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Down Graded Resistance: A Critique of DGR

Bobby Whittenberg-James

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There's been a lot of talk in anti-civ/primitive anarchy/deep ecology circles of late about a new organization called Deep Green Resistance and I haven't really weighed in very heavily on it yet and after a few conversations I decided to throw my hat into the ring. If you are unfamiliar with DGR I recommend checking out their website (<http://deepgreenresistance.org>) before reading this. Don't depend on my explanation of who and what they are. It's better that you form your own opinion before engaging my critique.

In reading through the intro, the (DEW), the Code of Conduct, the Statement of Principles and Why Do You Want Me to Sign the Code of Conduct and Statement of Principles, I found no critique of domestication, sedentaryism, technology, work, symbolic culture, mediating institutions, or agriculture and the only references to dismantling civilization specified industrial civilization. This abbreviated critique of civilization put forth by DGR may very well be a key reason for many of the problems within the organization's framework, theory, and program. If one's critique is sorely lacking, then most likely their resistance will be as well.

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Through their calls for democracy, hierarchy, organizing (as opposed to autonomous coordination), and leftist rhetoric they are an explicitly anti-anarchist group, so I'm not really sure why so many anarchists are rushing to their defense. This reminds me a good bit of red anarchists who are sympathetic to liberal or socialist parties or regimes.

One of my initial concerns is the idea of organizationalism in general. It's important to distinguish between organizations and groups or networks and between organizing and cooperating. We don't need rosters and codes of conduct, programs, democratic rule, and recruiting to build a solid resistance. I think many times, as a result of our civilized minds, we tend to equate organization and standardization with expedience and effectiveness, with a quick and easy solution. This have proven not to be true on many occasions (The USA, National Syndicalist Italy, the USSR, North Korea.) We don't need a quick and easy solution, we need an effective solution.

A visit to their website starts out with their explanation of what Deep Green Resistance is. It starts off talking about the rise of civilization, the ineffectiveness of the mainstream activist scene, and building human communities inside of restored landbases. This is all good stuff. My first point of concern comes in the 5th paragraph. "*Industrial civilization can be stopped.*" This, to me, is concerning because we went from talking about how the problem has been 10,000 years of civilization to stopping *industrial* civilization. Civilization and industrial civilization cannot just be used interchangeably. Opposition to civilization is opposition to all civilization. Opposition to industrial civilization is opposition to one type of civilization, which carries with it tacit approval of other types of civilization.

My next concern comes in the next paragraph where it talks about the creation of "participatory institutions." Shouldn't the resistance against civilization be about the abolition of institutions, rather than their creation? Shouldn't de-institutionalization be a part of an anti-civ resistance? A critique of civilization and author-

we want our resistance to be based upon organization or voluntary cooperation?” “Do we want it to be anarchistic or authoritarian?”

I can't help but note a parallel between the principles of civilization and organizing/organization. DGR and other activist organizations or vanguards, like civilization, take something wild and organic and organize it, codify it, and maintain that order, giving authoritative direction to something that was once fluid and autonomous. We do need greater numbers, but we don't need recruits or activists. We need autonomous warriors and dissidents and who are ready to come together in an organic way and cooperate to bring down that which oppresses us all and destroys our source of life.

Fighting for Anarchy,
Bobby Whittenberg-James

ity certainly needs to include a critique of social institutions in general.

“... any strategy aiming for a just future must include a call to build direct democracies based on human rights and sustainable material cultures.”

Sustainability is definitely a necessary aim, but I'm curious about the rest of this. Anarchy is a condition of no rule with each individual having autonomy as opposed to democratic rule and a human rights model offered by civilization. Democracy is a form of rule, a form of government. There is an easily observable standardizing and homogenizing affect that comes with democracy. There must be a certain amount of uniformity to maintain social order and production. The process itself tends to discard and eliminate minority ideas and alienate minority groups, as well as challenge personal autonomy and subjugate the individual to the collective, forming a hierarchy.

As far as human rights, prisoners have rights; GI's have rights. Rights, as they are commonly understood, are a concept that rose up out of civilization. Rights can be given or taken. In a democracy they can be voted away. We can't equate a rights framework with liberation, as rights are something granted or recognized by a mediating body. Some people consider marriage to be a human right. California voted away the right for same sex couples to marry. The majority makes the rules. These ideas certainly aren't unique to DGR.

I'm also curious, would trans people be granted “human rights” by these democratically ruled communities? Lierre Keith is openly anti-trans. With her occupying a leadership position in DGR, I really wonder what the plan for trans people is. Would cis people be able to democratically vote these “human rights” away from trans people? Under democratic rule and a rights framework as opposed to liberty and autonomy, the majority can use the democratic institutions to crush the minority. This isn't just true of trans people.

This could be any race, people group, gender, or culture that the majority in a democracy wants to dominate.

The end of that section links to their strategy that is referred to as Deep Ecological Warfare or DEW.

I'm incredibly skeptical of any grand strategy designed to be THE strategy. There can't be a "the strategy." An organic resistance can't be synthesized. There can't be an umbrella organization for dismantling something as complex, nuanced, and layered as civilization. From the language in their program and the structure of the organization, I'm seeing a plan for the structure and program for building of a revolutionary vanguard.

"Industrial systems disruption requires underground networks organized in a hierarchal or paramilitary fashion." However, if we follow this a bit further we find that *"The above ground activists are the frontline fighters against authoritarianism. They are the only ones who can mobilize the popular groundswell needed to prevent fascism."*

I find the specific mention of fascism particularly perplexing. If we are opposed to civilization then we are obviously opposed to fascism. Should we not be fighting capitalism and socialism? Perhaps the answer lies in the next paragraph.

Furthermore, aboveground activists use the disrupted systems as an opportunity to strengthen local communities and parallel institutions. Mainstream people are encouraged to swing their support to participatory local alternatives in the economic, political, and social spheres. When economic turmoil causes unemployment and hyperinflation, people are employed locally for the benefit of their community and the land. In this scenario, as national governments around the world increasingly struggle with crises (like peak oil, food shortages, climate chaos, and so on) and increasingly fail to provide for people, local and directly democratic councils begin to take over administration of basic and emergency services, and people redirect their taxes to those local entities (perhaps as part of a campaign of general noncooperation against those in power). This happens in conjunction with the

any individual who dares to try to take more than they are allotted and is caught doing so is met with the full force of the Code of Conduct.

"Most human societies before the rise of civilization, were based on mutual responsibility and cooperation."

Yes, there was mutual respect and cooperation but NO formal Code of Conduct.

"But freedom in a capitalist society is based on atomized, alienated individuals within a rights framework; as though we are not all interdependent."

Doesn't DGR advocate a rights framework under democratic rule for its communities?

What I don't see is what vision of the world DGR proposes. I don't mean a blueprint or anything. I just don't understand what the overall goal is. I understand calls for a democratic, participatory socialism and autonomous communities. I understand the goal of bringing down industrial civilization. This makes me curious as to whether we might be talking about an autonomous agricultural or horticultural democratic socialist civilization. I hear a call for a rights framework and disdain for individualism. I hear a plan to dismantle industrial civilization, but what then?

I keep hearing that since we have a common enemy we should unite to fight it, but the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend, something that anarchists generally find out in socialist revolutions once the socialists have gained power and no longer need the anarchists.

DGR says that it exists because there is a dire need for a targeted resistance and I hear many in the current discussion of DGR defend the existence of such an organization on the same grounds. I don't think anyone in the anti-civ/deep ecology/primitivist milieu denies that. That isn't in question.

The questions we face are more like: "What do we want our targeted resistance to look like?" "How will it manifest itself?" "Do

Our disagreement is not about whether there are certain behaviors and actions that are unacceptable in a community setting. The discrepancy is whether we want to foster respectful interactions through authoritarian or anarchistic means.

I assume that when they refer to “the” Spanish Anarchists that they are referring to the famous CNT-FAI. These organizations are certainly not ones that should be emulated or idealized as iconic of anarchy. They were organized in a hierarchical fashion, authoritarian in nature, and even took seats within the Spanish government. Their end state was not even anarchy, but socialism. Let us also never forget that their revolution failed to result in the socialist utopia they sought, much less anarchy, something completely different. This argument is similar to saying that since Murray Rothbard called himself an anarchist and advocated a free market capitalism which included a child market, that it’s ok for anarchists to sell children and that it is an anarchist practice to do so. Anarcho-capitalism and anarcho-syndicalism are both hierarchical, authoritarian schools of anarchist thought, and therefore we are going to find authoritarian tendencies and ideas within them. This doesn’t justify their use in anarchist practice.

“The modern, Western, individualist, capitalist, code of conduct is that there can be no such thing as a code of conduct other than what benefits an individual the most.”

Capitalism is not individualist. The rhetoric may be that of the rugged individual, but in practice it is dependent upon a hierarchical class system, which is a collectivist arrangement. There is a Code of Conduct in capitalist society. It’s commonly referred to as “the law,” and it generally prevents individuals from getting what benefits them the most.

What DGR seems to be saying is that in capitalist society, the individual is free to pursue what benefits them most and that there is no law to restrict that. That sounds like anarchy, but that is not the reality of the capitalist society I live in. The society I live in is designed to benefit a very few at the expense of the very many and

community emergency response and disaster preparedness measures already undertaken.”

Apparently the reason for specifying a fight against fascism is to facilitate the creation of some sort of democratic socialist idea. Is this suggesting that there is a progressive path to a post-civ world?

I’d also like to key in on this part of their Code of Conduct:

“Liberty: DGR groups have a zero-tolerance policy for abuse of anyone, human or nonhuman. Physical integrity and emotional safety are basic human rights that DGR is sworn to defend. DGR will banish any members who rape, batter, or abuse any living creature. Masculinity, with its militarized psychology and its violation imperative, has to be abandoned personally and dismantled globally.”

While this is a good standard for banishment, there is a loophole. If you want to rape, batter, and abuse living creatures but still want to help out with DGR, you can become a police officer and provide security.

“2. Civilization, especially industrial civilization, is fundamentally destructive to life on earth. Our task is to create a life-centered resistance movement that will dismantle industrial civilization by any means necessary. Organized political resistance is the only hope for our planet.”

Political resistance is essentially worthless in combatting civilization. Even a full scale political revolution couldn’t abolish civilization. At best it could only alter it. Civilization does not just exist in the political sphere. It is a complex and overarching institution and system of oppression that requires a holistic approach to dismantle.

This is something that really makes me think that the change in language might not just be coincidence. We see a distinction drawn between the broader “civilization” and “industrial civilization.” It is understood that civilization is destructive to life on earth, and yet the stated task is to dismantle *industrial* civilization. Civilization was ravaging the earth and enslaving living beings long before in-

dustrialization. If we limit our resistance to the political sphere, or political revolution, we have already defeated ourselves.

I also went to a section called “Why do you want me to sign the Code of Conduct and Statement of Principles?” which includes the passage

“Your signature on that document shows that you made an agreement with DGR and all its members to follow the code and principles. These can serve as proof in court that DGR did not support, condone, or accept the actions of anyone who would do something like blow up a daycare center, or some other horrendous action.”

DGR is an organization. As an organization with identifiable leaders and a member list, they want to be able to drop you like a hot biscuit if you get in legal trouble that might make the organization look bad (to those in power and civilized society.) It’s clear that blowing up a daycare is horrific, an act unworthy of our support. But what if we replace the words “daycare center” with “dam” or “police car” or “cell phone tower” or “bulldozer?” If you get caught in a situation where you are doing something that’s in your conscience to do, will your comrades have your back, or are they telling you right up front that they’ll drop you if you end up in a situation that might be bad PR or legal trouble for the organization? Make no mistake, the organization is more important than you. It’s not going to stick its neck out for you. An organization’s #1 priority has to be its own existence or else it will cease to exist. To an organization you are totally expendable, particularly in comparison to the organization itself.

“All societies—including the most peaceful; especially the most peaceful—have understood the necessity of codes of conduct, which are nothing more than behavioral norms.”

This is a conflation of two very distinct things. Behavioral norms might be nearly ubiquitous but they are not institutionalized and generally non-authoritarian. It is a behavior norm to not burp loudly or yell in restaurants, but there is no Code of Conduct that people sign before going into a restaurant. Most people just gen-

erally don’t do those things because it’s understood as a behavior norm. Many times there aren’t even any consequences aside from some disgusted looks, or someone might ask them to stop. Rarely do people have to be forcibly removed from a restaurant for such things. In people groups that do not have official written law or Code of Conduct there is still personal accountability. When we get together with friends, there is no code of conduct to sign but we can still hold one another accountable and make sure everyone is safe and taken care of.

“All serious organizations have codes of conduct by which people are meant to abide. The Spanish Anarchists did. So did the IRA. The Freedom Riders had a code of conduct, as did Nat Turner’s fighters. Codes of conduct are even more important in militant resistance movements who have a history of behaving badly.”

The IRA was also in favor of the Catholic Church, an institution that routinely rapes children and covers it up and they kill people because of their nationality and/or religion. This is not an organization after which we should pattern our resistance, particularly concerning matters of conduct.

“There is a strain of modern anarchists who believe all codes of conduct interfere with their feral freedoms, or are otherwise inappropriate. These people have done a lot of damage to modern anarchism. And they’re ignorant of anarchist history and the history of social movements. Anarchists throughout history have understood the importance of codes of conduct. Emma Goldman for example. And the Spanish Anarchists. (The men were not allowed to drink, violence against women was unacceptable, men using prostituted women was unacceptable, brawling was unacceptable: they were to comport themselves with dignity and respect).”

It seems that most hunter-gatherers groups, the only to have ever achieved anarchy for any extended period of time, seem to agree with us modern anarchists. The Mbuti and the !Kung don’t have Codes of Conduct, but they do have behavior norms and ways of protecting members of the tribes’ dignity and autonomy.