

Vagaries of the Left

John Zerzan answers liberal columnist Chris Hedges, who charges the Black Bloc has “hi-jacked” the Occupy Movement.

John Zerzan

On February 6, progressive columnist Chris Hedges wrote a fairly predictable attack on Black Bloc militancy, “The Cancer in Occupy,” in Truthdig, the on-line news site.

It voiced, in general, the perspective of the liberal-moderate-reformist folks who have been mostly predominant in Occupy. Hedges’ screed against anarchists and others who “go too far” shows just what anti-authoritarians have been up against and why so few of them, in my experience, have been interested in Occupy.

Of course, the Occupy sites were many and varied, it must be added, some of which included strong anarchist participation.

Hedges counsels that if everyone behaves, then Occupy will continue to succeed, obviously exaggerating the potency of the movement so far. He advocates voting, property-respecting, obey-the-rules-of-the-game—unless he’s talking about somewhere else. He has lauded rioting and resistance in Greece, for example.

His “Cancer” essay is full of gaffes and bloopers, e.g., I am a big voice of Black Bloc, anarchists are full of “a repellent cynicism,” etc. It has been critiqued by many, including Peter Gelderloos, magpie, and Bobby Whittenberg-James. I wish to add only a couple of things that have been less developed, or not mentioned by other commentators.

Hedges finds it scandalous that *Green Anarchy* magazine published a brief article years ago (GA #5, Spring 2001) criticizing the Zapatista EZLN from an anarchist perspective. As an editor of GA at the time, I recall that we weren’t thrilled by the piece, but we ran it in the interest of provoking discussion. Hedges is evidently not in favor of open discussion, and neither was the EZLN, which sent us a rather angry response (GA #8, Spring 2002).

If it is scandalous to think critically about what is going on in Chiapas, it is worse to fail to learn from the evidence, from the record. Over the years I’ve seen enthusiasm for national liberation-type movements, widely and loudly expressed, but fade into silence when such movements became governments or political parties. Do I see this happening in southernmost Mexico? I hope not. Do I support their struggles? Certainly.

But a certain silence has set in, and questions emerge. Remember when Subcomandante Marcos renounced his urban, leftist, intellectual past and embraced indigeneity as the necessary realm of authenticity? Given the recent past of the EZLN, it seems like a long time ago.

In 2005, the Sixth Declaration was proclaimed by the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committees—General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Except for the one word, does any of this hyper-bureaucratic-sounding mouthful seem remotely indigenous? And, within this document, there are references to “our Mexico,” “our Patria.”

Is nationalism indigenous? How about such slippery terms or phrases as “The Other Campaign,” or “we govern by obeying?” Similarly, “building another way of doing politics, for a program of the Left and for a new constitution”?

For a leftist like Hedges, it is forbidden to wonder about the direction or nature of the EZLN.

But the bulk of “The Cancer of Occupy” consists of quotes from Derrick Jensen (described on one of his many books as, “Hailed as the philosopher poet of the ecology movement”), who was once an enemy of civilization.

Jensen's opening announcement in Hedges' article is that "what they [Black Bloc types] are really doing is destroying the Occupy movement."

In this, he seems to echo Hedges' charge that BB tactics are not only inappropriate, they are "criminal." With his complete intolerance of criticism, Jensen had already cut ties with anarchists. Not "officially," but he's made it pretty clear to many.

"I can't stand those people," he wrote in a recent letter to an organic farmer referring to anarchists. It took a few years, but he now seems to be hardly distinguishable from a liberal. The anti-city bit is a distant memory, used very occasionally, qualified and tamed. Speaking of tamed, Jensen never seemed to grasp that civilization starts from domestication. Can't remember him ever using that word.

It is, of course, nothing short of bizarre that Deep Green Resistance, a Jensen spin-off, calls for the physical destruction of the industrial and fossil fuel infrastructure, while Jensen recoils in shock and horror from BB militancy. DGR has been an attractive idea to some precisely because it is "heavy," portends real action against the machine.

When the tactical formations of young people freak out Jensen, one cannot miss the irony: he calls for felonious arsons and bombings in a DGR supplement to the Earth First! Journal!, but Black Bloc is too much (??).

DGR projects and at least one of Derrick's recent books are subsidized by the Wallace Fund; that's when things get really bizarre. Major funders of NPR, and named for Henry Wallace (former U.S. Vice-President under FDR and 1948 Presidential candidate of the CP-backed Progressive Party), the Fund cannot exactly be counted among anarchist or anti-civ forces!

The strategic thinking that Jensen counsels means, I guess, that the DGR will direct the resistance, not undisciplined anarchists. I heard his DGR cohort Lierre Keith speak last year, and in a similar vein, she expressed contempt for ELF and ALF folks, and their disrespect for authority in general. They would be welcome, however, she said in as many words, as cannon fodder for the DGR authorities, who think like "field generals." I'm not making this up.

In his column, Hedges states: "Black Bloc adherents detest those of us on the organized left." I do detest leftists like Hedges, for obvious reasons. Mainly because they are anti-radical and hence, anti-anarchist. That's obvious to me. What should also be obvious is how movements or individuals slide into what should not be acceptable.

A few days after his "Cancer" piece appeared—and a furor ensued—Hedges gave an interview to try to calm the waters in the February 9 Truthdig. Here he admitted that it is anti-civilization and anti-Left ideas, more than the Black Bloc, that really set him off. As well they should!

That colossal failure known as the Left has always been a bulwark of civilization and all of its horrors. The Left has reason to fear that which means its definitive end.

It should come as no big surprise, given Hedges' progressive orientation, that he opposes anti-civ ideas. Just as it shouldn't be a big jolt to know that Noam Chomsky is similarly exercised by those who question such primary institutions as domestication, civilization, industrialism and mass society—which is fast leading to disaster in every sphere, at every level. And now neither should it be big news that Derrick Jensen is more and more a part of the Left and its basic acquiescence in this nightmare in which we live.

I was at the beginning of a 3-week group speaking tour in India when the Hedges piece broke. Let me add, perhaps as an antidote to Hedges and Jensen, that there are now anarchist groups in India, apparently for the first time.

The February visit was my third in the past four years and broke new ground—this time the venues were mostly in the South. To learn more about the tour see anhilaal.com, the website for the anti-civ, anti-work, anti-career network in South Asia.

fifth Estate

John Zerzan

Vagaries of the Left

John Zerzan answers liberal columnist Chris Hedges, who charges the Black Bloc has “hi-jacked” the Occupy Movement.

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/387-summer-2012/vagaries-left>

Fifth Estate #387, Summer, 2012

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net