

The Unabomber's Unending 15 Minutes of Fame

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FE Note: Most of this article was written prior to the WTO demos and is not a contribution to the debate over tactics used there.

Ted Kaczynski, who pled guilty to the bombing campaign of the Unabomber, continues to pop up as a convenient mass media symbol of anarchism.

The October 18, 1999 *Time* magazine anointed him “King of the Anarchists,” while the December 13 edition of *Newsweek*, whose cover blared “The Battle of Seattle,” featured a collage inside under the title “The New Anarchism,” showing Noam Chomsky, Emma Goldman, *Anarchy* and *FE* contributor John Zerzan, the bands Chumbawamba, and Rage Against the Machine, and Kaczynski.

Also, following the WTO actions, the “60 Minutes II” television program aired a segment on “The New Anarchists,” featuring activists from Eugene, Oregon, including John Zerzan, during which Kaczynski’s writings and acts were debated.

For better or for worse (and we’d say the latter), Kaczynski is the world’s most widely recognized critic of technological, industrial society. In fact, he may be the only person known to most people outside of the small milieu, including this newspaper, that has examined this perspective for the last twenty years.

For most people, the Unabomber’s acts of anti-technology terror, frequently random in its targeting of the smallest cogs in the megamachine, gave a spectacularized, and momentary expression to the frustration, anger and horror experienced by many people living in modern, bureaucratic society. For instance, *Time* magazine began an essay about technological angst published shortly before Kaczynski’s 1996 capture, with the astonishing (for them) statement, “There is a little Unabomber in all of us.”

Affectionately Referred To As Ted

But some within the anarchist and anti-technology milieu have embraced Ted (as he is affectionately referred to by many therein) as not only possessing wisdom, but also having the courage to act on his views. Usually missing from these paeans, however, is a willingness to confront the trail of shredded dead and maimed bodies that Ted left in his desire for “revenge,” as he wrote in a diary. Lit crit types refer to this disappearing act as the “missing referent.” Much like in Eugene Ionesco’s play, “The Chairs,” the Speaker engaged to articulate our most important thoughts has some problematic aspects for many of us.

As individuals within a movement professing a desire to reconstitute the world on the basis of love, harmony, peace, and sharing, an ethical question arises when a means inconsistent with an end is presented. In this case, the tactic of non-self-defense violence. This is not a question of armed defense such as was the case during the 1930s Spanish revolution, for instance, but rather, the validity of aggressive violence against those who are designated as The Enemy.

The question of who is our enemy is a slippery one. Most of the dead and maimed from the Unabomber campaign were involved in this massive, almost entirely inclusive system of destruction and repression in a manner little different from most of us. Under the Unabomber rubric of complicity, almost all of us are potential targets. It should be remembered, his toll of three dead and 29 wounded was severely limited only when his bombs failed to go off in an airliner and outside a university classroom. Apparently, all of us were indiscriminately designated as The Enemy.

His final two targets got a little more focused, hitting a couple of bad news earth rapers, but do we really want a one man hit squad that one day whacks the owner of a computer store or a science grad student, and the next, a PR man promoting clear-cutting? If you're answering, yes, as you read this, we're coming from a much different ethical place, one, I would argue, where any act can be justified in the name of revolution.

To justify the Unabomber terror, one frequently hears nostalgic reference to the turn of the last century anarchist assassins who killed kings and presidents. However, these historic events are celebrated without ever examining the consequences of those acts to the movements of the time. Can anyone point to growth within anarchist movements or communities following these acts or, rather, did they serve to validate an already existing demonization of anarchists, increase the popular misconception of anarchy as chaos, and the victimization of radicals by the government?

One only need look at the aftermath of the assassination of U.S. President William McKinley in 1901 for the answer. Anarchists, including Emma Goldman, were hounded and arrested for being part of the "Red Thing called Anarchy [that] raised its blood-stained hand against government..." as a contemporary book put it.

Although there have been increasing questions about Leon Czolgosz's (McKinley's assassin) actual commitment to anarchism (Carlotta Anderson in her book [*All-American Anarchist: Joseph A. Labadie and the Labor Movement*] reports he was registered as a Republican in Cleveland), the president was no innocent. The U.S. had just completed a successful inter-imperial war with Spain, and was involved in genocidal repression in the Philippines to secure it as a colony.

But no one shoots people without a reason. Serb paramilitary gunmen in Kosovo, Unita teenage soldiers in Angola, or Tamal rebels in Sri Lanka, all have "good" rationalizations for why their killings are justified. Many of those who support bombings or "armed struggle" (almost a joke if one considers the extent of the state repressive apparatus) see the unrestrained advocacy (and infrequent trips to the gun range) as a step forward in revolutionary consciousness. Nothing, in my estimation could be farther from the truth.

People Are Mesmerized

The failure of anarchist ideas to take on mass expression is a complex question, but suffice it to say most people at this time are mesmerized enough by the dominant culture to remain mainly passive and indifferent to our message. We are not living in a fascist police state. We have all the latitude in the world to organize counter-communities where revolutionary values and a culture of resistance predominate, but unfortunately, with a few exceptions, not very many people are interested at this time.

I don't have a lot of interest in people who advocate "armed struggle." In this country, it usually comes down to those enthusiasts for armed adventures constituting a rooting section without taking the leap into the fray themselves. This is often accompanied by an arrogance and set of judgmental politics that condemn anyone not in the clique as timid, or reformist, or worse, counter-revolutionary. The latter, by the way, has historically been a pre-execution category, so I watch my back when ever I hear that phrase being thrown my way even by someone claiming to be an anarchist.

My experience is that advocates of violence have a short shelf life. They break windows or plant a few bombs while furiously condemning everyone else for a lack of revolutionary ardor

and then they are gone, usually with some wreckage that has to be cleaned up by those committed to long range organizing.

I don't have any problem with people breaking windows, trashing cars, or fighting cops; this is often a natural response of rage to abuses of the system or its repressive mechanism. However, to not create liberated space (what Bey calls Permanent Autonomous Zones) as the basis for revolutionary struggle that can turn off people's need for the state and capital, and for activity that can also include families, women, elderly, and the timid (not as negative a category as the militants charge, in my mind), gives up the field to the martial-minded with all of the authoritarian potential contained in violence.

Following the collapse of the last great movement of rebellion during the 1960s, numerous small groups constituted themselves as armed bands ("moving to a higher level of struggle," they called it), managed to kill a few cops, rob a few banks, and ultimately get themselves killed or imprisoned for long stretches. Nothing, I repeat, nothing good came of this activity and instead wasted the lives and talents of people whose hatred for the state and capitalism and its ill deeds motivated them to participate in perhaps brave, but ultimately foolish acts.

Radicals always advise learning from history. The lessons are there. After Seattle, it should be clear, we don't need anyone doing our dirty work for us. Real work that won't wind up getting blood on our shoes can be successfully achieved by determined people.

No Kaczynski Book (sidebar)

Don't look for Ted Kaczynski's *Truth Versus Lies* book to be published soon (see Summer 1999 FE).

Context Books in New York announced cancellation of the title in November following the author's refusal of changes demanded by the publisher's attorneys, probably related to Kaczynski's denunciation of his brother for turning him in. Publisher Beau Friedlander says the author "was uncooperative and expressed himself in ways that made it impossible for the book to be published by Context."

Friedlander hoped the first printing of 15,000 would coincide with an article about Kaczynski and his brother David by Stephen Dubner that was dropped by *Talk* magazine, but published in the October 18, 1999 *Time*.

Context planned to give the royalties from sales to families of the Unabomber's victims, and had spent thousands on legal and production fees. However, Kaczynski may have had second thoughts about publishing a book that could be construed as inflammatory during the appeal of his 1998 guilty plea.

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