

## Observer "withdraws" NETCU eco-terrorism scare story

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/11/413446.html>

watcher | 24.11.2008 17:53 | Ecology | Energy Crisis | Repression

*A story planted by NETCU police spooks and written by Mark Townsend about "eco-terrorists" has been "withdrawn" by the Observer.*

23 Nov 2008: The Observer - Page 34

Comment: STEPHEN PRITCHARD : The readers' editor on... anonymous sources and claims of eco-terrorism

You might think The Observer 's concern for the environment arose only in the past 20 years as global warming became apparent, but it has actually been reading the signs since 1925. Waldorf Astor, then the paper's forward-thinking owner, took a keen interest in all things environmental and urged his editor, JL Garvin, to appoint a correspondent to cover ecology and agriculture. Step forward Sir William Beach Thomas, who became, in effect, the first environment correspondent.

Much later, The Observer was to investigate and reveal the 'greenhouse effect' and to warn of its possible consequences. Thousands of words have been devoted to the subject ever since, winning a loyal audience, particularly among those who are active in the environment movement. So there was understandable dismay at a recent story which told of a 'growing threat from eco-terrorists'.

Police were said to be investigating the eco-movement Earth First! which, they claimed, had supporters who believed that reducing the Earth's population by four-fifths would help protect the planet. The National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit was concerned that a lone maverick might attempt a terrorist attack. It had also warned several companies they were being targeted as major polluters by the group and had offered them advice on how to withstand attack.

It's perfectly legitimate to report police security concerns, but none of the statements were substantiated. No website links were offered, no names were mentioned, no companies identified and no police source would go on the record.

The article linked Earth First! to climate camps established last summer, including one at Kingsnorth power station, Kent, and at Heathrow. While the paper had no intention of suggesting that every activist was a potential terrorist, several climate campers wrote to protest. 'If a journalist is told by a single anonymous source that a movement of people has among it individuals who would take the lives of men, women and children in a terror attack, what standard of evidence does that journalist require? In this case: no evidence whatsoever. The claim itself was the story.'

We've been here before. Other newspapers reported on a predicted 'summer of hate' at climate camps that never materialised and the Press Complaints Commission found against the Evening Standard after it ran a story from an anonymous source warning that climate campers were planning attacks at Heathrow.

Environmentalist Keith Metcalf explained that Earth First! supported direct action against property, but not against people. He believed that the debate around sustainable population size had been twisted to imply that environmentalists wished to kill people.

He also repeated the belief of several others that Nectcu was briefing in this manner in order to make prosecutions easier and to boost its funding, which is at risk owing to the decline in animal rights campaigns. I can't verify that or the fears about mass murder because, despite repeated requests, Nectcu won't respond. Accordingly, The Observer has decided to withdraw the story.