

We Don't Forget

Support Joseph Dibee, Environmentalist Accused of Sabotage

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After 12 years of fruitless searching, federal agents have captured Joseph Dibee, accused participant in the Earth Liberation Front. Dibee is charged with arson and conspiracy. The following statement from our collective, It's Going Down, and a network of anti-fascist groups explores why his case matters today.

In the 1990s, environmentalists and animal rights activists engaged in campaigns to put a stop to climate change, animal exploitation, and the destruction of biodiversity. They shut down board meetings, interrupted construction projects, organized demonstrations and sit-ins, held public outreach events at punk shows and vegan potlucks, liberated animals from captivity, and occasionally utilized vandalism, sabotage, and arson against corporations involved in particularly egregious behavior. Across the world, informally organized groups claimed anonymous actions in the names of the Animal and Earth Liberation Fronts.

International networks grew out of these movements. Struggles emerged against super-highways, gold mines, luxury ski resorts, old-growth logging, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and animal testing facilities on several continents. For years, corporate profiteers had cause to fear that they would face consequences when they perpetrated ecological harm. At that time, it was still possible to imagine that humanity could avert the catastrophe that is unfolding today in the form of ever-rising temperatures, hurricanes, droughts, forest fires, and mass extinctions.

At the turn of the century, federal authorities counterattacked, launching a campaign of repression to crush the Earth Liberation Front and subdue environmental movements of all kinds. Their goal was to protect business interests at any expense—even if that meant making the world uninhabitable. At the same time, increasing attention on climate change from the likes of Al Gore served to professionalize environmental activism, imposing the logic of the non-profit industry and bribing activists to moderate their tactics and targets in return for salaries. This two-pronged assault set back environmental movements a full generation or more.

The cataclysm that is unfolding today can be laid at the doorstep of the law enforcement agencies that have paved the way for it by making it so difficult for ordinary people to defend themselves against ecological devastation. If we don't stop them, they will frogmarch us directly into the apocalypse, profiting all the way—and when the last well is poisoned and the last forest burns up, they will be the last to die.

The Green Scare

At the end of 2005, the FBI escalated its assault on earth and animal liberation movements with a new wave of indictments. This offensive, dubbed Operation Backfire, was intended to obtain convictions for many of the unsolved Earth Liberation Front arsons of the preceding ten years.

Of those arrested in Operation Backfire, 12 of the accused became federal informants, collaborating with the authorities against their former comrades and the struggle against catastrophic climate change. The collaborators arrested include Stanislas Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, Chelsea Dawn Gerlach, Suzanne Savoie, Kendall Tankersley, Jennifer Kolar, Lacey

Phillabaum, Darren Thurston, and, much later, Briana Waters. Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, Nathan Block, Joyanna Zacher, Justin Solondz, and Rebecca Rubin all refused to collaborate. William “Avalon” Rodgers passed away in an apparent suicide following his arrest.

This case took place alongside a variety of similar operations, including the prosecutions of Marius Mason, who is still serving a 22-year sentence for environmental sabotage of a GMO facility, Eric McDavid, who served 9 years of a two-decade sentence before a judge threw out his conviction because the prosecution had withheld thousands of pages of exonerating evidence, and other earth and animal liberation prisoners, including Rod Coronado, Jeff “Free” Luers, and Christopher McIntosh. The campaign “Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty” faced multiple waves of repression, including the infamous SHAC 7 case, in which all six of the accused served up to six years in prison for maintaining a website. Other people refused to testify before grand juries, a commonly used tool for repressing autonomous movements, and served time for resisting FBI fishing expeditions against environmental activists.

For many years, federal authorities ranked anarchist environmental activism over white supremacist mass shootings and abortion clinic bombings as the number one domestic threat—even though it involved no injuries to human beings whatsoever. Yet despite all the resources they invested in this witch hunt, it took the FBI decades to capture some of their targets. Operation Backfire target Joseph Dibee remained free until August 9, 2018. As of this writing, one of the accused remains at liberty. Our thoughts are with them, wherever they are.

Operation Backfire Defendant Joseph Dibee Arrested in Joint Cuban-US Operation

At 4:53 pm, on August 9, 2018, Joseph Dibee, 50, was booked into the Multnomah County Detention Center by federal agents. Detained by authorities at an airport in Cuba, he was brought to Oregon via a secretive international policing operation. The next day, Billy J. Williams, US Attorney for Oregon, announced his arrest. Williams received Donald Trump’s support in 2017 and advocates for even more aggressive repression of undocumented immigrants.

Joseph Dibee is accused of participating in environmental direct action in the 1990s with the Earth/Animal Liberation Front. Specifically, he is accused of participating in the sabotage of a horse slaughtering facility that resulted in the permanent closure of the company. His charges include arson, conspiracy to commit arson, and destruction of an energy facility.

He has been wanted by federal authorities for 12 years, during which he is alleged to have traveled in Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, Lebanon, Syria, and Russia.

Defend Joseph Dibee—Defend Autonomous Movements

Why is the state still persecuting environmentalists nearly twenty years after actions that never injured anyone? Because as the consequences of resource accumulation and ecological collapse intensify, cracking down on resistance is becoming an ever more urgent priority for the authorities. In *The Dawn*, Friedrich Nietzsche suggests that you can measure the health of a society according to the number of parasites it can tolerate; today, the custodians of order know that they cannot tolerate any resistance whatsoever, on pain of insurrection.

As prisoners across the country prepare for a nationwide strike against forced labor and undignified conditions, the authorities are preemptively cracking down on organizers. Many rebellious black protesters are imprisoned for attempting to engage in proportionate response to racist extrajudicial police murders in Ferguson, Baltimore, Charlotte, Milwaukee, and elsewhere around the US. Indigenous and non-native water protectors faced unprecedented violence from state counterinsurgency forces and private security firms during the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in Standing Rock, North Dakota. Over 200 anarchists and other anti-fascists faced eight or more felony charges apiece in one of the largest conspiracy cases in US history on account of participating in protests against the inauguration of President Donald Trump, during which anarchists smashed the windows of corporate storefronts, clashed with police, and burned a limousine. Those charges were finally dropped in July after a year and a half of punitive mass intimidation directed at the arrestees.

The state is pouring all its resources into repression at a time when self-organized revolt and mutual aid are needed more than ever. Fascists and neo-Nazis are targeting hurricane relief organizers while Facebook and Google censor radical content online. Tech giants like Amazon and Palantir are working with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to capture undocumented people while landlords and developers collaborate with IBM and finance capitalists to reimagine cities emptied of the working class, transforming vibrant and rebellious communities into enclaves for the wealthy.

Joseph Dibee was arrested with the collaboration of Cuban authorities in a coordination between rival authoritarian powers that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. As climate chaos, popular uprisings, and economic uncertainty continue to shake the globe, we are witnessing unprecedented collaboration between states in policing and extradition. It remains to be seen what this means for other rebels from previous eras—such as Assata Shakur, who has lived in Cuba for many decades despite being at the top of the FBI’s “most wanted” list. What is clear is that all who oppose the coordinated international suppression of resistance must organize now to defend those who are currently being targeted, lest the authorities be emboldened to expand their scope still further.

Imagining a New Horizon of Struggle

The resurgence of street-level fascism in the US on the coattails of the Trump campaign is merely the tip of the iceberg. Worldwide, we have seen a wave of reactionary populism that will continue to circumscribe the popular imagination for a number of years. As sea levels rise and natural disasters continue to displace poor and working class people in Latin America, the Middle East, Indochina, and Oceania, warlords, right-wing gangs, xenophobic governments, and broad sections of the wealthy and ruling classes will collaborate to produce fanatical nationalist and life-denying discourses. Refugees from across the world are already being denied safe passage into the gated communities of the global north.

It is no longer realistic to imagine that climate change and ecological chaos can be prevented. But this only makes it more paramount to defend what wildness remains, impose consequences for the most environmentally destructive activity, and defend those who take risks to make the world hospitable for both human and nonhuman life. If we do not want to spend the next century locked in ethno-nationalist, religious, and racial warfare, we have to foster new struggles against climate change and ecological destruction, we have to build mutual aid networks capable of surviving in disaster zones, and we have to resolutely defend everyone who fights for a world without cages. **Free Joseph Dabee.**

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