Interview with Redneck Revolt: Arms Possession & Social Anti-fascism in U.S.A.

*Interview with Redneck Revolt by **Yavor Tarinski** and **Kostas Savvopoulos** for Babylonia Journal. You can find the interview in Greek here.*

On this year's B-Fest in Athens we have with us people from the RedneckRevolt movement from the U.S. (25^{th}-26^{th}-27^{th} of May in the Fine Arts School in Athens). Redneck Revolt was founded in 2016 as an anti-racist, anti-fascist network of community defense formations.

Redneck Revolt are fighting for social emancipation against any kind of oppressive regime or system, by highlighting the common struggles between people of color, the working class and the under-privileged in general. In the states of the U.S.A. where it's legal to carry and operate firearms they are organizing protests and actions which they guard on their own, exercising their right to carry firearms. They propose a different look on the concept of gun ownership and use. They also operate a number of gun clubs and shooting ranges where they help their members to learn how to protect themselves and others against police brutality and the recent rise of the far right.

Their political ideologies are less important in the face of common and collective action. Through their actions they are providing the necessary space for oppressed people to express and assert themselves against the systemic and everyday inequalities and struggles.

Babylonia: What is Redneck Revolt and where does it draw it's

influences from?

Redneck Revolt: Redneck Revolt was founded in 2016, as an anti-racist, anti-fascist community defense formation. The history of the term redneck is long and complex. One of the earliest recorded uses of the term comes from the 1890's, and refers to rednecks as "poorer inhabitants of the rural districts…men who work in the field, as a matter of course, generally have their skin burned red by the sun, and especially is this true of the back of their necks".

In 1921, the term became synonymous with armed insurrection against the state, as members of the United Mine Workers of America tied red bandanas around their necks during the Battle of Blair Mountain, a two week long armed multi-racial labor uprising in the coalfields of West Virginia.

We are influenced by the ethos of direct action embodied by John Brown as he and eighteen comrades, including former slaves, raided a Federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, on October 15, 1859, in an attempt to seize weapons to be used in a massive slave uprising. Brown's raid failed. But their courage and complete dedication to the freedom of all people serves as an example and testament: a refusal to submit to oppression and fear and to organize and act for the liberation of all with insurrectionary zeal burning hotly against the brutal institution of slavery.

We trace the radical, action-oriented racial solidarity of Brown's company into the class conscious organizing efforts of the Rainbow Coalition in the late 1960s. The group formed in Chicago with members of the Black Panther Party, The Young Patriots—"dislocated hillbillies" or white working class youth—and The Young Lords, a militant Chicano gang-turned-political movement. Though targeted by the FBI with massive repression and direct violence, the Coalition defined new territories of anti-racist and community defense organizing.

B.: Standing by the 2nd amendment and claiming that the use of weapons is something good or –worst case scenario- something neutral (depends on who's using it) is something that traditionally, left wing(we're not talking about the Democrats or the liberals of course) and leftist radicals stand against. In fact the forces that stand behind the 2nd amendment and the NRA in the US are more or less in the right wing spectrum. How do you view the concept of weapon carrying and what are the differences between you and the opposing forces in this matter?

R.R.: We stand for the right of all people to live free and to defend themselves by any means necessary. Within the context of the United States we insist on exercising our right to arm ourselves and organize for our collective defense under the guarantees of the 2nd Amendment in the Bill of Rights. We emphasize, however, that we place people's right to defend their own liberty and autonomy over the provisions of any law. In the United States, the right wing privileges the law over people and we refuse this inversion of abstract power against living freedom.

We also challenge this idea that "left radicals" are against the use of weapons. Perhaps it is useful to place this idea within histories of white supremacy, specifically in the post-Civil Rights era of the 1970s and the rise of armed Black militancy such as the Black Panthers. It is in this moment that a white, liberal reactionary position based on an absolutist insistence on non-violence began to take hold to the point where inflexible pacifism has become the guiding tenet in left wing catechism in the U.S.

This fetishization of non-violence has led to the erasure of histories of armed self-determination and resistance, including during the Civil Rights era of Dr. Martin Luther King. This erasure, we contend, is part of a pattern of whitewashing by liberal, bourgeois white people who would

rather preserve State monopolies of power and defang the working class and people of color by making pacifism the only "legitimate" means of dissent and thus coercing people's behavior and tactical possibilities in the face of government and far right attacks.

Negroes with Guns by Robert F. Williams outlines strategies of armed community defense undertaken by African Americans in North Carolina during the 1950s and 60s amid maelstroms of white supremacist arson, violence, and murder. A more recent historical account of this same era, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed* by Charles E. Cobb, Jr., depicts the ways firearms and those who carried them were carefully incorporated into widespread struggles for self-determination and community safety throughout the American South and in so doing, dismantles the ubiquitous liberal myth that the Civil Rights struggles was a completely pacifist undertaking. Instead, this history insists that a diversity of tactics is crucial in building sustainable and victorious campaigns for justice and freedom.

Redneck Revolt rejects the alienating individualism central to modern, right wing interpretations of the 2nd Amendment. The right wing embrace of firearms is one of single-minded desperation and is ultimately a fetish of hyper-individualism. We believe firearms are a tool to be learned and used within ethical parameters carefully developed by communities to serve their needs.

The great danger of firearms is an addiction to the limited power they represent. Guns are a tool of destruction. The use or deployment of weapons must be tactically specific and limited within larger strategies designed to provide spaces of security where people can work together to build up the societies they desire, free from fear. Redneck Revolt only carries firearms in carefully-defined situations and at the request of other members of the communities we come from. We

are not a self-appointed militia of “the people”. Instead, we are accountable to the people we live among. Our tactics and our ethics are shaped by the communities we are responsible to.

B.: Concerning the latest events in the Florida shooting the debate of whether guns should be banned or not has been rekindled. Where do you stand in this, and secondly what do you think the main reasons behind the long history of mass shootings in U.S.A are? (if we assume that the main reason is the relaxed laws for weapon purchasing and usage)

R.R.: Redneck Revolt does not believe the people should be disarmed. People have the right to choose the means for their own best communal defense, especially while the police in the United States continue to murder with impunity and at accelerating rates—over 3,300 people have been killed by police since 2015. This body count far exceeds those lives lost in mass shootings. While these kinds of mass shootings are a spectacle of horror and produce a social panic, the media focus on mass shootings distracts from the larger, fundamental crises provoked by capitalism, imperial militarism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and a society intent on controlling and disciplining youth within an unequal schooling system.

Mass shootings are symptomatic of these larger issues that go unspoken and unchallenged within conventional, political discourse. People who are faithful to the State anxiously ignore or elide confronting these deep, societal problems. These people are still entranced by the false promise of symptomatic solutions through government legislation, such as banning a particular kind of gun. The statistical data about the limited effects of gun control is widely available for any curious and critical reader and we encourage people to think in complex ways—against reductive media narratives—about how they perceive the imbalances of power between the State and its people and the fracturing, volatile pressure people are

subjected to within such a poisonous capitalistic society as they struggle with debt, poor health, food insecurity, loneliness, and endless war. We are not interested in debating new laws for firearms, knowing that in a capitalist and white supremacist society, any law is likely to be applied most severely against people of color and the poor.



B.: It seems that you are taking a different approach from many radical left-wing, anarchist and antifa organizations, regarding the way you interact with society. While often such groups descend into sectarian ideological purity, thus placing themselves and their actions against society, you tend to successfully intervene in your local context by embracing and reframing social traditions with emancipatory potential. In the description of what is RedneckRevolt you write that "In this project, political ideology is less important to us than our ability to agree on our organizing principles and work together". What made you choose this approach that some can call social anti-fascism?

R.R.: Redneck Revolt is not interested in sectarian contention. Writing in 1860, the African-American Abolitionist Frederick Douglass understood that ideological and theoretical debate indulged by so many on the left "gratifies their intellectual tastes, pleases their imaginations, titillates their sensibilities into a momentary sensation, but does not move them from the downy seat of inaction."

We take heed and choose action instead.

We are compelled to move, to create, to plan, to engage in our homeplaces: our neighborhoods, our communities, our villages, towns, and cities.

We abandon "the downy seat of inaction." (We leave that cursed perch to the armchair anarchists, do-nothing communists, and especially to the anxious paralysis of the State-loving liberals.) Nothing substantial gets done by endless debate and a reluctance to actually attempt constructive efforts at making the small, social changes we require. It is important to confront fascists in the streets and in the courts and government buildings. But we also insist on the powerful effect of building up communities and to help them resist fear and oppression through autonomous action. Redneck Revolt is comprised of people from across the political spectrum and we are unified in our antifascist and antiracist goals and our focus on the local ground we share with our neighbors. Solidarity is forged through shared action.

B.: Because of your social approach you have encountered and collaborated with people from various backgrounds. How are local communities accepting your anti-racist messages for social liberation and do they also influence your group?

R.R.: Reception of our mission varies, but its simple and straightforward assertions, coupled with a belief that we need to meet people where they are and listen to the analysis they already bring has meant that we are able to build open

relationships full of rich dialogue. We don't need nor want to convert anyone—we have no party platform people need to conform to. Instead, we are able to amplify and enhance the critiques working people *already have about the world they inhabit.* People are experts in their own lives and they don't need outsiders coming in to tell them what's wrong with those lives. Redneck Revolt seeks to take the struggles people are already experiencing and bring them into conversation with broader struggles against racism and capitalism.

B.: What is the potential that social anti-fascism holds for one future that seems to be filled with multidimensional insecurity, encompassing racial, economic, ecological and other issues?

R.R.: Asking about the future potential of Redneck Revolt's strategy is the provocative but unanswerable question. Each member of Redneck Revolt has their own dreams, stitched together with the resilient thread of mutual aid and communal dedication to our shared survival and freedom. Local contexts and individual experiences, skills, and capacity shape how our project manifests and mutates. Certainly we attempt to hold all these social, political, and environmental struggles before us and to analyze the intersections and complex textures they produce. By letting go of the need for a programmatic plan and centralized strategy, there is the uneven and unpredictable flow of micro-energies from communities and regional affiliations that develop practical models and a focus on immediate needs.

We want to grow powerful social possibilities, make friends, strengthen our comrades, figure out how to solve one another's problems, keep each other healthy and fed, preserve our freedom, and defend our lives. We work together in consensus to try to build the world we all desire while understanding that the dangers we struggle against are constantly shifting and are deeply woven into the fabric of the lives we lead. We don't have things figured out. Theory is always in the service

of practical action. Like so many of our comrades dedicated to fighting fascism and white supremacy, we are experimenting, playing within the social field, resisting in the ways that are needed in the moment but never imagining we have a perfect method or even that we fully understand the complexity of the issues we contend with. In humility, we are always open to critique.

This is a global moment for courage and radical love. Uncertainty abounds. Risk is always with us. We trust one another and yearn together for the ebullient world of freedom we dream of.

We fight to win!