

Why I Choose to Live in Wayne National Forest

Beginnings of Land Defense

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TO THE POINT

Our current system is like an abandoned parking lot. Asphalt was laid, killing life and turning everything into a homogenous blackness, a dead sameness. The levers of maintaining this have broken down. No one is coming to touch up the asphalt. In abandoned parking lots, cracks form and life grows from the cracks.

All these riots, environmental catastrophes, food crises, occupations of land by protestors, and various breakdowns in daily life are cracks in the asphalt. What will spring from the cracks depends on what seed is planted within them. Beautiful flowers could grow. Weeds could grow.

Modern rich nations have walled themselves in. Colonized India was a world apart from Britain. The United States exists an ocean away from the places it drone strikes. Citizenship acts as a tool of ethnic cleansing. The world, according to the new nationalists, will be a checkerboard of racially homogenous governments with swords continuously drawn. The rich nations will now literally wall themselves in, ensure their “racial purity”, and steal from the poorer nations until the end of days. At least, this is the future envisioned by the Trump/Bannon regime. This is the future governments everywhere seem to be carrying us toward, a divided people screaming in joy or anger.

The continued and sped up process of fracking Wayne National Forest, Ohio’s only national forest, fits perfectly into this worldview, or a governance in managing the cracks. The power of this world and the world our rulers wish to realize is dependent on fracking wells, oil rigs, pipelines, and energy infrastructure in general. To oppose this infrastructure is to oppose this system, to take as our starting point the cracks.

I am living in Wayne National Forest in hopes for, first and foremost, protecting the forest. I hope to crack the asphalt and plant a flower.

Everyone is welcome to join the occupation, beginning on May 12th. Everyone is welcome to visit. Everyone is welcome to participate, in one way or another, in this land defense project.

EXTENDED

Some conclude the election of Trump signals an end of the left. Though the opinion seems rushed, and forces could push for a revitalization, if true, then good riddance.

Those of the left are preoccupied with flaunting ego. Taking up their various labels- communist, socialist, anarchist, Trotskyist- seems more about themselves than any revolutionary project. The labelling urge is bureaucratic. Leftists have done themselves no favors talking like politicians. Their endless meetings bear all the marks of officialdom and red tape. Distant from daily life, they alienate those who truly seek a new world. Most meetings, not much more is accomplished than an agreement to continue having meetings. This is a hallmark of bureaucracy.

Rally after rally appears the same dead tactics and strategies. Standing on the sidewalk, holding signs, and chanting slogans at buildings will never bring change. These events only pose a threat when a variety of activity occurs, when people stop listening to the activists. This could be anything from smashing up cop cars to a group of musicians playing spur of the moment.

Supervisors hate the unplanned.

If change is sought than an understanding of the ruling structure is vital. Understanding the current arrangement takes a grasping of history. History reveals how the present came to be and such recognition provides the basis for comprehending our current world.

The first known civilization sprang up in modern day Iraq around 6,000 years ago. This did not occur because humans became smarter or more physically fit. Modern humans evolved physically around 100,000 years ago and mentally 40,000 years ago. The five main qualities of civilization are: 1. City life 2. Specialized labor 3. Control of resources above what is needed to survive by a small group, leading to 4. Class rank and 5. Government. This is still the order we face today.

Before civilizations ascendancy humans organized life in various ways. One was the hunter-gatherer band. These were groups of 100 or less, usually with no formal leadership and no difference in wealth and status. These groups were mobile, never staying in one spot more than temporarily. Again, it was not due to stupidity that these people did not develop more civilized ways of living. One could argue the hunter-gatherer life promotes a general knowledge while modern society encourages a narrow, yet dense, knowledge.

Agriculture and animal domestication led to farming villages and settled life. With this came the "Trap of Sedentism." After a few generations of village life people forgot the skills needed to live nomadically and became dependent upon the village. In general, people worked harder and longer to survive while close quarters with each other and animals increased illness. With greater access to food, the population increased.

Chiefdoms were another form of pre-civilized living. These ranked societies had various clans placed differently on the pecking order and everyone governed by a chief. The chief controlled whatever food was produced above what the village needed to survive. The chief controlled the surplus. These societies came the closest to civilized living patterns.

Agriculture's surplus allowed more people to feast than in the hunter-gatherer band. With more people working the fields and tinkering with technology came innovation and with innovation a larger surplus. This larger surplus allowed for continued population growth. This cycle proceeded to the birth of civilization and became more rapid with its birth.

Economists have advertised the story of "barter" for a very long time, perhaps because it is so vital to their domain of study. The narrative is as follows: John owns 3 pairs of boots but needs an axe and Jane has 2 axes but needs a pair of boots. The two trade with each other to get what they want and each is trying to get the upper hand in the trade. The massive problem with this story is it is false.

Adam Smith, an economist from the late 1700s, popularized this tale and made it the basis of economics. He asserted one would find barter where money did not exist, in all cases, and pointed to aboriginal Americans as an example. When Europeans came to conquer the continent, they did not find a land of barter where money was nonexistent.

Barter took place between strangers and enemies. Within the village, one found different forms of distribution. One place may have a central hub where people add to and take from. Another place may have free gifts between them. To redo our John and Jane example, John takes Jane's axe and Jane knows that when she needs something of John's he will let her have free use of it. What we never find happening is barter.

This is important because the barter folktale convinces people our present system is a reasonable development. If humanity's natural propensity is to barter, then money and profitable

exchange seem like evident progression. This is not to say that barter is “unnatural”, as it came from the heads and relationships of people, but that it is not the only game in town. If it is not the only game in town, and there are a multitude of ways humanity could and has organized itself, then the current system can’t be justified as the necessary development of human nature.

So, for most of human history impersonal government power did not exist. Communities were self-sufficient and relationships were equal and local. The rise of civilization and government changed this. Dependency and inequality marked associations and the few held power over the many.

Surplus food put some in a position where they did not need to work for their survival. While most still obtained resources from the earth and survived on their labor, a few extracted supplies from the many. This small group became the wealthy ruling class and controlled the allocation of production excess. The basic relationship here is parasitic.

The smart parasite practices restrained predation, meaning it doesn’t use up all the energy of the host to maintain the host’s life and continue its own survival. The smartest parasite defends its host. Rulers learned to protect the workers for this reason and in the process increased these laborers’ dependence on them. Increasing population developed into cities and problems of coordination occurred with more people living in a single space. The ruling parasites organized social life to maintain their control of the surplus and, at the same time, rationalize the city to solve problems of communication and coordination.

State power emerged from large scale infrastructural projects as well, specifically irrigation. Irrigation is a way of diverting water from the source to fields. Large scale irrigation endeavors required thousands of people and careful utilization of raw materials. Undertaking such a plan required a small group with the technical know-how to control what labor was done, how and when it was done, how much material was needed, when and how it was used, and utilize these same networks of influence for future repairs. Large infrastructure and complex city life increased the dependency of producers on rulers.

The city is the basis of civilization. The city, simply defined, is land where too many people exist for it to be self-sufficient. It requires continuous resource importation to keep the large population alive, one that cannot live off the soil. This impersonal power, who’s structures don’t change, is based on mindless expansion outside of the city in search of resources. War, of course, is the most efficient way to grab these resources when one city’s importation search runs head on with another’s or with people who live in the way of what is sought. Conquering existed before civilization yet become perfected within its system.

Emperors emerged to rule the masses, gaining prestige from war prowess. Forming empires, these leaders ushered in a new form of rule through large territories gained in conquest. For peasants that controlled their land and were not controlled by feudal lords, they only came into contact with government once a year. Politics was centralized in the palace. Ruling families may change but this did not affect peasant lives. Without modern surveillance technologies and police institutions it was virtually impossible to continuously govern every piece of land. Peasants organized their villages on their own. The only time they saw their government was when the army was sent to collect taxes. This all changed with the rise of the nation-state and mass politics.

Feudalism was based on loyalty to the King and land distribution by the King to obedient lords. Lords, in turn, granted parts of their land to vassals under similar conditions of obedience. Governing authority was decentralized. The King was the ultimate feudal lord, but could only flex on those lords who held land from him. The entire system depended on the lord’s willingness

to obey or the ability of the king to rally enough troops to crush the disobedient. This system was basically moneyless, relying on rents or food and other goods flowing up the feudal pyramid. This changed with increased commercial activity.

Buying and selling began to replace rents, with power beginning to shift to merchants and urban commercial activity in general. This change brought about the ability for Kings to monetarily tax those within their domain. Centralization was required to do this and it undermined feudal relations, that of the lord controlling his own land. Any further development of commercial activity would strengthen the monarchy over the nobility.

Changes in warfare required taxes and the creation of a permanent army. Before, Kings would call upon their lords who would rally their vassals to the King's will. Feudal armies were small, unreliable, and war was local. With Kings increasing their revenue, they were able to hire foreign mercenaries and pay a small permanent army. If other Kings did not want to be conquered, they conformed or died. With a permanent army came a need to increase taxation for maintenance, further undermining feudalism.

Kingly taxation of the populace established a direct link between the highest governing authority and the lowest on the power chain. This completely undermined the rule of lords and centralized power into national monarchies. The primary concern of these nations was that people consented to taxes.

Another way the nation-state emerged was through city-state infighting. Dictators would rise within the city to calm civil war taking place between the rich and poor. These dictators would conquer more land and become princes. When these carved out territories fell apart, cities and other units would try to conquer each other to fill the power vacuum. Eventually, consolidation would happen and usually with the help of mercenaries. Since mercenaries held it all together, whoever controlled the national treasury had power.

When vast empires fell apart, specifically in the Middle East, there arose smaller governing units. These smaller units were concerned with conquering and so had to develop militaries. To do this they taxed the population and could only do so if the people consented, meaning they had to provide services and other incentives. Politics moved out of the palace to everywhere. The nation-state gave birth to mass-politics.

The nation-state is totalitarian by nature. It must care about what its population is doing. Government presence went from one year at tax time to being a constant. Laws upon laws developed, strictly regulating the life of the people in the borders of the nation. The daily life of the people was now bound together with the health and viability of the system. Here, we find the international system of nation-states and world market.

Peasants no longer grew food, ate it, and had a surplus. Now, they sold their food on the market, which the nation-state taxed, in exchange for money and used this money to buy food and pay taxes. Urban centers made goods for a taxable wage and the goods they made could be taxed. Imported goods from other nations could be taxed as well. Truly, all of daily life was absorbed into the system. People's continued consent and work within new market parameters called forth the totalitarian nature of the nation-state.

Economic development led to restructuring. Small craftsmen went out of business when factory production was able to make, and therefore sell, goods cheaper and faster. These craftsmen found themselves doing unskilled and semiskilled labor on the factory floor. Before, production was individual. Those that produced a good also owned the shop and tools so it made sense that they should get all the money earned. Factory production saw creation become social, with

many helping to make the goods, while payment stayed individual, with factory owners who contributed no labor gaining all the profit for simply owning the tools and the building. This is the same parasitic relationship found throughout all of civilization, just new roles and new ways for the ruling class to live off of the labor of many.

The workers movement developed in response to this, made up of various left ideologies; from Marian communism to anarchism. Regardless of ideological preference, the idea was the same. The factory was the kernel of the new world. People had been separated from the land and each other through borders, style of work, race, and a number of other things. The factory got all these different types of people together and under the same conditions. The more the factory spread, the more people were united by their similar exploitation. Eventually, they would rise up and usher in a new world based on freedom and equality.

There were problems with this. People were united in their separation. It took the imposition of an ethic by the workers movement, that all these different types of people should identify first and foremost as workers, for collective action to take place. All the workers did not have similar interests. Young white single males have much different concerns than a single black immigrant mother, regardless of being in the same factory. Obviously, government leaders and factory owners utilized these differences to their own advantage by privileging some groups over others. The slogan “An Injury to One is an Injury to All” was based more on faith than fact.

The workers movement saw the factory’s mass employment with hope as well. With massive profits, owners would reinvest this money in machines and other tools. Needing people to work the new equipment, they hired. Selling more products, created more efficiently, led to more profits and the cycle continued. As the factory system expanded, it was believed capitalism was bringing its own collapse. More were being united by a common state, that of the worker, and eventually their false separations would subside. They would see each other as the same, regardless of creed or color, see their true enemy in the factory owners and their government, and revolt.

For this reason, the workers movement advocated the expansion of the factory in a policy called “proletarianization.” When the Bolshevik Communists came to power in Russia, their main concern was to industrialize the nation for this purpose, similar to the rise of Communist governments elsewhere. One could ask the obvious question: Would spreading the factory system and the working-class condition really bring its end? Would spreading the plantation system and the slave condition end slavery, or strengthen it?

If Trump is the end of the left, good riddance.

The conditions that brought about the original workers movement have changed, yet the left seems blind to this or prepares mental gymnastics. For starters, the current economy is deindustrializing in America and post-industrial worldwide. Even in current industrial powerhouses like China and India, employment rates and growth from a former period are not found. For the United States, Europe, and the West in general, there is no real industrial manufacturing base. This type of work only happens in the colonized world or prison. It’s only sweatshops of various types in different spaces.

In fact, it may even be fallacious to speak of a “colonized” world. The nation-state seems not to matter anymore. A new, global system has developed. Transnational corporations organize social life, almost everywhere, to operate for the creation of value. Every facebook post made, every online search informs advertisers and helps business adapt their products. The spending habits

tracked on your debit card help to know who you are and what type of products you like. One's interaction with the current world contributes to value creation. In other words, production has moved from the workplace to all of life and has only been possible with modern communication technology and the new post-industrial economy.

The workers now are not the same as the past in this country or countries similarly situated. The left, when admitting that things have changed, will then perform backflips to also claim nothing has changed. The service sector has come to dominate, yet the left holds its orientation to be exactly the same as the factory. I was discussing this with a Trotskyist friend that worked a service sector job at a burrito joint. Since they were still payed a wage, he claimed, the form of capitalist exploitation had not changed.

Taking the example of the burrito joint, the harvesting of the lettuce, tomatoes, and other food items used to make those burritos most likely occurred in another underdeveloped country or by migrants or prisoners in this country. They receive wages much lower than those in the service sector (usually) and their labor is more vital to the economic set-up than those performing easily automated service jobs. If they did not harvest the food, my Trotskyist friend would have no lettuce to put on someone's burrito. Building a burrito is not the same as building a highway, car, skyscraper, or harvesting fields. No kernel of a new world can be seen within this type of work, other than someone akin to a psychiatric ward.

So, how will a better world be brought about? I think anyone who believes they know the answer to this question is arrogant and needs to come back down to earth. I certainly do not know the answer. I will provide some thoughts to help answer this question.

Every single revolution has failed. The French Revolution, American Revolution, Russian Revolution, the list goes on, all have failed to usher in a world that has ended the few dominating the many. To hang on to these past conceptions of revolution is to condemn the next one to loss. This means a rethinking of fundamental questions is needed.

What does revolutionary action succeed at doing?

First and foremost, it succeeds at establishing a set of values within a subversive context. Courageousness is a good thing to find in the hearts of people, yet the soldier who goes to fight and die is "courageous." The last goal of revolutionary action is to get people to join the armed forces. An insurrectionary act affirms notions of justice, courage, honor, right and wrong, freedom, kindness, empathy, etc. that completely negate the selfishness, materialism, and overall toxicity of the dominant values.

This is where anarchists who fetishize violence get off the mark. Simply put, just because we burn everything to the ground does not mean people stop being assholes. This is not to say, however, that these values won't get affirmed in riots and the like. Who could say those in Ferguson, Baltimore, and many other places were not courageous with deep notions of justice, right and wrong, and freedom? These values can also be affirmed through wise grandparents going on a hike with their grandson, a teacher who treats her students as equals, a victim who stands up to their bully, a group of musicians playing carefree, a ropeswing and a group of good people, graffiti, sharing a smoke, stealing from Walmart, fighting mobilized Nazis, and many other ways.

Revolutionary action does not just happen at a march or political meeting. I'd go so far as to argue it happens at these places less of the time.

Secondly, it succeeds in taking space to keep these values and energy going. It takes space and organizes the shared life within it in a completely new way. It may even be wrong to describe this as “organized.

When hegemonic powers fall apart, power REALLY does go back to individual people. Depending on how we relate to each other flowers or weeds could grow. What seed is planted in the cracks?

How is power disrupted?

From here, we can look to the most interesting struggle to occur in the United States in many years: Standing Rock. For all its problems, the Standing Rock resistance highlighted some important things. Power is found in infrastructure. The construction of the pipeline only strengthens the world of pipelines and oil dependency. These constructions, from oil pipelines to highways to electrical system to fracking equipment, help keep this world running. Those of us who went to Standing Rock and stayed with a certain group in Sacred Stone saw the banner: “Against the Pipeline and Its World!”

Standing Rock had one camp that sat in the path of the pipeline to block construction, until forcibly removed by the police, and camps across the river. This struggle blocked the construction of a world it did not want to see and built one it did right in the space it captured. It had its own food supply, water supply, etc. It had its own logistical system, outside of government and business. It relied on the power of people.

During the Occupy movement, it seemed natural for those in Oakland to block the port. The port brought in commodities to be sold, benefitting the rich and propping up the system. It seemed like common sense for revolutionaries in Egypt to take Tahrir Square, the center of activity, block main roads, stopping people from shopping and working, and burn police stations. In fact, focusing on Tahrir square misses all the blocked roads and burnt police stations all across Egypt.

The reflex seems to be to block the flows of this world and construct new ones, to block on form of life and build many new forms.

Why do revolutions fail?

There is no good answer to this.

One reason revolt fails to materialize (among many) is activity gets pacified by liberals. This, again, could be seen at Standing Rock where those apart of “Spirit Camps” put their bodies between police and “Warrior Camps”, telling them to demobilize, leave the initiated conflict, and pray. This can be seen when liberals demask covered protesters trying to push things or these liberals even pepper spraying them when they nonviolently damage property.

Following this, one of the most inspiring revolutions in the last 100 years was snuffed out by revolutionaries giving up their power, believing it was strategic. Within the Spanish Civil War, workers in Barcelona, Aargon, and other urban and rural places took over the land and factories, abolished the government and money, and armed themselves. They subordinated themselves to Republican government authority in the belief they could win the fight against the fascists by doing this.

What was shown from this is the Republican government was no more capable of fighting fascists than autonomous armed workers. The workers should of trusted no one but themselves,

being repressed by both Republican and Communist henchmen to fall in line. Both of these forces reintroduced market mechanisms and money, government authority, and other ways the few rule over the many. Contrary to their claims, these efforts did not make fighting the war any more efficient and in some ways, especially the reintroduction of market forces into the food supply, it made things much worse. In the end, the fascists still won.

The problem here is viewing the conflict in purely military terms instead of a social war. By falling in line with Republican government and military command, those in Barcelona and other places allowed them to organize social life and overall just laid the groundwork for a fascist organization. Their self organization should've never been sacrificed.

When revolutionaries forget their struggle is more than a military confrontation they become exactly what they are fighting against. They become their enemy. They also miss inspiring movements due to fetishizing combat. We heard the left praise the fight of Kurdish women in Rojava against ISIS, and justifiably so, yet hear nothing about grassroots councils that have sprung up and continue to survive all across Syria in spite of horrible civil war. With the collapse of the Assad dictatorship, these councils took on the role of getting electricity, distributing food and water, healing the sick and injured, and whatever else is necessary to life.

I have spoken in generalities mainly, attempting to adequately explain my reasoning yet not over complicate and bore.

Over 700 acres of the Wayne National Forest have been auctioned off to the with hydrofracturing intentions. The Wayne is not new to gas and energy exploitation, yet this is a new and intensified maneuver in the war on Ohio's only national forest. The plan from the Bureau of Land Management is to continue resource extraction until it's all gone and The Wayne is dead. Some people will make a profit, though...

I will live in Wayne National Forest, in a long-term occupation starting on May 12th, in hopes of changing this tide. While it would be interesting for this to fit into some wider narrative of struggle, and in some ways it naturally does, that is not my main concern. My main concern is stopping the continued energy industry's attack on the forest.

To anyone who has resonated with what's been written, who sees this battle as their battle, and who believes they can help, PLEASE GET INVOLVED.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO COME.

To read:

- Affirming Gasland by the creators of the documentary Gasland
- 1984 by George Orwell
- The Madman: His Parables and Poems by Kahlil Gibran
- The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis
- The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race by Jared Diamond
- What is Civilization? by John Haywood (found in The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Civilizations)
- Debt by David Graeber
- To Our Friends by The Invisible Committee

To watch:

- Gasland
- Gasland 2

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