

# Letters to the *Fifth Estate*

Various Authors

1976

## **Anarchism Flops**

To the Fifth Estate:

If it is wrong for a woman to be put on trial when she is raped, isn't it equally wrong for a society to be put on trial when it is raped?

Prejudice predates capitalism and is found in all societies. The same can be said of crime. Smash the State! Let the workers control the factories they work in. Do all of this and you will have a small residue who will want to do harm to their fellow man.

In order to protect the workers, -you will need armed individuals. You will call them workers' patrols, but what they will be is police. I have come to the stumbling block of the anarchist argument.

Crime is not a response to law, law is the response to crime. The majority of black people are law abiding. They are also victims of the Black Killers. The law abiding whites and blacks form a majority that doesn't want to be willing victims of crime. If you doubt this, remember the audiences that cheered "Death Wish" were integrated. The black hoodlums of Detroit are no more to be swept under the carpet than the white hoodlums of Boston.

David Thorp  
Greensboro MD

## **More of you, please**

To the Fifth Estate:

A letter in the August issue [#275] chided you for being "rhetorical"—but you say you don't know what he means. Well, neither do I, but here's what I mean:

There is an impersonality in your tone, a formal protective irony in almost every piece. This tone protects the writer from revealing doubts about the real nature of the situation described, or doubts about one's own active response. This has become the "house style" for most situationist writing, and I'm frankly sick of it.

I think a lot of this adolescent sarcasm comes from a failure to "appropriate" the revolutionary aspects of feminism, Most of the ultra-left, while understanding theoretical foreshadowings (surrealists, Reich, S.I., etc.) of feminism's rather intuitive attack on objectivist politics, still seems content with a "theoretical" subjectivity.

But I still think the real subjectivity—transparent, expressive, and long for total revolution—which is shown by the best of feminism (like Su Negrin) is a finer article. Even if this latter still needs to find adequate theory, this is easier to imagine than hearing a situationist speak in his own real voice.

More of yourselves, gentlemen (sic), in your newspaper...Other than that, I continue to like it.

Better Days,  
Jim Stodder

New Orleans

*Staff Response:* Gee, we don't know whether to defend or deny except to say, call us anything, but not situationists. In fact, don't put any labels on us because we are none of the above. Also, if you want more of us—come drink a beer with us.

## College Life

To Whom It Doesn't Concern:

Being a resistive victim of the final indoctrination center of the corporate state, the state university, I come into contact with many "intelligent" (well indoctrinated might be better) people that consider your anarchist ideals to be unreal nihilist bullshit. I then listen to their constructive plans and ideas on rebuilding society through individual input,, in government action and non-action, and think, wow, there's hope after all.

But then I slip into my past, the past of growing up and living in the inferno of Detroit and its parasitic suburbs; of mile upon mile of cemented-in shopping centers, condominiums, subdivisions, tank plants covered with four and 18 wheeled monsters filled with living manifestations of successfully programmed consumers; of renting my body for a few months to a steel factory; and of the extreme hopelessness at ever changing it all.

After this remembrance of the ever-lasting hopelessness of the American situation, I have to laugh at the constructive plans of the "intelligent" do-gooder.

So, instead of fighting for a lost cause, I do nothing like the Taoists; just laugh at it all, wait for it to end, and read your fine newspaper.

Mark Mackiewicz

Ann Arbor

## Nix on "Ned"

To the Fifth Estate:

I am writing to take issue with a letter signed "Ned Ludd" (FE, August 1976). Comrade Ned denounces the factory council system setup during the Spanish Revolution of 1936–7 as "capitalist," and goes on to assert that "a 'modern urban economy' is capitalism no matter who administers it." I'll deal with the two points in reverse order.

First, while "modern urban economy" is undoubtedly a vague and ill-advised term, what the authors mean by it is clearly a fairly complex system of industrial production, i.e. one involving the use of machinery on a large scale. To say that this "is capitalism no matter who runs it" is manifest nonsense.

What makes capitalist industry capitalist is not the fact that it employs machinery, but that the people who work in it sell their labor-power for a wage and produce a surplus value which is realized on the market as profit and re-invested as capital. To be sure, this could mean "self-managed" capital, i.e. the workers in each enterprise managing their own (self-) exploitation, and this would not make it any less capitalist (see *Lip and the Self-Managed Counter-revolution*, Black and Red, 1975).

It is also true (and this is what I think Ned is trying to get at) that, particularly since World War II, industry has been so shaped by capital that much of it is virtually useless for a communist society, and that virtually all of it is unpleasant to work in, even in physical terms.

However, there is still a huge amount of industrial plant, particularly in the most highly automated and therefore most adaptable sectors, that will be very useful to us.

The main point is this: simply in order to win a revolutionary war, (let alone survive after it, and live better than we did before) we're going to need armaments, clothing, medical supplies, food, water, and transportation and power. This means we're going to have to keep up and even (horrors!) expand production in such sectors as these, hopefully improving the product and transforming the physical conditions and organization of production as we go along.

Basically, the idea is to use the existing means of production as a lever to catapult us into the new world: to use them to construct new means of production and a new environment in which starvation, privation, and the contradiction between city and country, human and non-human nature, has been abolished.

In particular, we're going to have to tackle the appalling conditions in the "Third World", which will require our helping those populations to create a new non-capitalist (use-and-pleasure-value based) industry and agriculture.

The Spanish case is much more complex and contradictory than either the FE article's authors or Ned Ludd seem to acknowledge. From what I understand, there was an effort made in many areas to abolish wages and money in general, but this did not prove immediately practicable in Barcelona for the most part: in some cases non-circulating credits and ration cards were substituted for money as a means of regulating the flow of goods between factories and organizing distribution to consumers.

In general, the Catalonia-Aragon experience of the period seems to have hovered somewhere between worker-managed capital and a kind of transitional "War communism." The great error of the revolutionary workers in this experience was not that they kept up production, which they did simply so as to survive and fight, but that they did not form a regional coordinating body through which to suppress the local parliaments and State bureaucracy, and then move to overthrow the Republic, rather than allowing their CNT representatives to collaborate with said Republic.

What is stupid and dangerous about Ned Ludd's letter and the tendency it represents is that it makes revolutionaries look like a bunch of crazed nihilists. Any worker, no matter how much they hate wage labor, knows that production of some sort is the basis of their survival.

Ned, I am a wage-slave, I have no desire whatever to become a bureaucrat, and yet I do believe that, "willingly" or not (as if the revolution were an act of "will" in the first place) workers are going to have to go back into "those ghastly places" if only in order to supersede them. If they don't, if WE don't, we are going to lose the revolution and most likely die of bullets or starvation. No more silly apocalypses, no more beautiful losers!

Communist Greetings,

Louis

Berkeley, Calif.

## More on Spain

Dear Fifth Estate Comrades:

In view of the fact that Tampa Narcissus sent in the Point Blank! essay "Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution," (FE July 1976) we feel a group obligation to address the controversy surrounding this particular text and the question of the Spanish Revolution as a whole.

We would like to iterate at the outset that we feel the authors of the piece (D. Jacobs and C. Winks, now of *Perspectives*) have presented a critical overview of the revolutionary phenomena far superior than their admonishers. Our disagreement with the authors is not so much over what they elaborated as what they didn't elaborate—the international and historical context of the events—and we'll consider this problem at the end.

In your August issue "Ned Ludd" attempts to indict the Point Blank! article on the bizarre grounds that it somehow reflects a blind "adulation of workers' councils and their ability to administer every aspect of capitalist daily life and without a boss." He then tries to prove that Jacobs and Winks' analysis merely endorses "increased productivity." Actually, such a glib assertion plainly proves his inability to read as the same paragraph which he quotes disparagingly clearly states:

The most radical aspect of this movement, however, was not the simple rationalization of the Spanish economy, but the attempt made to practically realize a critique of political economy. From the beginning of the occupations, the Spanish proletariat proclaimed a comunismo libertario in which money and commodity labor were abolished. In spite of admittedly primitive economic conditions, the Spanish councils and collectives were able to devise a system of distribution and exchange which represented a qualitative supersession of the relations of capitalist production.

The revolution would probably see the complete abandonment of the industrial means of production, if not their complete destruction, by those who have worked there under the coercion of the wage system,” he reveals himself as a markedly confused nihilist. It is not “complete destruction” of the social machinery of production, but, rather, its conscious and total radical transformation that signifies genuine proletarian revolution. The name “Ned Ludd” is well chosen, since to conceive of working-class revolt in the manner that he does is to regress to early 19<sup>th</sup> century forms of protest against an equally infantile capitalism.

Stuart Christy’s letter in the September FE (#276) is a thinly-veiled effort to resurrect the myth of the (perfected) CNT-FAI. When he tries to discount the autonomous councilist practice and continuity between the revolutionary workers of Berlin, Turin, Kronstadt and Barcelona, - he backhandedly denies the international class character of the proletariat in motion for-itself. His other problem of grafting an intrinsically and expressly councilist form onto the ideological limitations of anarcho-syndicalism also remain unresolved and ahistorical.

Moreover, it is not Jacobs and Winks who detect a bureaucratic quality to the CNT, but anarchist theoretician M. Bookchin as well:

“Charismatic leaders at all levels of the organization (CNT) came very close to acting in a bureaucratic manner. Nor is the syndicalist structure immune to bureaucratic deformations. It was not very difficult for an elaborate network of committees, building up to regional and national bodies, to assume all of the features of a centralized organization and circumvent the wishes of the workers’ assemblies at the base.”

“No bureaucracy existed,” pleads Christy—formally this is true; informally (i.e., practically) this is untrue. “Leaders” and “influential militants” persisted to behave as de facto bodies of revolutionary authority within both the CNT and FAI. As a matter of record, all of the capitulations to the state—the collaboration with the Generalitat on July 20, 1936, the entry into the Catalonian government on September 26<sup>th</sup>, the acceptance of the collectivization decree of Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>, the entry into the Madrid government on Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>—were all faits accomplis of the CNT-FAI intelligentsia taken without public debate and rubber-stamped at plenum meetings after the fact.

Christy’s pathetic explanation for “the drift of former militants into the government” serves as a queer anarchist rationale for the movement toward statification of the capitalist economy in a period of extreme crisis.

As for Jess Gordon’s note, the first paragraph submits to the actions of the CNT-FAI leaders to make arbitrary decisions and then ram-rod them through at plenums with no real consultation with the membership. He then ignores the necessarily universal movement of social revolution—the workers must extend their anti-power everywhere or be crushed. Next, Gordon gives a neat justification for anarchist commandism which happens to parallel that of the Popular Front—“The effort to unify the left was foremost in the minds of the CNT-FAI hierarchy in addition to gaining access to much needed arms and supplies for their militias.” In similar fashion, paragraph four excuses the “Circumstantialist” policy of class-collaboration with the bourgeois forces by the anarchists.

Finally, in his insistence that “the CNT was trying to defend their workplaces,” Gordon projects an economic, reformist view to contest what was in reality a deep social revolution.

We must become fully aware of all of the ideological as well as material impediments which inhibit and thwart the efflorescence of the proletariat as a class-for-itself. None of the old organizations (syndicalism, partyism) are sufficient to the total revolutionary tasks of our era.

The social transvaluation we are going to ignite requires both the form (general assemblies and committees) and content (determinate negation of the capitalist law of value) of direct, conscious communist self-activity. It is now our time to play for the high stakes of civilization.

Ted Lopez for Tampa Narcissus  
Tampa, Fla.

## **Congrats to PSF**

Dear Fifth Estate:

We think you've got a good paper goin' there. No doubt it's thanks to the women revolutionaries on the staff and the highly sensitive men who can tune in to the complete struggle on all wavelengths primordial ooze of earth's discontent 10,000,000 years ago to the clear light of the higher class consciousness we are all now confronted with (or at least some of us are).

"If you go for revolution and neglect yourselves, then you're going about it backwards, like all militants."

— R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*

We couldn't agree more.

Love and Power,

Art-Research

P.O. Box 6

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England

*Staff Response:* The *Fifth Estate* is good because of the intervention of the Plutonian Space Fleet and for no other reason. Please, be so advised.

Also from Art-Research: What's the difference between Mama and Dada? Answers (in any form) should be sent to the above address. All replies will be included in our next exhibition. It is not even necessary to answer the question.

## Just Business

The following was received by the *Fifth Estate* after a request to receive publications was sent to China:

Dear Madam:

We note from your letter that you are interested in getting Chinese publications and are ready to serve you any time on request. Being a business concern, however, we only sell publications on a commercial basis and do not handle the exchange of publications.

To acquaint you with our publications, we are sending you some sample copies of our periodicals. If you find any items that interest you, please let us have your order.

Guozi Shudian

Peking, China

## Dear Fellow Shirkers:

We'd like to know if Mao will join V.I. Lenin in a duet of "It's My Party..." (see "Mao Aids Chile Dogs," #271, April 1976), now that he's in a glass box, too?

Windexing

Red Mongoose Collective

Honolulu, Hawaii

# fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #277, October 1976

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