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John Zerzan is one of the leading advocates of the anti-civilization movement, communicating through speech, literature and action that modern society is unsustainable and harmful to our psychology and freedom. Following in the footsteps of Theodore Kaczynski, Zerzan is a radical anarcho-primitivist and believes that we must get rid of civilization itself, returning to a very simple lifestyle close to nature. His ideas confront commonly held beliefs about primitive people and about our path towards progress.

When was the first time you seriously began to question modern civilization?

I began to question civilization by the early ’80s. Began the route to this in the ’70s when I was looking at the beginnings of industrialism in England, which led to certain conclusions about the nature of technology (that’s it’s always about values, never neutral). This went on to thinking about division of labor and soon I was con-

fronted by the nature of civilization. About when Fredy Perlman was making similar conclusions.

Most people today would agree that we live in troubled times, but few would dare to claim the system is fundamentally flawed. What makes you defend the radical viewpoint that we cannot reform civilization to better meet our needs and the future health of our planet?

Freud saw civ [Editor's note: civilization] as the cause of neurosis (Civ and its Discontents), Jared Diamond called domestication (the basis of civ) "the worst mistake humans ever made." It isn't so hard to come to a radical conclusion about it; what is harder is to project an alternative.

A big part of your criticism against civilization is that it gives birth to hierarchies and inequalities. Is it possible for humans to completely get rid of social power structures?

I think it's possible to get rid of the structures; afterall. Homo didn't seem to need them for more than two million years. Power structures emerge quite recently really. That is with domestication, followed swiftly by civ.

German anthropologist Hans-Peter Dürr made a study during the 80's, which described primitive tribes in modern time displaying extreme social guilt over nakedness and sexuality. Aren't there other countless examples of primitive tribes where social and cultural norms uphold power and gender structures as part of everyday life?

Primitive is a fairly useless term. The watershed is whether or not people practice some domestication. This sounds simplistic but it holds true universally. Think of a behavior or attitude that we might call negative. Did it exist before domestication? No is the simple answer.

Theodore Kaczynski rejected leftism, because he believed it would inevitably support collectivism, and thus, the growth of large-scale societies. Do you agree with him or have you chosen a different ideological path?

I do agree with that. I am anti-leftist. ('Post-leftist' is a phoney term signifying about nothing.)

Kaczynski also famously claimed that technology creates incentive for its own continued growth. Is technology a necessary evil, or is primitive technology in small-scale communities acceptable, as long as it doesn't develop into industrial forms?

Tools are fine, that which has little or no division of labor/specialization. Systems of technology are a 'necessary evil' if you want eco-disaster and barren techno-cultures (like this one).

Let's say we had the possibility of returning to local, self-sustaining communities tomorrow. Would we be able to regulate or prevent communities to unite and begin developing better technology and more advanced lifestyles?

Given what we know about the bad results of political and technological development I would think that people would not want to replicate that path.

You've said that the "symbolic thinking" of modern man, including language, mathematics and time, limits and oppresses our freedom. What do you believe led up to the development of these things—why did humanity choose civilization culture and not primitive culture? Do we have a choice at all?

My guess is that the very, very slow movement of division of labor crept up on humans and set the stage for domestication. All of society moves along together so that it is hard to reverse things - which is a big reason technology never goes backward. The whole question of the symbolic is connected, I think, to the movement of alienation. Unless it's just a coincidence that both seemed to have come along together.

Kaczynski argues that we need to destroy key elements of industrial society in order to return to a pre-industrial order. Do you believe this is realistically possible, and if so, are

there ethical limits to radical activism against the current order?

I think the elements need to be destroyed but if the population wants technology it will likely, I'm afraid, simply be re-installed. So the challenge is deeper than just physically destroying the stuff. The limits of militancy would seem to be determined in terms of how serious the situation is in one's estimation. That is people who are shocked by radical acts are basically those who feel that the dominant order is mainly sound and healthy.

Do you believe green anarchists are organized enough to be able to overthrow the current system and replace it with your ideal vision, or do anarcho-primitivists need to align themselves with other anti-globalist groups in order to grow more powerful?

What other 'anti-globalist' groups, is one question. Where are leftist groups, for instance, anti-globalization? They want to reform it not get rid of it - because industrial existence, mass society, is fine with them. But a-p folks [Editor's note: anarcho-primitivists] are nowhere potent enough yet to be decisive against it.

What changes do you want to see being implemented as a part of reducing the negative impacts of globalization?

Abolition of globalization ,in favor of radically decentralized, face-to-face community somewhat along the lines of band society, which obtained for thousands of generations.

Some people might compare your views with that of Rousseau. Isn't there a danger in romanticizing "the wild man" against "the modern man," imposing a romantic picture of what's it like to live a primitive lifestyle?

Romantizing or idealizing life outside of domestication/civlization is not a good idea and the road there is not likely to be a picnic. But what are the choices? Continuing on a path of suicide, genocide, ecocide?

The current ecological crisis is beginning to scare many. Is humanity by nature an irresponsible species, or what motivates us to value profit and greed over long-term health for the environment and ourselves?

No, not by nature. Again, consider that war, hierarchy, ecodestruction, the systematic objectification of women, religion, work, etc etc. are products of domestication/civ and that people - who were cooking with fire 2 million years ago -did fine without that exalted development.

Do you believe a collapse of the globalist order is inevitable, or is there a possibility for humanity to unite its best of minds and choose a different path?

I am actually hopeful that as reality continues to present itself unmistakably that there could be a conscious choice in favor of a sane existence. That of course is what I am working toward.