans, notably Petra Kelly, were aware. See Astrid Mignon Kirchhof, "Spanning the Globe: West-German Support for the Australian Anti-Nuclear Movement", *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 39, 1(2014), pp.254-73.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Doyle, *Green Power: The Environment Movement in Australia*, (Sydney, 2000), p.136. Vallentine, dismayed by the influence of the left in the NDP, soon resigned from the NDP and sat as an independent Senator until she joined the Greens in 1990.

and already a Green member of the Tasmanian parliament. The nascent party struggled to surmount the suspicions of environmentalists, especially in Victoria, of the motives and behaviour of more marxist-influenced groups, but the Australian Greens relatively quickly consolidated from the strands of social movement politics, environmental interests most prominent among them.<sup>14</sup> Erstwhile supporters of the NDP provided a distinctive strand to the emerging Green party, particularly in Western Australia, and not until 2003 did the Greens Western Australia join the Australian Greens.

The conditions of political competition clearly affect outcomes. The Greens emerged as a formal national political party in Australia relatively late, principally because there was already a centrist party, the Australian Democrats, that appealed to part of the Greens' potential constituency, and partly because principles of local autonomy were important to people whose political activities were confined to one or other of the several states or cities. As in Germany, the Australian federal political system presented both obstacles and opportunities; local political cultures and allegiances had to be negotiated in order to fashion political action at a national level. But once established, the institutional context in Australia was, as it had been in Germany, relatively facilitative: proportional representation (especially in Tasmania and for the Australian Senate), preferential voting, and from 1995, state funding in proportion to votes cast in

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<sup>14</sup> Stewart Jackson, "The Australian Greens: Between movement and electoral professional party" (PhD thesis, Government and International Relations, University of Sydney, 2011)

federal elections, combined to give the Australian Greens a toehold in national politics.<sup>15</sup> The subsequent implosion of the Australian Democrats served to enlarge the available space, and the Australian Greens have gone on to become entrenched in the national political system.

By contrast, in the UK<sup>16</sup> and the US, in systems where simple majoritarian, first-past-the-post elections are the norm, Green parties have struggled to achieve more than token representation. Although by 1984 the principles of Green politics were inspiring activists in the US, the preference of many for movement rather than electoral politics, as well as the inhospitable political institutional context, delayed the formation of the Greens / Green Party USA (G/GP USA) until 1991. In 1996, representatives from 13 states formed the Association of State Green Parties, and laid the ground for the foundation in 2001 of the Green Party of the United States (GPUS), which most key members of the G/GP USA eventually joined and which, unlike the G/GP USA, is a federally registered political party. In their various guises, Greens in the US have enjoyed only a very

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<sup>15</sup> State funding in proportion to votes cast was a significant lure to the formation of *Die Grünen* in 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Until the election of a single MP in 2010, the Greens' only national level successes in the UK were in elections for the European Parliament and for the Scottish Parliament, which both employ proportional representation.

modest level of electoral success at local council level and, rarely and briefly, at state level.<sup>17</sup>

## **Friends of the Earth**

Friends of the Earth (FoE) has become the most extensive network of autonomous environmental NGOs in the world.<sup>18</sup> Uniquely among the groupings considered here, it had an unambiguous single point of origin. Established in San Francisco in 1969, it was the brainchild of David Brower, who had recently resigned as executive director of the Sierra Club, the organisation established in California by John Muir in 1892 to promote the preservation of wilderness areas in the American west. Although the proximate reason for Brower's resignation was the Club's mounting deficit, Brower was also at odds with the board of directors over his opposition to nuclear energy, and his expression of regret that the Sierra Club had voted to accept construction of a nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon.

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<sup>17</sup> Mike Feinstein, "From the birth of the U.S. Greens to the birth of the Green Party of the United States" (no date), available at <<http://www.gp.org/birth-of-us-greens>>, accessed 6 May 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Doherty and Timothy Doyle, *Environmentalism, Resistance and Solidarity: The Politics of Friends of the Earth*, (Basingstoke, 2013).

Believing that the environmental predicament required a more activist international organisation, Brower, having established FoE in San Francisco, set out on a European tour with the aim of making FoE international. Although Brower's initial conception was of an international organisation headquartered in San Francisco with branches elsewhere, he was persuaded it would be more appropriate to affiliate autonomous organisations in different countries, and in June 1971 FoE International was formed at a meeting in Sweden with delegates from the US, UK, France and Sweden.

In the US, Brower, with supporters from the Sierra Club, quickly established FoE as a leading opponent of nuclear power, and later promoted Amory Lovins' prescriptions for a "soft energy path". Though respected for its "broad vision, and its reliance on a loose, decentralised network of branches, field representatives, volunteers and a small well-informed staff", FoE US soon fell victim to internal divisions, stemming at least in part from Brower's control of the organisation from his California base.<sup>19</sup> In 1980, when Brower was forced to resign as President of FoE, the US organisation had nearly 30,000 members; in 1986, when Brower resigned from the board, it had only 17,000. Although it has persisted in the face of fluctuating fortunes, FoE in the US has never been as prominent nationally or internationally as some other affiliates of FoE International.

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<sup>19</sup> Lorna Salzman, "The Decline and Fall of Friends of the Earth in the United States", *Philosophy and Social Action*, Vol. 16, 3(1990), pp.53-64.

## **FoE in the UK**

In London in 1970, Brower was introduced to former student activists, and encouraged them to set up a UK branch of FoE. FoE's earliest campaigns in England attracted little attention until May 1971 when a media stunt—a “bottle drop” of non-returnable bottles outside Schweppes' London headquarters— attracted press coverage that so raised the profile of FoE that it was besieged with phone calls from people wanting to become involved. FoE had not intended to become a mass organisation, but responded by licensing over seventy local FoE groups by 1973. Meanwhile, the national office was preoccupied with preparations for the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm.

Although its occasional forays into direct action excited— and sought to exploit— media attention, FoE insisted on the scientific basis of its claims, and most of its effort was invested in assembling, printing and distributing dossiers of information. Working within the system, FoE was committed to action that was not only non-violent but legal, even to the extent of frustrating supporters who wanted to be more directly active. Such discontents were crystalised when, despite FoE's long campaign against nuclear energy, the 1978 Windscale nuclear reprocessing inquiry report dismissed FoE's arguments. Many supporters were

disillusioned, and some defected to Greenpeace.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, FoE survived this and subsequent financial problems that precipitated an office revolt that ended in the empowerment of officers and its 250 autonomous local groups.<sup>21</sup> With a national membership that grew from 18,000 in 1981 to 111,000 in 1991,<sup>22</sup> Friends of the Earth in England, Wales and Northern Ireland became a democratically accountable grassroots, mass membership organisation<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, during its first ten to fifteen years, even as FoE grew in size and was organised into specialised campaign departments, it became more decentralised and participatory. Yet, because it retained its capacity and reputation for scientifically-informed campaigning, it squared the circle between lobbying and grassroots mobilisation. A key actor in FoE International, it became central to the network of the environmental movement and a leading contributor to campaigns (increasingly in coalition with others, notably Greenpeace, WWF and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), reaching the peak of its influence with the passage of the Climate Change Act 2008, for which it had adroitly campaigned.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Lamb, *Promising the Earth*, (London and New York, 1996), p.87.

<sup>21</sup> Lamb, *Promising the Earth*, pp.97-9.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Rootes “Environmental NGOs and the Environmental Movement in England” in Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay, eds, *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: non-state actors in society and politics since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2009), table 2, pp. 201-21,.

<sup>23</sup> Since 1980, there has been a legally separate FoE Scotland.



## FOE in Australia

Friends of the Earth groups first began to appear in Australia from 1972. The first, in Adelaide, was “one of several organisations that emerged from a group called Social Action”<sup>24</sup>; “a social justice orientated group that was active on campus”.<sup>25</sup> Although a small group calling itself “Friends of the Earth” already existed in Melbourne, the most important and best documented case is that of the FoE group formed in Carlton in 1973.<sup>26</sup>

Peter Hayes reports that when he returned to Australia in late 1973, he began to “activate” Friends of the Earth. The son of dairy-farmers alert to the danger of fall-out from French nuclear weapons tests, Hayes travelled to Europe in November 1972 “to organise against the French nuclear tests”. Going first to FoE London and meeting its leading activists, he contacted British peace groups and the authors of *The Ecologist's Blueprint for Survival* before travelling to Paris and

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<sup>24</sup> Friends of the Earth Australia (2004) *30 Years of Creative Resistance*, p.8.

<<http://www.foe.org.au/sites/default/files/30Years-book-FoE-Australia%209MB.pdf>>, accessed 4 April 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Cam Walker, email to author, 14 April 2015. FoE-Brisbane claims to date from 1972, but it adopted the name Friends of the Earth Queensland only in 1974.

<<http://www.brisbane.foe.org.au/history.html>>, accessed 4 April 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Hayes, “Founding Friends of the Earth Australia: the Early Years” (2015) <<http://friendsearthaustriahistory.blogspot.com.au/2015/03/founding-friends-of-earth-australia.html>>, accessed 14 April 2015.

meeting with *Les Amis de la Terre* (FoE-France) and its leader, Brice Lalonde. Hayes “was inspired by the concept of a loose, networked federation, based on *Les Amis'* notion of ecological autogestion, or green self management (which was) the philosophical core of the left-green movement in France”.<sup>27</sup>

Through his French connections, Hayes drew information on nuclear energy from FoE in the US. On the basis of recommendations from those same French connections, David Brower permitted the nascent Australian group to use the FoE name, and the US organisation sent books to supplement the material supplied by FoE-UK. Thus the ideas of FoE travelled from San Francisco via London and Paris in Peter Hayes’ baggage before there was any direct trans-Pacific connection. Again, however, although such personal histories may be the identifiable links in the chain of transmission, many of these ideas were more widely circulating in the period of intellectual and political ferment that followed the radical mobilisations of the 1960s. As Hayes observes, FoE emerged in Australia in the context of “the confluence in the early seventies of the post-Vietnam war peace movement, the anti-French test movement, the feminist movement, the Lake Pedder campaign, the takeover of the Australian Conservation Foundation, the green ban union campaigns”.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Carlton group was the embryo of what became FoE Melbourne, it was not alone. Cam Walker recalls that “in the early days of FoE there were a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

considerable number of small FoE groups in the suburbs. Some of these lasted well over a decade". FoE Carlton came to be seen as the "resource centre for all of these because it had a public space and, eventually some staff, plus the food co-op".<sup>29</sup>

As FoE's webpage puts it, FoE in Australia from the outset "identified itself as a radical ecology group that recognised the need to move to sustainable and equitable social systems to be able to protect the environment in the long term".<sup>30</sup> Thus, "based on the concept of radical grassroots environmental action ... the new network structure of FoE [...] offered an alternative to the often hierarchical structures of many other 'establishment' styled national environment groups".<sup>31</sup> Perhaps more importantly, it conjoined social and environmental concerns in a way that older conservation-focused environmental organisations did not.<sup>32</sup>

With nuclear issues prominent among the concerns of the early FoE activists in Australia, in 1974 FoE in Melbourne began producing the newsletter, *Chain*

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<sup>29</sup> Cam Walker, email to author, 14 April 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Friends of the Earth history, <<http://www.foe.org.au/history>>, accessed 22 March 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Doyle, *Green Power*, p.85, remarks that "for FoE Australia, environmental and social issues were inseparable". In this, FoE resembles FoE in the UK, and the general tenor of FoEI.

*Reaction*, in print-runs of ten to twenty thousand.<sup>33</sup> In December 1974, FoE held its first national meeting, when nine people from four states met on the site of a proposed nuclear reactor at Westernport Bay in Victoria. In a manner strikingly reminiscent of the early activities of FoE in England, FoE Australia opposed the possible development of nuclear energy in Australia, making submissions to the Ranger Inquiry into the environmental concerns surrounding uranium mining, and attempting to inform the public via the mass media.<sup>34</sup> FoE activists were prominently involved in the anti-nuclear movement of the mid-1970s<sup>35</sup>, but by 1976, the issue-specific campaign organisations— Campaign Against Nuclear Power and Movement Against Uranium Mining— which had grown from FoE activist circles, had taken on lives of their own and, as they became bigger, so “there were more people from the non-FoE Left that probably started to

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<sup>33</sup> Hayes, “Founding Friends of the Earth Australia”.

<sup>34</sup> A committee of inquiry established by the Whitlam (Labor) government in 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environmental Movement*, (Cambridge, 1999), p.138, report that “most of the work in the [Ranger] inquiry for the environment movement was carried out by FOE”, and ten of the fourteen environmentalists who in July 1975 undertook a fact-finding tour of the Northern Territory, visiting the Ranger mine site, were from FOE.

dominate”.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, “FOE members remained the most committed conservation activists doing grassroots anti-nuclear work”.<sup>37</sup>

FoE was distinctive for its commitment to non-hierarchical, grassroots organising, but nevertheless participated in the peak council meetings between federal environment ministers and various national and state-level environmental NGOs. It was not, however, invited to participate when in 1990 the Hawke government established an “ecologically sustainable development” (ESD) process that was broadly inclusive of civil society as well as environmental interest groups. It is unclear whether its non-invitation was because it was “not considered legitimate enough” or because it was simply too small to be considered a major partner in policy formation.<sup>38</sup> Yet FoE Australia’s grassroots community organisation enabled it to weather the withdrawal of federal funding from 1996 better than did others in the environmental movement.<sup>39</sup>

In recent years, FoE Australia has had many fewer paid-up members than either the Wilderness Society or the Australian Conservation Foundation, but it has retained a national presence and plays an important role in FoE International. With national liaison officers based in Melbourne and Brisbane, in 2015 it acts as

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<sup>36</sup> Cam Walker, email to author, 14 April 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Hutton and Connors, *A History of the Australian Environmental Movement*, p.141.

<sup>38</sup> Doyle, *Green Power*, pp. 153-4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.

an important node for a network of other campaigning organisations, but has no active group in the largest city, Sydney. FoE Australia's failure to establish a national role comparable to that of FoE in England reflects the difficulties of maintaining an organisational presence in widely dispersed major population centres whose political complexions vary. Emphasising its status as a network of autonomous grassroots groups may reflect the philosophical underpinnings of FoE Australia, but it may also be an attempt to make a virtue of a necessity.

### **Friends compared**

Although the various national FoE organisations shared many ideas, the national contexts differed markedly. FoE in the US at first stood deliberately outside the well-established Washington-based national environmental lobby. This strategy reflected David Brower's internationalist aspirations as well as his disillusionment with the US environmental advocacy establishment, but may well have limited its influence on US policymakers, and certainly produced conflict between Brower and non-Californian FoE board members.

FoE in the UK, by contrast, rapidly won a respected place in policy circles, principally because of the credibility of its science-based campaigns. It very quickly became a participant in consultative forums that became more important as environmental policy became more salient, and it enjoyed generally co-operative relationships with other national environmental NGOs, most of which were, like FoE, headquartered in or near London, and with governments in a country in which political parties were less polarised on environmental issues

than in the US. Moreover, because, despite its maintenance of a network of autonomous local groups, FoE in England has mostly been a relatively centralised national organisation in a country in which political power is, especially on environmental issues, much more centralised than in the US or Australia.

The development of FoE in Australia reflected the protracted prominence of the nuclear issue, the spatial distribution of population between the major cities, the salience and singularities of the several states with respect to environmental matters, and the relative weakness, before 1983, of national environmental policy. If FoE developed first and put down deepest roots in Adelaide and Melbourne rather than Sydney, it is perhaps because it was in South Australia and Victoria that the first serious proposals to construct commercial-scale nuclear reactors in Australia were announced. More recently, FoE Australia's influence has depended more upon its role in the networking of autonomous grassroots and other activist groups than on access to policy circles.

### **Earth First!**

Earth First! (EF!) is the most widely known proponent of anarchistic environmental direct action in the English-speaking world.<sup>40</sup> It developed from

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<sup>40</sup> Environmental "direct action" connotes a form of activism in which activists seek by their own actions directly to impede those who assault the environment

1977 among a small group of men who were concerned to defend the roadless wilderness of the US west against commercial exploitation. It began— or rather, the name/slogan and the clenched fist logo emerged— in 1980 during a road trip in which Dave Foreman, the increasingly disillusioned southwest regional co-ordinator for the Wilderness Society, and a group of friends, including Mike Roselle, were returning from a trip to Mexico.<sup>41</sup> Inspired by Edward Abbey's novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, these early EF!ers were prepared to do "whatever it takes", not excluding sabotage, to defend the wilderness.

The first issue of EF!'s journal appeared, roughly typed and duplicated, in July 1980 with the title *Nature More. The Newsletter of Earth First*. By November 1980, the newsletter, now carrying a hand-drawn version of the clenched fist logo that was to become EF!'s hallmark, but still roughly typed and duplicated, was entitled simply *Earth First*, carried a statement of the EF! platform and a long list of wilderness areas, desert and forest, in all parts of the US, that EF! aimed to protect.

In March 1981, the newsletter (vol.1. no 4) declared that

EARTH FIRST! is an informal group of Earth radicals who believe in militant actions and courageous positions in defense of Earth and her

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rather than working through the institutionalised channels of representative democracy or lobbying the powerful.

<sup>41</sup> Rik Scarce *Eco-warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement*, (Walnut Creek, CA, 2006), pp.58-60.



diversity of wilderness life. EARTH FIRST! has no officers, no constitution or by-laws.

There were no required membership dues but readers were encouraged to “pitch in” ten dollars a year towards printing and postage costs. Starting in 1980, EF!ers gathered annually on 4 July at the Round River Rendezvous, which attempted to bring American conservationists together in wilderness areas they sought to celebrate and protect. Success in mobilising support did not come overnight. *Earth First* Vol.1. No.5 (May 1, 1981) carried a list of just nine regional contacts, five from the western states, and others from Alaska, Arkansas, Virginia and Maine. In October-November 1981, the “Earth First! Road Show” took the message to over forty communities from California to Connecticut; by December 1981, the list of regional contacts published in the journal had grown to seventeen, and by May 1982 to thirty-two. By March 1982, the EF! “membership” or subscriber list numbered more than 1,500.

EF! first acquired a public profile as a result of a spectacular publicity stunt in 1981 in which activists, in an entirely peaceful symbolic act, unfurled a plastic “crack” down the face of the Glen Canyon dam. EF! attracted a diverse range of activists who embraced a variety of philosophies; many were resolutely non-violent but there was much argument over how audacious/provocative tactics could legitimately be. In 1982, Dave Foreman worried about the efficacy of civil disobedience and declared that he was “entirely pragmatic” about violence/nonviolence; for him it was just a matter of which tactics would be more effective. Generally, monkey wrenching was seen as a tactic of last resort because it often “gets in the way” of effective campaigning. Although

disagreements persisted within EF!, it was nearly a decade before the schism over strategy and tactics became unbridgeable, with Foreman and other “wilders” leaving EF! because they believed the insistence on non-violent civil disobedience of the “holies” was making EF! ineffective.

### **Earth First! in Australia**

EF! in Australia has a fugitive history. In 2015, “Earth First! Australia” consisted of “a vegan organic community project based around 70 acres at Buckleys Swamp near Hamilton in Victoria, and [...] an organic food co-op in South Gippsland, Victoria”.<sup>42</sup> However, these had existed only since the 1990s “with no connection to any previous EF! Incarnations”.<sup>43</sup> Doyle observed that “Earth First! [...] is at times active in Australia”.<sup>44</sup> But, as he correctly noted, drawing on US sources, EF! was a “non-organisation”, so it remains unclear whether its activity in Australia has extended beyond a few individuals invoking its name.

Doyle discusses the tactics used by some activists at Terania Creek (NSW) in 1979-80, including log-spiking, a tactic sometimes associated with EF! in the US Pacific northwest forests campaign, but the main subject of his account, credited with victories at Terania Creek, the Franklin River and Daintree, is the Nomadic

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<sup>42</sup> <<http://www.earthfirst.org.au>>, accessed 1 April 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Peter MacLean, email to author, 5 April 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Doyle, *Green Power*, p.39.

Action Group.<sup>45</sup> Even in his discussion of these activists' commitment to non-violence and deep ecology, and the greater militancy of the early 1990s that led some to forms of "ecotage" similar to those outlined by one of the founders of EF! in the US, Doyle does not mention EF! However, he identifies "activists affiliated to Earth First!" among the mainlanders involved in anti-wood chip actions in Tasmania in the early 1990s, and states that "Earth First! members attached to FoE" were involved in the occupation of Forestry Commission offices in Sydney in 1992.<sup>46</sup> According to Doyle, in 2000 EF! in Australia remained "an extremely small network".<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52ff. The Nomadic Action Group inherited the tactics and some of the personnel, and preserved the acronym, of the Nightcap Action Group, which fought to defend the forests of the Nightcap Range in northern NSW in the early 1980s.

<sup>46</sup> Doyle, *Green Power*, pp. 55, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Branagan, in his account of direct action tactics in Australian environmentalism, makes no mention of EF! He does, however, discuss the tactics of the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) and the Nomadic Action Group (NAG), and the influence of the Sydney Rainforest Action Group in reducing tensions by informing police of actions. He goes on to observe that "sabotage has been relatively rare in Australia despite assertions to the contrary by journalists". Marty Branagan, "'We Shall Never Be Moved': Australian Developments in Nonviolence", *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 27, 80(2004), pp. 201-10.

But if EF! was not a prominent banner in Australia, it was perhaps because the traffic in ideas ran not from the US west to Australia, but, as Vanessa Bible suggests, because the influence largely ran in the other direction—from Australian forests campaigns to EF! in the US.<sup>48</sup> John Seed, perhaps the most prominent activist in the Terania campaign, seems to have been an influential figure, less in transmitting American ideas to Australia than in carrying knowledge of Australian forest activists' ideas, strategy and tactics to the US. Thus Doyle's description of John Seed as "an internationally renowned Earth First! Activist" is at best imprecise.<sup>49</sup>

Seed was first listed in the "Earth First! contact list" (as the only non-US contact) in the EF! journal in August 1982.<sup>50</sup> Seed's second report from Australia,<sup>51</sup> in December 1982, began with a description of the flags flown in the northern NSW forests campaign:

The most colorful flag: A painting of planet Earth, blue and white floating in the blackness of space, Australia foreground, with "Earth

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<sup>48</sup> Vanessa Bible, "Aquarius Rising: Terania Creek and the Australian Forest Protest Movement" (BA (Honours) diss., University of New England, Armidale, NSW, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Doyle, *Green Power*, p.59.

<sup>50</sup> *Earth First!*, Vol. 2, 7 (1 August 1982), p.6.

<<http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/6834>>, accessed 22 April 2015.

<sup>51</sup> John Seed, "130 Arrested in Australia: Save the Nightcap", *Earth First!* Vol. 3, 2 (21 December 1982), p.1 and p.11.

First!" written in rainbow colors around the globe encircling her. A lifebuoy, a halo.

This flag flew next to the red, black and yellow Aboriginal landrights flag above our meeting tent at Mt. Nardi where we have been camped for the last couple of months in non-violent defense of the womb of all life - the rainforest.

The flag flew often on blockades [sic] leading to the Nightcap Rainforest where up to 200 people regularly prevented logging trucks from passing till the police dragged them away.

Seed in this article announced the apparent victory of the campaign, as the NSW Land and Environment Court ruled against further logging pending an environment impact statement, and the state government declared a series of new national parks, including much of the disputed rainforest then in the control of the NSW Forestry Commission. Significantly, Seed went on to anticipate the "drift" of activists to the Tasmanian forests where opposition to the proposed Franklin dam was building.

Foreman's editorial in the same issue declared that "our brothers and sisters in Australia have set a powerful example for us". The next issue of the EF! journal carried on its front page the headline "700 arrested in Australia" above an unsigned report of the mass protests against the Franklin dam, and alongside a photograph of John Seed holding up a banner bearing the words 'Earth First'

behind a large group of soon-to-be arrested protesters, including Bob Brown, MP.<sup>52</sup> “Clearly”, the article began,

the world leadership in wilderness preservation has passed to Australia. While the environment establishment in the United States preaches moderation and practises meekness, the “Greenies” of Down Under are taking courageous/exemplary action to protect their wilderness and are sending the world a message—a message of the path of right action which must be taken to safeguard natural diversity.

Foreman’s editorial amplified the point: “Australia continues to set the pace [...] The Aussie Earth First!ers are the inspiration and example for our actions here this year”. But Foreman was not reporting accurately but rather coopting the Australian campaigners on the flimsy evidence of Seed’s bespoke banner (which did not resemble the characteristic clenched fist banner of EF! in the US) and Seed’s correspondence with the EF! journal. Seed is emphatic that this did not signify that EF! had become established in Australia or that he was acting in its name, explaining that at the Franklin blockade:

I whipped out this banner, and it looked like it was like it was Earth First! claiming a victory, and that got printed in the next volume of the Earth First! journal [...] but at that time “Earth First!” was a slogan,

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<sup>52</sup> *Earth First!*, Vol.3, 3 (21 March 1983),

<<http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/6841>>.

there was no organisation and no-one [in Australia] knew that there was an organisation. I didn't proseletise that there was this organisation by that name in the United States; I just thought it was a great slogan; that's what we believed: that the Earth should come first.<sup>53</sup>

Seed followed up with a report, "The battle for the Australian rainforests," in the EF! journal, and another entitled "'Franklin River Victory'" in June 1983, while other Australians, including Rupert Russell from the Australian Conservation Foundation, contributed discussion pieces on philosophical issues concerning strategy and non-violence.<sup>54</sup>

Following the Franklin episode, it was announced in the December 1983 issue of *Earth First!* that John Seed would join the 1984 EF! Road Show. The photograph of Seed with the Earth First flag at the Franklin was reproduced, and it was promised that a film about the Terania Creek blockade— "Give Trees a Chance"—would be shown on the five-week tour, on the theme "Preservation of Wild Forests", that would take Seed, Foreman, Roselle and folksinger Cecelia Ostrow to university campuses across the US. By this time, the EF! journal listed eleven state wilderness coordinators and ninety "local contacts" distributed across thirty-six states.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> John Seed, interview with author, 27 March 2015.

<sup>54</sup> *Earth First!*, Vol. 3, 3(1 May 1983), p.16, and Vol. 3, 4 21 June 1983).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol.4, 2.

Although the Terania Creek campaign was, in keeping with Seed's Buddhist principles, deliberately non-violent, there were others who advocated sabotage. There were even some instances in which, in defiance of collective decisions, "splinter groups" spiked trees to impede logging.<sup>56</sup> But this was long before EF!ers in the US were accused of tree-spiking, and there is nothing to suggest that the Australian activists had, at that stage, ever heard of "monkey wrenching" or of EF! Rather than being influenced by US actions or ideas, the advocates of sabotage and obstruction drew upon Australian experience, notably of the BLF's Green Bans.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, despite their initial expectations that they would teach the "peace-loving hippies" a thing or two about obstruction, in the end it was the philosophy and tactics of the "hippies" that won over the others, especially when they succeeded.

After Terania, Seed established the Rainforest Information Centre (RIC), credited as the first organisation in the world dedicated to rainforest conservation, and was, though his participation in Earth First! roadshows, largely responsible for

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<sup>56</sup> Ian Watson, *Fighting over the Forests* (Sydney, 1990), pp. 91-2. Tree-spiking was not, however, a novel tactic; usually occurring in disputes between workers and logging companies, it has been a felony in California since 1875 (Scarce, *Eco-warriors*, p.77.).

<sup>57</sup> Bible, *Aquarius Rising*, pp.47-8. In 1976, two men, motivated by opposition to the wanton destruction of Western Australia's remaining forests, were jailed for bombing a woodchip conveyor in Bunbury. See, Tim Bonyhady, *Places Worth Keeping: conservationists, politics and law*, (Sydney, 1993).



raising awareness of rainforest issues and establishing rainforest preservation “as a priority for many Earth First!ers”.<sup>58</sup>

EF! in the US began its forests campaign with a blockade in Oregon in 1983, nearly four years after the battle over Terania Creek. The Australian campaigns involved far larger numbers of people than contemporaneous US actions, and they served as inspiration for US actions as well as providing examples of innovative tactics, such as tree-sitting.<sup>59</sup> Even Dave Foreman, author of *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* and famous sceptic about civil disobedience, believed it was possible to learn from the Australians’ successful use of non-violent civil disobedience.<sup>60</sup>

If Seed and other Australian wilderness campaigners influenced EF! activists in the US, they did so without ever adopting the EF! label in Australia. However, a later generation of Australian forest activists, impressed by reports of EF! actions in the US forests, did attempt to set up EF! groups: Cam Walker reports that, in the 1980s, while employed by FoE, he “helped start EF! in Australia”. Although there was never a formal link between FoE and EF!, there were various personal connections [...] most of the core group were active in Melbourne Rainforest Action Group [MRAG] and then East

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<sup>58</sup> Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization*, (Boston, 1990), p.119.

<sup>59</sup> Manes, *Green Rage*, p.100 and Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, p.175.

<sup>60</sup> Susan Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs: Earth First! and the Environmental Movement*, (New York, 1993), p.398.

Gippsland Forest Network, which later became the Forest Network and formally affiliated with FoE. MRAG kind of ran its race and eventually wound up. The Forest Network did various actions, including occupations [...] FoE was active for a time with Native Forest Network (and had activists very active as spokespeople in NFN in the early-mid 90s). NFN was at that time closely aligned with EF! in North America. Again, this was probably more due to individuals involvement than any decision taken by FoE.<sup>61</sup>

Thus it appears that, although it was, in the early 1980s, Australian campaigners who pioneered forests activism and influenced EF! in the US, less than a decade later a new generation of Australian activists was drawing inspiration from US EF!, which by this time was itself focused upon campaigning to preserve forests.<sup>62</sup> Yet even in these later protests, when activists and loggers alike had

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<sup>61</sup> Cam Walker, email to author, 14 April 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Jo Chandler (“Green Guerillas”, *The Age*, 18 January 1992) asked whether Australian activists might be taking a leaf from EF!’s US book, but the only observers she found who appeared to believe so were timber industry spokesmen; of the activists she interviewed, John Seed distanced himself from Dave Foreman’s rhetoric and advocated non-violence, and Ian Cohen, who was sharply critical of ‘wimpy “inactivists”’ afraid of confrontation, advocated spectacular but non-violent media stunts rather than violent action. Chandler did refer to “Australian Earth First!ers”, but she did not actually identify any, and it

some knowledge of the reputed exploits of EF! in the US, in Australia “Earth First” was more a slogan than a signifier. When in 1992 David Rainbow attempted to impede progress of a barge carrying a bulldozer and erected a tripod to obstruct a logging train in Tasmania, his invocation of “Earth First” was evidently the latest in a series of deliberately provocative gestures rather than an indication of concerted action or a reference to a group.<sup>63</sup>

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appears that she used the term loosely to refer to environmental activists who employ direct action.

Australian activists might, too, have been influenced by knowledge of the earlier Australian forests protests. Jeni Kendall and Eddie Buivids’ book, which follows up the earlier film that Kendall and Seed made on the Terania Creek campaign, is entitled “*Earth First*” (Sydney, 1987). However, although that book presents eloquent accounts of the Terania, Nightcap and Franklin campaigns, it never mentions EF!, and Seed is mentioned only to quote him on non-violence: “I know that it [violent retaliation] is counterproductive and, in fact, often—historically speaking—there have been attempts to move us to violence merely because then we’ll be able to be defeated with violence”, John Seed, quoted, pp.112-4.

<sup>63</sup> Ian Cohen, *Green Fire*, (Sydney, 1996), pp.10-1. Rainbow was evidently a colourful character and a free spirit; Cohen mentions that Rainbow had been expelled from several communes. His action was, however, a blazing red flag to the antagonists of the environmental movement, and especially to publicists for the logging industry. According to Cohen,

## **Earth First! in the UK**

EF! in the UK was undoubtedly inspired by knowledge of its US predecessor.

Although several individuals excited by the example of EF! direct action in the US attempted to attract interest in the UK, they enjoyed little success until in 1991 two students— Jason Torrance and Jake Burbridge— in Hastings, Sussex made contact with EF! in the US and were soon listed as EF!'s UK contact. Both had been active in and disillusioned by various established environmental groups

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“David Rainbow ... casually reported the protest as an Earth First action and, despite the fact that it was non-violent, the media equated it with terrorist activity – a hardline terrorist organisation had hijacked a train. It was front page. Debate centred on the acceptability of the action. The Wilderness Society slammed them, and the timber industry called on Green politicians to denounce the group.”

On the eve of the 1993 federal election, the Tasmanian media reported a failed attempt by “Earth First” to blow up a railway bridge, but police investigations later concluded that this was a hoax, possibly perpetrated by loggers in order to discredit environmentalists and, by implication, the Greens. See Bob Burton, “Tasmania: Beware the “eco-terrorism” dirty tricks brigade”, *Crikey*, 17 March 2010.

and were inspired by EF's "no compromise" style of direct action and commitment to deep ecology.<sup>64</sup>

Our line was to be unashamedly unreasonable. We knew EF US's original hardline "rednecks for wilderness" attitude wouldn't appeal here, so we set out to build a group that combined radical action and social justice to protect Britain's few remaining natural places.<sup>65</sup>

EF! UK's first action, however, drew upon the activists' prior experience in the UK peace movement rather than any US influence; they blockaded Dungeness nuclear power station. Soon they encountered George Marshall, a Briton, who had been inspired by John Seed's philosophy and direct action in the Australian rainforests, and who, on returning to the UK in 1990, attempted to set up a rainforest movement there. Frustrated by his lack of success, Marshall sought advice from Seed who, having seen EF! UK's contact details in the US EF! journal, suggested that Marshall should contact the UK group.<sup>66</sup> The result was that some of the earliest and largest actions in which EF! UK was involved focused on the importation and sale of rainforest timbers. Thus, from its early days, EF! in the UK was influenced, in its themes and methods, by the Australian forest campaigns that inspired US EF!ers.

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<sup>64</sup> Derek Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical*

*Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements*, (London, 1999), p.46.

<sup>65</sup> Jake Bowers and Jason Torrance, "Grey green", *The Guardian*, 2 May 2001.

<sup>66</sup> Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement*, pp.47-8.

EF! in England attracted most attention because of its prominent involvement, from 1992, in direct action against the UK government's road-building programme. Following lively debate about tactics at the first of the annual EF! gatherings, EF! "adopted a strict non-violence code, decided that no form of property damage should be committed in its name"<sup>67</sup> and focused on non-violent direct action that combined elements of British protest tradition, such as protest camps, with tactics learned from abroad.<sup>68</sup> "Within two years (of its formation) 50 Earth First! groups and hundreds of nomadic activists were using Gandhi-style civil disobedience on a scale unseen since the early 80s peace movement".<sup>69</sup> The audacious and risky techniques of direct action pioneered in the Australian rainforests— such as lock-ons, walkways and tripods— were emulated and developed, sometimes in urban contexts, in UK protests in which EF!ers were prominent. The North East Forest Alliance's "Intercontinental Deluxe Guide to Blockading" circulated in Britain and is credited with influencing tactics employed in protest actions against road building.<sup>70</sup>

EF! UK was never a formal organisation, but it played a critical role in the diffusion and maintenance of anti-roads protests, and remained a prominent banner for environmental protests throughout the 1990s. The on-line *Earth First*

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<sup>67</sup> Bowers and Torrance, "Grey green".

<sup>68</sup> Brian Doherty, "Manufactured vulnerability: eco-activist tactics in Britain", *Mobilization*, Vol. 4, 1(1999), pp.75-89 .

<sup>69</sup> Bowers, Jake and Torrance, Jason, "Grey green".

<sup>70</sup> Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement*, p.17 and p.174.

*Action Update* was invaluable in informing and linking a widely dispersed network of environmental campaigners, many of whom did not advertise any connection with EF! Other banners and groups, including Reclaim the Streets, Rising Tide and Plane Stupid, emerged from the EF! milieu, which was an important and relatively enduring element in the British environmental movement.

### **Patterns of influence in environmental direct action**

As Doherty put it, “The tactical repertoire of eco-activists results [...] from a complex process of diffusion within counter-cultural networks both nationally and cross-nationally”.<sup>71</sup> It is clear that environmental direct action in Australian forests influenced the ideas, priorities and strategies of EF! in the US, and that the influence of EF! on Australian environmental activists was late and very limited. The campaign in the northern NSW forests was well under way before Gary Snyder brought news of EF! in late 1981 and remarked that the Australian forest activists were “just like Earth First! in the US”.<sup>72</sup> John Seed had, by the time he learned of EF!, already spent seven years learning and practicing Buddhism and was living in a Buddhist intentional community near Terania Creek before logging commenced there in 1979. Amongst the Terania Creek activists were people who had travelled in India and had heard of the Chipko “tree huggers”<sup>73</sup>, and even Indian observers remarked that the northern NSW forests campaigns

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<sup>71</sup> Doherty, “Manufactured vulnerability”, p.86 .

<sup>72</sup> John Seed, interview with author, 27 March 2015.

<sup>73</sup> John Seed, interview with author, 27 March 2015.

were “pure Gandhi”.<sup>74</sup> Thus the Australian activists were powerfully influenced by Seed’s already well developed philosophy of “deep ecology” and non-violent practice. The effect of Seed’s writing for the EF! newsletter was to advertise the Australian campaigns and their successes and, by so doing to impress and ultimately to influence his American contacts.

The forests of the US Pacific northwest were listed among EF!’s concerns almost from the outset and it is possible that EF!’s shift of focus toward the rainforests would have happened anyway. But Seed’s dissemination of news of the successful Australian campaigns, his participation in the EF! roadshows, and his celebration of rainforests as the womb of life almost certainly accelerated the process. Seed appears to have been important both in inspiring Mike Roselle to establish the Rainforest Action Network and in encouraging non-violence in the US movement.

The influence of the Australian activists upon EF! in Britain does not appear to have been reciprocated until the latter’s urban spin-off, Reclaim the Streets, was emulated in Sydney in 1997.<sup>75</sup> The greater and more immediate impact of US EF! on the British than on the Australians reflects the fact that environmental direct action emerged in Australia several years before news of EF! travelled to Australia. But it is also an accident of timing. By the late 1980s, when the first

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<sup>74</sup> John Seed, “Buddha Touched the Earth: An Exploration of Engaged Buddhism”, March 16, 2013, <http://newlotus.buddhistdoor.com/en/news/d/33687>, accessed 4 April 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement*, p.175.



attempts were made to form EF! groups in Britain, it was EF! actions in the US that commanded attention as its network and the circulation of its journal expanded. Even so, personal connections, and the greater appeal in Britain of non-violent civil disobedience, facilitated the significant, if lagged and mediated, influence of earlier Australian forests activists upon EF!ers in Britain.

An account that focusses on the labels groups attach to themselves may give a misleading impression of divisions within environmental movements. Although in both the US and Britain EF! was formed in response to the perceived shortcomings of established environmental campaign organisations that appeared insufficiently activist and too willing to compromise with the powerful, environmental movements have usually been more broadly inclusive than accounts of conflicts between groups suggest. In Britain, EF! received material assistance and support in many of its actions from more established environmental NGOs such as FoE, Greenpeace and WWF. In Australia, relations appear to have been even more fluid, even though tensions over tactics surfaced at times between direct activists and the Wilderness Society and Australian Conservation Foundation.

Whereas EF! in the US struggled long and hard to achieve partial victories, the Australians campaigning to save the rainforests enjoyed several important victories relatively quickly. The difference was the political context. In the US, Republican administrations favoured economic development over the preservation of the natural environment. This stepped into high gear with President Ronald Reagan's appointment in 1981 of James G. Watt, a pro-development and property rights lobbyist, as Secretary of the Interior. By

authorising oil, gas and minerals exploration on federal lands and declining any increase in national parks, even declining donations of land for such protected status, Watt was seen to be reversing much of the progress made by the environmental movement in previous decades.

In Australia, by contrast, the Wran ALP government in NSW cemented the rainforest campaigners' victory by legislating in 1982 to declare extensive new national parks, and when the Tasmanian Liberal government proved obdurate in its determination to dam the Franklin River, concerted protests prompted the federal ALP opposition to promise to block construction of the dam. With the election in 1983 of the Hawke ALP government, the federal government intervened, using the external affairs powers granted to it by the Australian constitution, to ratify the World Heritage status of the Tasmanian wilderness. When the Tasmanian government claimed the federal government had exceeded its powers, the contention passed to the courts, with the High Court quickly ruling in favour of the Commonwealth and against Tasmania. Thus environmental contention that began outside conventional politics was quite swiftly incorporated and partially resolved within mainstream institutions. As a result, there was some release of pressures that might otherwise have built toward more bitter contention.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Environmental management in Australia is mostly the responsibility of the states, and both Labor and non-Labor state governments began to pass new protective legislation in the 1970s.

In the UK, EF! gained traction during the late days of Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership, especially because of its opposition to a widely unpopular road-building programme to which the Conservative government clung doggedly, even after Thatcher's departure. However, the recession-induced slowing and eventual abandonment of the "Roads for Prosperity" programme, and the Labour Party's embrace of environmentalism, especially after Tony Blair became leader in 1994, drew some potential support away from environmental direct action as expectations of a change of government rose. If political opportunities were constricted by Conservative government intransigence, they were soon offset by new opportunities as Labour reformed and became a government-in-waiting. The Blair Labour government elected in 1997 delivered institutional reforms consistent with its promise to "put the environment at the centre of government" and subsequently backed down whenever environmental protests challenged its policies.

Thus political opportunities and contexts served to shape the character and outcomes of environmental contention in the US, UK and Australia. Political cultural factors also played a part. The more combative stance of some prominent US EF!ers, such as Dave Foreman, may owe something to the quirks of individual personalities, but it also reflects the libertarian "rugged individualism" and mistrust of the state characteristic of the US west, and its ambivalence about violence. By contrast, although there were tensions and lively debates about strategy and tactics among EF!ers in the UK and environmental direct activists in Australia, in keeping with the political cultures of both countries, the "violence"

associated with environmental direct action was restricted to minor property damage, and violence toward persons was never entertained.

## Conclusion

Ideas travel, but in travelling they are translated; in circumstances different from those of their point of origin, they are received differently. As Astrid Kirchhof puts it:

Ideas do not move in a vacuum; they need mediators who transmit relevant information, ideas and values. [...] The term “transfer of ideas”, however, describes more than a mere placing of ideas into a different context, it also requires a willingness of the receiving society to accept the new ideas and values, absorb them and adjust them to their specific circumstances.<sup>77</sup>

Ideas may more readily be accepted unmodified where they relate directly to the prevalent discourses and practices of their destination, or where they speak to

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<sup>77</sup> Astrid Mignon Kirchhof, “For a decent quality of life’: Environmental groups in East and West Berlin”, forthcoming in *Journal of Urban History*, (Fall 2015). Cf. Astrid Mignon Kirchhof and Jan-Henrik Meyer, “Global Protest against Nuclear Power. Transfer and Transnational Exchange in the 1970s and 1980s”, *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 39, 1 (2014), pp.172-3.

some local need; where they do not, they are likely to be greeted with silence or, at best, with enthusiasm by small minorities. It is easier to track the paths of labels than of ideas, but, as we have seen, labels may become, to varying degrees, detached from the ideas they are often taken to represent.

But perhaps the more important point is that ideas often do not have a single identifiable point of origin. Very often, the same or similar ideas emerge more or less simultaneously in various places. As this is more likely where people in different places share at least significant elements of language, culture, history and institutional context, it is not surprising that it should occur in various parts of the English-speaking world. Moreover, as globalisation— cultural and political as well as economic—reduces differences, so such (apparently) simultaneous, independent beginnings may be expected to become more widespread, greatly assisted by the pervasive reach and near instantaneous speed of the new communications technologies. Nevertheless, the homogenisation of cultures and contexts will never be complete, and so differences between the cultures and contexts within which traveling ideas are received will continue to produce diverse outcomes.