

FREE POLITICAL PRISONER JEFF 'FREE' LUERS



Extreme Actions

Op-Ed piece in *The Oregonian* by Jeffrey Luers

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The history of the United States is based on acts of civil disobedience and sabotage. Our government was founded on the acts of a few brave men and women who were willing to risk their freedom. Samuel Adams and the other disguised men who participated in the Boston Tea Party would no doubt be labeled terrorists in today's political climate.

An In My Opinion ("Oregon's home-grown terrorists incite hate, violence," March 5) would like us to believe that there is no difference between property destruction and the murder of thousands of people. Author David C. Austin draws the comparison between the two when he states that Osama bin Laden and the Earth Liberation Front share "the same goals . . . the destruction of our society."

In nearly a decade of its existence, ELF has never once caused an injury to life. Nor has ELF ever targeted individuals.

Violence against a person is the exertion of force resulting in injury. When a person is attacked, the person has been assaulted. When property is damaged, the property has been vandalized. There is a distinct difference between the two, and they are not comparable.

The truth is that ELF uses a campaign of property destruction to cause economic damage to institutions responsible for practices harmful to the environment, and to destroy equipment being used in those activities.

ELF has never claimed that "cutting a forest is morally akin to killing your child," as Austin claims. ELF followers are not the fanatics Austin makes them out to be. Rather, they are concerned individuals who have taken extreme actions to defend the wild.

ELF's goal is to stop practices that are incredibly harmful to the environment and to help create environmental sustainability. Common sense tells us that a replanted forest is not the same as an ancient growth forest. A majority of Americans would like an end to old-growth logging. Yet, powerful logging interests have kept old-growth forests open to logging. And with only 5 percent of our old-growth forests left standing, is it any wonder that people would go to extremes to protect the last stands?

ELF is not attempting to destroy the free-market or bring about the downfall of society.

ELF has engaged in a strategic and apparently effective campaign to ensure protection for wild places. Colorado Rep. Scott McInnis said, "ELF's attacks have had an appreciable impact on the management of the national forests." Several forests are, in fact, still standing only because of ELF's efforts to protect them.

I'm not justifying the actions of ELF. I do not agree with all of their adherents' actions.

However, there is a reason that ELF and similar groups have come into existence. They have received the support of many mainstream people because of the effectiveness of their tactics. More important, ELF has received so much support because in a world prone to violence, the ELF has stuck by its code: Never place life in danger of harm.

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