

Hedges, from page 5

became criminalized. And you lock these people up as a form of social control. You lock the men up – I mean, you lock the women up too, but it's disproportionately poor men of color. And what you do to the women and children is evict them every six months so they can't build any community or network to resist. It's why when you visit an incarcerated relative in prison, it's so unpleasant. They make it unpleasant, especially for the children. They don't want people to build any network in which they can confront these forces. Because we can't confront them alone.

You have a group of very serious and impressive people who find whatever freedom they can find in prison through the life of the mind.

And I've watched them carry out acts of resistance in prison. One of my classes led a sit-down strike in the prison, and it was moving because they knew what was going to happen, which did happen, which was everybody had their cells searched, everybody was interrogated, and you're threatened with losing what little you have in prison: the ability to be in the education program, your rec time, your job. Until they found the two leaders, and they sent them to another prison, and they're in indefinite solitary confinement. Everybody knew (what would happen), but they rose up and resisted anyway. And that for me was instructive.

That's what we have to do. We have to stop asking ourselves if we're going to succeed, because if we don't rise up, we're definitely not going to succeed. And at the same time we have to be very conscious of the forces that are raised against us. I think the greatest existential crisis of our time is to at once grasp what it is we have to confront, and yet resist anyway. And I see that in the prison.

J.Z.: Do you support a civil war?

C.H.: Civil war? No. Number one because violence is the language the state can speak far better than we can. Number two, it won't work. I mean, the state wants it. They love the Black Block, or Antifa. It's a gift from heaven because it demonizes the movement and makes people frightened of it. That's the basic goal of any counterinsurgency. I mean, the whole idea of throwing bricks through windows? Look, I've covered war. I know what special forces are equipped with and what they can do, and this is insane.

Revolution is not a form of catharsis. I support a revolution, but we won't win if we deploy violence. Any revolutionary movement succeeds by appealing to certain elements within structures of power and getting them to defect. That's what I saw in Eastern Europe, when I covered the revolutions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania. And what all the theorists like Crane Brinton ("The Anatomy of Revolution") and others have written that

that's the only way revolution succeeds. And the system is so corrupt, so gamed, so rigged, so rotten that we have the capacity to appeal to those forces successfully. That's our only hope. Because at this point, unfettered, unregulated capitalism with no internal or external constraints will commodify everything. Human beings in their eyes are commodities; the natural world is a commodity that it exploits until exhaustion or collapse. And there's nothing now within the structure of power that will stop that.

J.Z.: You talk about appealing to people for the revolution. But it feels like they've already cut us off on that front, including gutting net neutrality. For example, we as an organization can't promote most of our news stories on Facebook because its algorithm categorizes

them as political ads and won't let us do it. So it feels like that reach has been shut down.

C.H.: It is being shut down. Nobody's buying the ruling ideology, which is neo-liberalism – the idea that you structure your society around the dictates of the marketplace – and that's across the political spectrum. So they are going after the critics, such as myself, who has already been pushed to the margins of this society, because they don't have a counter argument. So they impose algorithms as they have on the website I write for, Truthdig.

So impressions – you go into Google and you type a word like "imperialism." If I had written a story on imperialism a year and half ago, it would have come up with any other recent article. Now it doesn't. So referrals from impressions to Truthdig alone have over the last year declined from over 700,000 to below 200,000.

Alternet's traffic has dropped by 63 percent. World Socialist Web Site by 83 percent. Black Lives Matter. Any of these groups that are critics of the stated ruling ideology are targeted, and net neutrality is another weapon to tier the internet and marginalize them even further. There's no question that it's under way. I have a show on RT America because it's the only place left where I can respectfully interview Mumia Abu-Jamal or interview David Harvey, the great Marxist economist, or Spenser Rapone, who was thrown out of the Army because he stood up for Kaepernick and declared himself a socialist. (RT America) is funded by the Russian government – I won't pretend that it isn't – but they've already targeted it. They've already managed to get RT off of the cable channels in New York state and California, and they'll shut the whole thing down. It has to do with a relentless campaign to silence voices like mine. And they will. They'll do it.

J.Z.: Was there ever a time when we got it

right? And what do we do about this? You've talked about taking to the streets in the past.

C.H.: There's never a time when we got it right. America was always created as a closed system. And it is radical movements that opened up the space in American democracy as Howard Zinn writes in "A People's History of the United States." The labor movement – we had hundreds of American workers murdered. We had the bloodiest, most violent labor wars in the industrialized world. The civil rights movement, the struggle of African-Americans for freedom, which they still don't have. So we never got it right.

J.Z.: It seemed like we were trying, though.

C.H.: It was episodic. With the breakdown of capitalism in the 1930s, we created enough pressure on the oligarchic class that they responded. So Roosevelt created 12 million jobs. We had the movements in the 1960s. Out of that came the environmental movement, the feminist movement, and of course until the end of Vietnam War, the anti-war movement, which terrified the elites.

And with the 1971 (Supreme Court Justice) Lewis Powell memo – which is a blueprint for a corporate destruction of those movements – they really made war against what the political scientist Samuel Huntington called the "excess of democracy."

The current period is from the early 1970s until now, with the collusion of the Democratic Party – in particular Bill Clinton, who sold out to corporate power, destroying welfare – and 70 percent of the original recipients of the welfare program were children. Our mass incarceration exploded from about 700,000 to 2 million. And he militarized the police and extended the length of sentences, because he and Joe Biden wanted to take back the law-and-order issue from Republicans. The destruction of Glass-Steagall, which ripped down the firewalls between commercial and investment banks, which precipitated the (financial crisis) – all of that was Clinton.

So at that point, you didn't have a functioning liberal class. You had a faux liberal class that spoke in the traditional "feel your pain" of liberalism but assiduously served corporate power. That's Pelosi, that's Schumer, that's Obama and that's Clinton. And at that point, we just lost any mechanism to get the centers of power to respond. Now the only thing we have left is to try and mobilize sustained civil disobedience in the hope that we can wrest power back from the hands of these corporations that are cannibalizing the country, further impoverishing and repressing the working class and the poor, and who are, in the name of short-term profit, destroying the ecosystem on which we depend for life. I mean, it's really the gravest crisis in human history, and we're all sitting in front of the TV talking about Brett Kavanaugh being drunk at Yale.

J.Z.: So who are the leaders that you look to, or are there any?

C.H.: I wouldn't look to leaders. That's kind of a mistake.

You have to understand power before you can confront it. Education is a fundamental component to resistance because the ruling

RECOMMENDED READING

When looking for guidance or inspiration for the resistance, Chris Hedges doesn't put much faith in so-called leaders.

"I look to people like Noam Chomsky and Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Marx. All of the theorists who understand how capitalism and imperialism works. You need that literacy," he said.

We asked Hedges for a short, recommended reading list – in addition to his new book. Here are his suggestions:

■ "Capital. Volume 1: The Process of Production of Capital" by Karl Marx. (1867) "There is no analysis of capitalism and how it works that's been better," Hedges said.

■ "A Brief History of Neoliberalism" by David Harvey (2005) "If you want to understand the ideology of neoliberalism, read David Harvey's book," Hedges said.

■ "A People's History of the United States" by Howard Zinn (1980) A grassroots view of American history from laborers, women, people of color and others fighting for equal rights and justice.

■ "Death of the Liberal Class" by Chris Hedges (2010). A primer on how the hallmarks of liberalism have collapsed and the extremes that filled the vacuum left behind.

■ "Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire," "The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic" and "Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic" all by Chalmers Johnson. These three books are known as The Blowback Trilogy and address the illegal operations the U.S. conducts abroad and the world's response.

elites are never going to give you the information. You've got to go out and find it for yourself. All of the anarchists, communists, socialists, all of the radicals – we had a strong radical movement at the turn of the century, and they understood that. Sweatshop workers were spending 10 to 12 hours a day on the Lower East Side and then going to their study groups.

That's kind of why I teach in a prison. As my students say, it makes them kind of lonely because they can't talk to anyone, who are spitting back these thought-terminating cliches that are fed to them on television screens. On the other hand, how power works, that is the prerequisite of becoming an effective opponent. But if you don't understand how power works, you can't oppose it.