

Wolf Hunt In The Kingdom

Minutemen Draw Rain & Protesters to Derby Line Vermont

David Van Deusen/Green Mountain Anarchist Collective

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“The Gods of the Hills are Not the Gods of the Valleys.” -Ethan Allen

Northeast Kingdom, Vermont, 2006- On the morning of Saturday October 15th, I got in a truck and headed north towards Derby Line. I really should have been home bringing in the last of the winter wood; if not the wood, then turning over the garden one last time before the autumn snow. But what the hell, if I were home the downpour would have likely kept me in by the woodstove anyway. Besides, I considered it my duty as a Vermonter to attend a certain un-welcoming party for a group of out-of-staters less interested in the foliage than in our rugged boarder with Quebec—the group was *The Minutemen*.

Borders, Guns, and Murder

The Minutemen are a quasi-vigilante organization founded in the spring of 2005 by Jim Gilchrist and Chris Simcox, both of California. This past year they mobilized hundreds of people in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California to set up armed camps along the Mexican border. The goal of the group is to prevent undocumented immigrants from crossing into the U.S., and to further pressure the Federal Government into adopting a more militarized border policy. The Minutemen also claim that their “border patrols” help protect the nation from drug trafficking and terrorist attack.

The group’s modus operandi has been to occupy public lands just within the U.S. border. This area is then divided into small camps that run parallel to the frontier for several miles, each within a short distance of the next. The Minutemen claim that their method of enforcement is limited to calling in the Border Patrol when and if they spot “suspicious activity”. However, frontier regions surrounding Minuteman encampments have increasingly played host to a number of mysterious shootings directed against the local Mexican population.

In May, masked vigilantes armed with assault rifles detained a van containing 18 Mexican nationals. The occupants were ordered to exit the vehicle. The driver, Apolinar Ortega Sanchez, was then promptly executed. The assault occurred on the southern side of the border, near the town of Columbus, New Mexico. Eyewitnesses reported that the gunmen spoke poor Spanish and, after the killing, sped off in the direction of the U.S. Not surprisingly Minutemen spokesmen deny any responsibility for the action. Even so, Patricia Gonzalez, the Attorney General of the Chihuahua Province (where the murder took place) is not convinced. She is currently investigating potential links between the attack and the Minutemen organization. [Minuteman Violence in New Mexico, La Voz de Aztlan, New Mexico Independent Media Center, June 20, 2005]

In California, near the Minuteman monitored Tecate-Campo border crossing, two more Mexicans were shot. One, Estrada Martinez, took a bullet after crossing 200 yards into the U.S. Jose Humberto Rivara Perez was shot in the knee while standing 20 yards within Mexican territory. Again the Minutemen deny any official involvement. [Minutemen: A home for extremists, Independent Media Center, August 08, 2005]

Based on the evidence currently available, these attacks cannot be definitively linked to the Minutemen. Even so, the proximity of the organization’s presence, as well as the timing and targets, can’t help but cast suspicion in their direction. Even if the group’s leadership had no knowledge of the shootings, it is easy to comprehend rank and file members striking out on their own. Given the Minutemen’s growing constituency of organized racists, this scenario is not only possible, but likely.

Where There Is Smoke, There Is Fire

Gilchrist and Simcox routinely contend that the Minutemen are opposed to undocumented immigrants, but do not advocate racism as a justification for their actions. However, the facts on the ground tell a different tale. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), an organization which monitors hate groups, reports that the neo-nazi National Alliance have enthusiastically endorsed the Minutemen's actions and are serving as armed Minutemen volunteers. The white supremacist Aryan Nation group have also endorsed the Minuteman project, calling it a "white pride event", and have been actively recruiting within their ranks for project collaborators. [The Minuteman Project: Modern Day Slave Patrols, www.infoshop.org, July 08 2005]

On July 30th Save Our State (SOS), an offshoot of the Minutemen also founded by Gilchrist, hosted an anti-immigration rally in southern California. In attendance, were contingents of fascists openly flying swastika flags. The event organizer who refers to herself as OCAngel resigned from the Minutemen/SOS shortly thereafter. As for the reasons, OCAngel cited SOS's cozy relationship with neo-nazis and further alleged that she was the target of anti-Semitic threats. [Minutemen: A home for extremists, Independent Media Center, August 08, 2005]

The Minutemen also admit having Glenn Spencer (of the white supremacist Voices of Citizens Together group) and Joe McCrutchin (of the Council of Concerned Citizens-CCC) as members. The CCC has a long history of knowingly receiving operating capital from the Pioneer Foundation. Formed in 1937, the foundation's first priority was to build public support for Adolph Hitler's Nazi regime. Since then, they have "funded studies of eugenics and the alleged links between race and intelligence." [Report Issued By One Peoples' Project, July 2, 2005, <http://www.onepeoplesproject.com>]

These intra-organizational networks among the Minutemen and the fringe right were further on display during a June 25th Minutemen/ United Patriots of America (UPA) rally in Bridgewater, New Jersey. There, the Minutemen and associated UPA shared the speakers' podium with event headliner John Clark. Clark spoke on behalf of the American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF) and the California Coalition for Immigration Reform (CCIR), of which Gilchrist is also a member. The AICF is led by John Vinson, who is himself a member of the CCC [Anti-Racist Action Report, July 2nd, 2005]. The AIFC and CCIR uphold the bizarre theory that Mexico is conspiring to send immigrants into the western United States as part of a grand strategy to reclaim the lands ceded to the U.S. more than one and a half centuries ago. All three of these Minutemen allied bodies (the CCC, AICF, and CCIR) are listed as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center. As for Clark's speech, it amounted to a verbal attack on Mexican people, going so far as saying, "[Mexicans] have no respect... They've killed people's livestock, they defecate on peoples' porches." [Minuteman Project Disrupted In New Jersey, One People's Project and NJ Indymedia, www.infoshop.org, June 26, 2005]

Clark's racist depiction of Mexicans mirrors the views of Chris Simcox. Prior to founding the Minutemen, Simcox publicly stated that "[illegal immigrants] have no problem slitting your throat and taking your money or selling drugs to your kids or raping your daughter and they are evil people." [Arizona Showdown, David Holthouse, Reporting for the SPLC] Such skewered views of Mexicans and immigrants appear to be dovetailing with the racist and jingoistic beliefs of fringe fascist elements. As neo-nazis and extremists are made to feel comfortable within the Minutemen, and as the Minutemen are made to appear "main stream" by certain media outlets it

should not be surprising that one Mexican lies dead and two more have already been shot. What should be surprising is that the body count is not higher.

From Mexico To Canada

In the summer of 2005, the Minutemen announced that they would begin to build a presence in all fifty states (a project that is far from fruition). In August the group made plans to patrol New England's Northeast border with Quebec and New Brunswick. Vermont was targeted as a launching point. Derby Line was the intended location of their first action in the Green Mountains. October 15th was the decided date.

The Minutemen expected to announce their intentions and then sign up Vermonters to their cause. In turn, these recruits would play a critical role in local organizing efforts. Going into the operation they had no members in the Green Mountains, let alone near the northern border. And again, unlike in the Southwest, the Vermont-Quebec frontier is primarily composed of privately owned land. If the Minutemen were to import their Arizona model to the Northeast, the building of a local support network including landowners would be essential.

Minutemen and Vermonters

Once the Minutemen's intentions were uncovered, a number of Vermonters began to organize against them. A diverse coalition composed of concerned Northeast Kingdom residents, peace activists, immigrant rights advocates, union members, and socialists, began to take form. By early October they put the word out that an anti-Minuteman rally would be held in Derby Line the same time and day the Minutemen planned to be active in the town.

Unlike in other states (such as California where Governor Swartzenager welcomed them as heroes), Vermont's elected officials turned a cold shoulder to the Minutemen. Not one local politician came out in support of the group. Governor Jim Douglas went so far as to tell them they were not welcome. And again, not a single Vermonter elected to join the organization, let alone allow them access to privately owned land on the border.

An open letter to the Minutemen from Thomas Naylor, founder of the Second Vermont Republic, and the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective read:

"Vermonters know what is best for Vermont and we do not accept the inclusion of your radical anti-immigrant ideology rooted in your racist worldview in our Green Mountains. We the Vermonter; the Quebecois, the Abenaki and the sons and daughters of Ethan Allen, birthed in the spirit of self-determination, direct democracy, and self-governance have determined: We don't want you and your ilk in our mountains."

Vermonters To Minutemen: Go Home!

I approached the Town Green at eleven AM and was met by a number of other like-minded individuals. No Minutemen. By noon fifty people were gathered near the main road. Many carried signs reading "No One is Illegal" and "Flatlanders Go Home." The largest banner, made by folks from the Kingdom, read "Vermont: 200 Years of The Underground Rail Road/ Minutemen = KKK."

The protesters came from many northern towns including St. Johnsbury, Glover, Cabot, Montpelier, and Burlington. Speakers talked through a blow horn denouncing the Minutemen to the crowd. Jim Ramey, a Montgomery Center native and member of the International Socialist Organization thundered to the crowd:

“It is very positive that wherever the Minutemen go they are opposed. Even in the woods of Vermont they are opposed. The people of this country see the hypocrisy in the Minutemen’s beliefs. The problems facing the common people are such that they cannot be scapegoated away [on Mexicans or Quebecois].”

Jim’s words were met with cheers from the crowd. His statements were in reference to recent anti-Minutemen demonstrations in Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, New York, New Jersey, California, and even in New Mexico. Some of these rallies were quite large, most notably in Chicago where thousands turned out. The bulk of them resulted in protesters greatly outnumbering Minutemen supporters.

I asked one protester, Wes Hamilton, a bartender from Middlesex [worker-owner of the Langdon Street Café], why he came out to the demonstration. He answered, “It’s important for Vermonters to stand up against bigotry.”

I asked another, Jeremy Ripin, an archeologist from Moretown, if he had a message for the Minutemen. Referencing the Green Mountain Boys struggle against New York landowners in the early 1770s, he shot back in no uncertain terms, “In the spirit of Ethan Allen, we will drive them from our hills like we did the Yorkers of old.” Some Vermonters I spoke with, eager to confront the Minutemen, spent part of the morning scouring the town centers and back roads of the Northeast Kingdom looking for signs of them. No luck.

With the Minutemen nowhere to be seen, the crowd eventually marched to the official border crossing into Quebec. Meeting them there were another twenty five to thirty anti-Minutemen protesters from Quebec. Great cheers went through both crowds as they approached one another. Separated by an arbitrary concrete marker delineating the frontier, Vermonters and Quebecois shook hands, exchanged messages of friendship and camaraderie, and even kicked a soccer ball back and forth across the border.

Anticlimax: Minutemen Walk In The Rain

After receiving no local public support, and aware of the planned demonstration (where they would be outnumbered more than five to one), Jeff Buck, northeast Minutemen coordinator from Framingham, MA, and his cohorts decided to quietly change the location of their border action. Accompanied by eight persons from as far away as New Jersey (none of them had any ties to Vermont) Buck walked the bike path in Newport along Lake Memphremagog. Yvonne Abraham, a Boston Globe reporter who walked with them in the pouring rain, stated that the Minutemen soon became disoriented and unsure of the direction of the border. At one point they were compelled to knock on a door and inquire which way was north. [Volunteers Get Cold Reception In Vermont, Yvonne Abraham, Boston Globe, October 16th, 2005]

All told, the minutemen failed to intercept any immigrants, and they failed to build any local presence. On the contrary, the next morning Minuteman Jeff Buck found a note under his truck window reading “Flatlander Go Home.” The air was let out of one of his tires. Buck returned to Massachusetts.

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This article was first printed in Catamount Tavern News, 2006. The title comes from the Green Mountain Boys referring to their armed anti-Yorker operations as “going on a wolf hunt” in the 1770s.

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