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In Memory of Richard Sylvan

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I was deeply saddened to learn that Richard Sylvan, the Australian deep ecologist, philosopher and forestry activist died on June 16th in Bali, Indonesia. There was a memorial gathering on June 24th in Canberra, Australia. He was buried, his wife Louise wrote to me in a July 9th letter, in the manner that he wished: "without ceremony, at the edge of one of the forests he cherished and overlooking the sea. I'll plant the tree to grow beside his grave in the spring."

I first contacted Richard in 1987 because of reading some negative comments about a 1985 Australian National University publication by him called . *Critique of Deep Ecology*. At the time I thought, this sounds like an interesting fellow to be so savagely criticized. I made the initial contact to obtain the publication for myself to read. Richard's strict philosophical writing was incomprehensible to me. Over the years we exchanged many publications and letters. We shared a critical deep ecology perspective and a concern with how to apply this to subvert the industrial world. He called his work "Deep Green Theory". Despite promises rung out of him from me, he never produced the "primer" of his ideas for activists interested in theoretical questions, which I felt was necessary. He intellectually inspired me although we differed politically. Richard was an anarchist and did not share my pro-socialist sentiments. We never personally met or even spoke on the telephone. His letters were extremely difficult to read because of his hand writing. It was always a major task to decipher what Richard was saying. But the effort was always worth while.

Richard Sylvan had a sharp mind, a sharp tongue and was never afraid to give unpopular views. His was the major *inside* critical voice pointing out the philosophical fuzziness of much writing on deep ecology. The opening paragraph of his *Critique* described deep ecology as "a conceptual bog" which was "well on the way to becoming all things to all interested parties." Perhaps because of this criticism, he seemed to be excluded from the mutual appreciation "club" of deep ecology academics.

Richard changed his name from "Routley" to Sylvan. Under his former name, with Val Routley, *The Fight for the Forests: the takeover of Australian forests for pines, sood chips, and intensive forestry*, second edition, was published in 1974, by the Australian National University. Fortunate was the North American forestry activist who came across this book.

The issues raised in *The Fight*, showed an extensive and detailed knowledge of Australian forests and wildlife, and the timber industry. But perhaps more importantly, the theoretical perspective was helpful to forestry activists everywhere and became part of my own world view. Namely:

- The most fundamental conflicts in forestry are over values, not facts: "how do we use the forests?";
- Forestry interests want to maximize wood consumption;
- Forestry interests are opposed to any magnitude of forest preservation;

- Clearcutting, which has a commercial advantage, is defended as a biological necessity;
- Needed are a new environmental ethics and an associated environmental economics;
- The prevailing forest ideology, maximum wood production, is part of a larger developmental industrial ideology;
- Industrial forest ecology has as its aim to justify as ecologically sound those methods producing maximum quantities of wood; etc

While unknown to many ecocentric activists in Canada and the United States, I regarded Richard as the leading critical voice within the deep ecology movement. He was very intellectually productive and there are many publications. Two recent books are (with D.Bennett), *The Greening of Ethics*, 1994, White Horse Press; and *Deep Pluralism*, 1994, University of Edinburgh Press. His work remains, but I will really miss him. My warm condolences to Richard Sylvan's family in Australia.

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