
Preface

In 1990 I participated in some of the Redwood Summer demonstrations in northern California. These protests were organized in response to the increasingly rapid liquidation of the few remaining old-growth forests in the United States. I was aware of the tensions that existed between environmentalists and some members of the logging community, but I was comfortable participating in the demonstrations in that the clearly defined targets were the corporate owners of the logging companies. Nonetheless, I designed my banner with the plight of the workers in mind. It read: “I support workers AND the environment.” But at some of these demonstrations I faced counterprotesters, workers from the local mills, men and women concerned about their jobs and resentful of the activists bussed in from San Francisco and other foreign lands.

This was deeply disturbing to me. For years I had been active in several social movements, from the struggle against apartheid to the war in Central America. I was and still am an active union member, and I had done a fair amount of labor support work as well. Through it all I never found myself on the opposite side of the picket line, the target of protest by the working-class people with whom I identified. The counter-demonstrators seemed disturbed by my sign as well, their anger shifting to confusion. Other environmentalists were already reaching out to the workers and the local logging communities. Some insightful activists had recognized the strategic and moral failure of not having done so sooner. Timber industry workers were not the enemy; they were important allies and fellow victims of the profit-hungry corporations that exploited workers with little regard for the long-term sustainability of their jobs

or the environment. Short-term profits were the order of the day and everyone, including the workers, stood to lose.

Although some important relationships were built between workers and environmentalists through the struggle over preservation of old-growth forests, the experience of being the target of worker protest continues to haunt me. It was this experience that motivated me to dedicate myself to understanding the profoundly important relationship between unions and the environmental movement. In my assessment of the contemporary political moment, the quality of this relationship and the invigoration of both the labor and environmental movements will determine whether we as a society will create a just and sustainable economy or further the hyperexploitation of workers and continue down the path of ecological ruin. It is my greatest hope that in some small way this book will help to bring about the former.

There are many people who made this work possible. I offer a great deal of gratitude to the activists and movement leaders who took time away from their important work to speak with me. Several people were particularly helpful in this regard, including Jane Perkins, Bill Towne, Ken Germanson, Ned McCann, Monica Castellanos, and Bill Norbert.

Several people offered helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this work including Gay Seidman, Fred Buttel, Gerald Marwell, Allen Hunter, Robert Gottlieb, Fred Rose, and Brad Barham. A special note of thanks to Pamela Oliver, who provided support and guidance throughout the course of this project and during my entire stay at the University of Wisconsin. I also appreciate the support of Annee Roschelle, Peter Kaufman, Hal Jacobs, Irwin Sperber, Susan Lehrer and my other friends and colleagues at SUNY New Paltz. I offer additional thanks to Clay Morgan, Deborah Cantor-Adams, and the other folks at the MIT Press.

I want to thank my mother, Linda Horowitz, for raising me right and providing constant encouragement. Thanks to my good friend Stuart Eimer for helping to discern what is real and important throughout this process. This book is dedicated to İlgü Özler for her unconditional support, love, and therapy, without which I never would have found the strength to finish.

The research for this project was funded in part by the National Science Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Department of Sociology Small Grants Committee.