



David Barbarash

Profile of ALF's New Spokesman

Special to Fur Commission USA by Simon Ward

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) has a highly qualified new spokesman, whose only shortcoming might be a penchant - in the view of Canadian police - for hurting people. Though seasoned observers would argue the point, ALF claims to eschew violence except against property, leaving the business of hurting humans to an affiliate, the "Justice Department".

On July 4, 1999, David Nathan Barbarash,⁽¹⁾ 34, of Vancouver, BC, announced that he had replaced Katie Fedor as spokesman for ALF's North American Press Office. Fedor, he said, was "still active" but was "putting her energy and resources into fighting against the Minnesota grand jury."⁽²⁾ In the last few months, he has attached his name to several claims of responsibility for terrorist acts. On June 25, for example, he declared that ALF was behind the firebombing of a truck at Worldwide Primates in Florida, "in support of the 1999 Primate Freedom Tour". On Aug. 11, he announced that ALF had torched the United Feeds mill in Wisconsin. On Sept. 2, he claimed ALF was responsible for the theft of dogs from a California supplier to research labs. On Sept. 13, he announced that ALF was behind the release of domesticated fox in Minnesota. And on Oct. 3, he announced that ALF was to blame for three attacks on Maine hunting clubs.

Under Barbarash's watch, no one has yet been killed, and if one takes him at his word, things should stay that way. In a 1995 interview, he parroted the standard line that ALF is "non-violent", with "activists taking precautions not to harm any persons or animal."⁽³⁾

His own career to date, however, hardly inspires confidence.

Arrogant Anarchist

Over the last decade and a half, Barbarash has built up a persona which includes the key ingredients of a classic anarchist: he is anti-establishment, and he is arrogant enough to believe he can force change by taking the law into his own hands. His occasional writings focus not on workable solutions to society's ills, but simply on ways to destroy the existing order - without getting caught.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) have called him an "animal rights extremist and anti-fascist",⁽⁴⁾ a conjecture borne out by some of the groups with which he has been linked: Anti-Racist Action, the Anti-Fascist Militia, the Militant Direct Action Task Force, ALF's Justice Department, and the tree-spiking Earth First!

However, his energies are not restricted to animal users and fascists. For example, he has used a Student Activist Network⁽⁵⁾ to promote resistance to "militarism" and "imperialism", and recently called on participants to "expose and oppose" the Aerospace North America trade show in Vancouver, Aug. 10-12, "where merchants of death & war mongers 'get business done'."⁽⁶⁾

Narcotics

His criminal record began in 1982 with a conviction and C\$300 fine for narcotics possession. But it was in 1987 that Barbarash the terrorist first came to the attention of the law. As one of the "Kentucky Fried Five", Barbarash helped vandalize a fast-food outlet in Toronto. The defendants pleaded guilty to mischief resulting in willful damage, and possession of burglary tools and stolen property. The original charges also accused Barbarash and one other of possessing explosives, carrying weapons, and vandalizing the Toronto University dentistry school in 1987, but these charges were dropped as part of a plea-bargain.⁽⁷⁾

Barbarash received a suspended sentence and a year's probation, but it made no impression - the mold had been cast. Meanwhile, another young man who would later become almost inseparable from Barbarash, both as roommate and partner in crime, was making his own mark on the terrorist scene.⁽⁸⁾

In 1991, Darren Thurston, now 29, firebombed three trucks belonging to a fish supply company in Edmonton. During their investigation, police seized from his apartment a loaded assault rifle, a semi-automatic handgun, 150 rounds of ammunition, a gas mask, two training grenades and two bayonet-type knives, plus literature on incendiary devices and improvised weapons.

In 1992, the new team of Barbarash and Thurston raided an Alberta University laboratory, released animals and caused C\$50,000 in damage. Thurston was jailed, but Barbarash fled to the US to avoid arrest, and lived in hiding there for two years.

In 1994 his luck ran out. The FBI nabbed him in California, and he was extradited back to Canada where he spent three and a half months in jail awaiting trial. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to time served by a judge who called the "zealousness" of his beliefs "frightening" and dubbed him a "danger to the public."⁽⁹⁾

By 1995 Barbarash and Thurston were free again and working for a British Columbia organization, Bear Watch, opposing the hunting of black bears.

Their provocative approach towards hunters was too much for Bear Watch, and they were soon kicked out. "Barbarash was a little out of control," said a spokesman. "We didn't like what they were doing. That's why they're no longer with Bear Watch."⁽¹⁰⁾

But Barbarash's stint harassing hunters was more significant for some of the utterances it produced on the subject of violence. For example, following a protest that involved the use of horns to scare bears away from hunters, Barbarash was charged with violating Canada's Wildlife Act. "We're a group of non-violent people trying to prevent violence," declared a miffed Barbarash.⁽¹¹⁾ And in May 1996, following retaliatory attacks by hunters on Bear Watch trucks, he said: "Violence of any kind is no longer tolerable."⁽¹²⁾

Terror Campaign

Meanwhile, according to the RCMP, Barbarash and Thurston had launched their own campaign of violence, directed at outfitters for hunting guides.

The RCMP's investigation began in response to a series of pipe bombs sent through the mail in 1995. First on the list was Holocaust-denier Ernst Zundel, who received an envelope rigged with a razor blade, and shortly after, a pipe bomb packed with nails. Other bombs went to Aryan Nations leader Charles Scott, Dr. Ted Mitenko of cattle biotech firm Alta Genetics, and John Thompson of the Mackenzie Institute, a think tank which researches issues relating to organized violence and political instability. A fifth was addressed to the Aryan Resistance Movement in Vancouver, but was intercepted by the postal service. Most of the bombs were disarmed or detonated safely by authorities, and no one was seriously hurt. But Mitenko only escaped with his life by using his heavy desk as protection while opening the parcel with a coat hanger. The shrapnel left embedded in the walls of his office left no doubt that the RCMP were investigating cases of attempted murder. Barbarash and Thurston were suspects. While the RCMP was investigating the pipe bombs, another wave of terror had been launched, this time directed at hunting guide outfitters. In January 1996, a total of 27 people - 22 outfitters and five media organizations - received envelopes containing cards with razor blades attached. Responsibility was claimed by ALF's Justice Department.

A fact that would later prove significant was the difference between the packages received by the outfitters and the media. While the outfitters received single envelopes rigged with razor blades, each media package consisted of *two* envelopes, one inside the other. The outer envelope contained a warning, while the razor blades were rigged inside the inner envelope.

Arrested

As part of their investigation of the pipe bomb campaign, in March 1997 the RCMP received a warrant to search the premises of Barbarash and Thurston.

A year later, in March 1998, they were arrested, but no charges were filed for the pipe bombs. Instead they were arrested for the razor blade campaign and charged with 27 counts of mailing items with intent to do bodily harm. Barbarash was also charged with two other offenses relating to items found in his possession: a prohibited

weapon (stun gun), and an "explosive device".⁽¹³⁾

On Apr. 12, 1999, a preliminary court hearing upheld all the charges against Barbarash except for the five arising from the razor blade mailings to the media. The court's explanation was that since the packages to the media contained a warning, it would be difficult to argue that the senders intended to cause bodily harm. This curious position was taken in spite of the fact that one recipient of a media package actually did cut a finger, despite the warning.

Barbarash will appear before the British Columbia Supreme Court on June 25, 2000, with six weeks having been set aside for the trial. Meanwhile, he is out of jail, no surety (bail) has been posted, and the only restriction on his movements is that he must report once a week to the RCMP.

But whatever happens at the trial in 2000 may not be the end of the story. Barbarash and Thurston are still under investigation for the pipe bombs, and are also suspects in another razor blade campaign.

In March 1996, just two months after the campaign with which the two men have been charged, a second wave of razor blades were mailed to 34 Canadian fur retailers. As in the first wave, responsibility was claimed by ALF's Justice Department.

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(1) According to the RCMP, Barbarash also goes by the names David Baker and Lawrence Troy Beyer.

(2) A federal grand jury has been convened following an Apr. 4 attack on Minnesota University which caused over \$1.5 million in damages. Responsibility was claimed by ALF.

(3) Vancouver radio station CFRO, Nov. 13, 1995.

(4) "Information to obtain a search warrant" request from the RCMP to search the premises of Barbarash and Thurston; March 1997.

(5) <http://san.tao.ca>

(6) www.tao.ca/~students/san/san02010.html. Note: On June 26, 1995, the *Montreal Gazette* received a communiqué from a group identifying itself as the Militant Direct Action Task Force concerning the pipe bombs sent to Zundel and Scott. The MDATF warned that its "armed resistance" would not be limited to fascists but also "imperialists, military weapons producers, eco destroyers, and all oppressors."

(7) The source of the plea-bargain arrangement is *Animal People*, May 1998. However, the same source also dates the dental lab raid as 1986, not 1987.

(8) A topical footnote to Thurston's career concerns a website set up this spring imitating that of the Makah Tribe (www.makah.com), who recently resumed whaling. Barbarash told the *Seattle Times* (May 22) that the domain name (www.makah.org) of the mock site, now removed, was registered to a PO Box belonging to Thurston.

(9) This account of the judge's words comes from Barbarash himself, in a letter published in *Earth First Journal*; reproduced by the Ecoterror Response Network at www.cdfc.org/indict.html.

(10) Bear Watch spokesman Eric Donnelly, *Vancouver Sun*, Mar. 30, 1998.

(11) *Vancouver Sun*, May 9, 1996.

(12) Bear Watch; www.bearwatch.org/media/5_27_96.html

(13) In Canada, the definition of possessing an "explosive device" includes possessing the components needed to make such a device. Barbarash was found with 9V batteries, alligator clips, timers and instructions for making incendiary devices.

(14) Reproduced by the Ecoterror Response Network, www.cdfc.org/indict.html.