



The Voter

February 2012

League of Women Voters of Sumter County

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

The February Membership Meeting of the LWV of Sumter County will be held at 6:00 pm on Monday, February 13, 2012 in the Seminar Room of the Health Science building, 133 South Main Street. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the provisions of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.

Originally, the issue to be discussed was the ‘rights’ of the ‘Occupy Columbia’ group that had established a site on the South Carolina Statehouse grounds and been subsequently evicted by Governor Haley. The First Amendment assures citizens the “right to peacefully assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” That will be the main focus of the presentation on Monday.

Subsequently, we learned that the U. S. Supreme Court ruled 9-0 against the U. S. Justice Department in a case involving a minister/teacher who claimed that she had been discriminated against by the Lutheran Church who fired her on ‘religious grounds.’ Further, last week the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that they were going to require the Roman Catholic Church to provide health insurance coverage to employees for medical procedures that go against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. At its meeting last Thursday, the Board of Directors agreed to expand the scope of the presentation on the First Amendment to include the first part of the First Amendment that reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

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February Membership Meeting

League of Women Voters of Sumter County
6:00 PM, Monday, February 13, 2012

Topic: The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

Speaker: Dr. Jacob E. Butler, Chairman
Division of Social Sciences
Morris College

Location: Central Carolina Technical College
Health Sciences Center
Seminar Room
133 South Main Street
Sumter, SC 29150

Dues are due: \$50.00.

First Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The Cancer in Occupy

By Chris Hedges

The Black Bloc anarchists, who have been active on the streets in Oakland and other cities, are the cancer of the Occupy movement. The presence of Black Bloc anarchists—so named because they dress in black, obscure their faces, move as a unified mass promoting solidarity, seek physical confrontations with police and destroy property.

The Occupy encampments in various cities were shut down precisely because they were nonviolent. They were shut down because the state realized the potential of their broad appeal even to those within the systems of power. They were shut down because they articulated a truth about our economic and political system that cut across political and cultural lines. And they were shut down because they were places mothers and fathers with strollers felt safe.

Any group that seeks to rebuild social structures, especially through nonviolent acts of civil disobedience, rather than physically destroy, becomes, in the eyes of Black Bloc anarchists, the enemy. Because Black Bloc anarchists do not believe in organization, indeed oppose all organized movements, they ensure their own powerlessness. Solidarity becomes the hijacking or destruction of competing movements, which is exactly what the Black Bloc contingents are attempting to do with the Occupy movement.

“The Black Bloc can say they are attacking cops, but what they are really doing is destroying the Occupy movement,” the writer and environmental activist Derrek Jensen told me when I reached him by phone in California. “If their real target actually was the cops and not the Occupy movement, the Black Bloc would make their actions completely separate from Occupy, instead of effectively using these others as a human shield. Their attacks on cops are simply a means to an end, which is to destroy a movement that doesn’t fit their ideological standard. The Black Bloc spends more time attempting to destroy movements than they do attacking those in power.”

They are unwilling to think critically about whether one is acting appropriately in the moment. “I have no problem with someone violating boundaries [when] that violation is the smart, appropriate thing to do. I have a huge problem with people violating boundaries for the sake of violating boundaries. It is a lot easier to pick up a rock and throw it through the nearest window than it is to organize. A lot of it is laziness,” said Jensen.

Groups of Black Bloc protesters, for example, smashed the windows of a locally owned coffee shop in November in Oakland and looted it. It was not, as Jensen points out, a strategic, moral or tactical act. It was done for its own sake.

The Black Bloc’s confrontational tactics and destruction of property can be used to justify draconian forms of control and frighten the wider population away from supporting the Occupy movement. Once the Occupy movement is painted as a flag-burning, rock-throwing, angry mob we are finished. If we become isolated we can be crushed. The arrests last weekend in Oakland of more than 400 protesters, some of whom had thrown rocks, carried homemade shields and rolled barricades, are an indication of the scale of escalating repression and a failure to remain a unified, nonviolent opposition. Police pumped tear gas, flash-bang grenades and “less lethal” rounds into the crowds.

Once protesters were in jail they were denied crucial medications, kept in overcrowded cells and pushed around. A march in New York called in solidarity with the Oakland protesters saw a few demonstrators imitate the Black Bloc tactics in Oakland, including throwing bottles at police and dumping garbage on the street. They chanted “F [word] the police” and “Racist, sexist, anti-gay / NYPD go away.”

This is a struggle to win the hearts and minds of the wider public and those within the structures of power (including the police) who are possessed of a conscience. It is not a war.

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Report from Sumter LWV Board

The Directors of the Sumter League met on Thursday, January 26, at The Shepherd's Center on Council Street. The purpose of the meeting was to conduct routine business and plan activities for the coming three months. It was reported that the balance in the checking account was \$1318.19 and that the membership as of Jan. 31, 2012 was 18.

Evelyn Bradford, our Web Site Mistress, recommends that we drop the web site. We have had few hits and it has not been effective in attracting new members. The cost to continue operating the web site will be \$200 per year. If there is no objection, the contract for the site will be cancelled this month.

Lorraine Dennis and Jeanette Roveri continue to work with the Sumter School District in an effort to get it to implement the "iCivics" that was the subject of the September Membership meeting. As reported earlier, Lexington #1 has implemented the program in all of its Middle schools.

As has been widely reported, the Voter Photo ID Law has been rejected by the U. S. Justice Department. The S. C. Attorney General plans to appeal this ruling in court. There are a number of states that have adopted similar laws requiring a Photo ID to vote. In a recent development, there is a House Bill, H.4549, which would place restrictions on those who would be authorized to register potential voters. A similar law in Florida resulted in the denial of the League of Woman Voters from conducting "Voter Registration Drives" in that state. H.4549 is presently in Committee. SCLWV opposes the adoption of this new law. Go to: www.lwvsc.org for details on this legislation.

Future Membership meetings will be held on Feb. 13, Mar. 12, April 9, and May 14. The program for Feb. 13 is set. We hope to have a final program on Judicial Diversity in March, and a program honoring the life of Mary McLeod Bethune later this spring. The Annual Membership Meeting is planned for May 14th, time and location to be announced.

The South Carolina LWV has obtained a grant to fund Voter Registration drives in the local high schools. The Sumter League has appointed Barbara Brown and Jeanette Roveri to look into organizing such a drive among the local high schools and colleges. They are looking for volunteers to be trained and to conduct the drive. Please call Barbara at 968-0388 and Jeanette at 840-3770 if you are interested in participating in this effort.

Finally, I must apologize to Senator Phil Leventis and Representative Murrell Smith. They were kind enough to meet with our members on January 9 in our annual meeting with the Sumter County Legislative Delegation. I failed to prepare a report last month on that meeting, and now I cannot find my notes. During the discussion, they were open and candid about the legislative prospects for the coming year. My apologies to all for not reporting on that meeting in a timely manner.

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Nonviolent movements, on some level, embrace police brutality. Martin Luther King kept holding marches in Birmingham because he knew Public Safety Commissioner "Bull" Connor was a thug who would overreact.

The Black Bloc's thought-terminating cliché of "diversity of tactics" in the end opens the way for hundreds or thousands of peaceful marchers to be discredited by a handful of hooligans.

The explosive rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement came when a few women, trapped behind orange mesh netting, were pepper-sprayed by NYPD Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna. The violence and cruelty of the state were exposed. And the Occupy movement, through its steadfast refusal to respond to police provocation, resonated across the country.

According to Jensen, "We have to go through the process of trying to work with the system and getting screwed. It is only then that we get to move beyond it. We can't short-circuit the process. There is a maturation process we have to go through, as individuals and as a movement. We can't say, 'Hey, I'm going to throw a flowerpot at a cop because it is fun.' "

The Occupy movement is constantly evolving as it finds what works and discards what does not.

For more information about this article go to http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_cancer_of_occupy_20120206/

Chris Hedges spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has worked for The Christian Science Monitor, National Public Radio, The Dallas Morning News and The New York Times, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. Hedges is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute in New York City and has taught at Columbia University, New York University and Princeton University. He currently teaches inmates at a correctional facility in New Jersey. He has written eleven books, including "Death of the Liberal Class" (2010), "Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle" (2009).

Public Transportation

As a follow up to the article I wrote in the December Voter concerning the financial situation that the Santee-Wateree Regional Transportation Authority faced, as reported to us by the Director, Ms. Ann August. I am pleased to report that some of the issues have been resolved, but not all.

I spoke with Donna Ambrose who is monitoring the situation for the South Carolina LWV and she was somewhat optimistic that the basic issues would be resolved in the next six weeks. Ann August reported that a new contract for the transportation of Medicaid patients to their medical appointments has been negotiated. It appears that Santee-Wateree RTA will be able to operate under this contract. This does not mean that the RTA is out of the woods financially, however.

The RTA Board is working with Jim Darby and the staff of the Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments in an effort to obtain additional financial support from the local government agencies in the four county area served by the RTA. This means getting the local governments to increase the amount of tax money they provide to underwrite the transportation services provided by RTA to the citizens of each county. In addition, the RCOG is helping evaluate bus route structures, frequency of service and other management issues that may reduce costs while maintaining basic services. It is anticipated that some employees will have to be let go to maintain the financial viability of the RTA.

If you are interested and willing to help, you could monitor the agenda for the various county councils and attend any hearings that are planned to discuss increased aid to the RTA for 2012/2013. I'm sure that RTA will keep you informed if you will contact them at 775-9347.

Chuck Gibbs, President

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Dr. Jacob E. Butler, Chairman of Morris College's Division of Social Sciences, has agreed to make a presentation that will include a discussion of both parts of the First Amendment. The meeting will focus on issues that are both timely and of interest to all those who are concerned about their freedoms under the constitution. We hope that you will attend, and that you will invite your friends.

Chuck Gibbs, President

**Mark Your Calendars
Future Programs**

March 12, 2012, 6pm	Membership Meeting
April 9, 2012, 6pm	Membership Meeting
May 14, 2012, 6pm	Annual Membership Meeting

Sumter County LWV Local Officers		
President	Charles Gibbs cgibbs@sc.rr.com	775-0487
Past President	Lorraine Dennis	905-4350
First Vice President	Barbara Brown	469-3165
Treasurer	Barbara Wiley	469-8419
Secretary	Ethel Wells	481-2342
Director	Jeanette Roveri	840-3770
Director	Evelyn Bradford	499-5961