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To HCN editors:

In Ray Rings feature "Magic Valley Uprising" (HCN, May 1st edition) there are nine profiles of the activists who stopped Sempra Energy Inc's Magic Valley coal plant. They are all ordinary people from diverse backgrounds. Most voted for George Bush for president. These profiles help readers realize that the majority of the environmental activism in this country is not created by scruffy young people operating on the fringes of society but by ordinary citizens acting in their own and their communities' self interest. Environmental activism is too often romanticized by the right (which promotes the label "environmental terrorism") and by the left. In both cases, ordinary citizens are encouraged to think of activism as something that is beyond them. Ray Ring's Magic Valley profiles helps readers realize that they too can make a difference in their communities.

Most impressive, however, was the recognition by Ring and historian Daniel Kemmis that the phenomena of new west environmental activism is not primarily a product of the feel-good collaborative groups that both writers have promoted in the past. True grassroots environmentalism is always rooted in place and always recognizes that self-interest is bedded within community interest.

As Professor Kemmis notes, the conflict resolution groups with their tears and hugs have a place. They are invariably focused, however, on stability rather than change. Too often these feel-good groups mush over the real and long-standing disparities in power that have resulted in the perpetration of historic and current social and environmental injustice. The new western environmentalism is both more honest and more effective. Bravo Mr. Ring and Mr. Kemmis for probing deeper into the emerging western environmentalism and especially for making activism in pursuit of enlightened self-interest more accessible to ordinary westerners from diverse backgrounds and diverse political persuasions.

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