

Letters

Various Authors

1977

CIA Supports FE

Dear Fifth Estate:

I refuse to renew my subscription to your radical rag for the simple reason I have some absurdist evidence you've been running a bogus journalistic revolution in the Motor City. That's right! I talked to Mr. Green jeans yesterday and he said you guys are being FUNDED BY THE CIA! It does make sense, you know. After all, how can you freaks continue to run a radical rag with NO advertising, continually asking your subscribers to put up bucks here and there and go to benefit parties. Come on. I've got a degree from Wayne State and I've been out of work since November 1975 (actually I'm bragging but the point is where the hell are you guys getting your money?) I actually don't give a shit since I don't give a shit about money any more than you guys do. The thing is, if you guys are being funded by the CIA that means you can continue perpetually with your anarchist ideals and absurdist philosophies. Something fishy in Detroit, and it ain't Mother Waddles.

Peace, Love, Struggles and Natural delights,
Cap'n Funhouse
Sarasota, Fla.

Debate Disappoints

To the Fifth Estate:

Your world-historical debate "On Organization" has finally moved me from the baseline disappointment with which I have witnessed the development of your position (as evidenced by Ned Ludd in the Letters section).

Being aware that you consider Marx to be out of style, I really should have expected this. Nevertheless, I will repeat again what I had hoped we would all know by now: Analysis must be historically specific if it is to avoid shallow dogmatism and mystification. The assertion you make that there is no possible "revolutionary activity" within capitalism, that all of it devolves down into "gang activity" is so abstract (in Hegel's sense) as to be not only devoid of content but to promote good old-fashioned confusion. What is really explained by a critique relying on the invocation of categories like "Leninist" and "Bolshevik" to address the complexity of the current situation in the United States? Less than nothing. In this dubious mode of discourse you join the majority of the American Left, which used the unexplained category of "revisionist" in precisely the same manner as you (both Ed Clarke and E.B. Maple) use the jargon of the ultra-left: not as discourse, but as curse, with the (explicit?) purpose of ending discussion, of having the last word.

And what a last word it is. You present us with the necessary disintegration of all attempts to reach out of the alienated forms of capitalist daily interaction into gang activity; with the impossibility of conceiving of a development occurring within the capitalist landscape that could help to ferment revolutionary activity farther down the

road; with the impossibility of reformist activity being dialectical, i.e., cutting both ways. You are left with merely reactive forms of political practice, nihilistic propaganda, the retreat into personal activity and increasingly into a desperate conception of the entire revolutionary project as a form of terrorism.

Consider Camatte's concept of "the real domination of capital." At first sight it appears to be a historically specific concept, but in reality it is a false abstraction from the historical process. If capital had achieved complete and total autonomy over human social existence, then perhaps it would be true that all activity was mere "gang" activity. It wouldn't matter much, though, since history would have ground to a halt; not only communist societies, but capitalist ones as well, are predicated on human production and reproduction. The history of capitalism is the history of various ways of stealing and deforming the fruits of that production; capital itself produces no value. Thus a monolithic conception of history which forgets the internal contradictions within its concepts becomes a merely ideological history. Capital as conceived by Camatte—shorn of the class struggle—misses the all-important fact that human beings still, in spite of it all, continue to love, to create, and to transform the world.

Since you seem so fond of Hegelian thickets, I refer you to one of my favorites: Hegel's discussion of that particular form of the unhappy consciousness which chooses, instead of a revolt against existing conditions, to decry all activity as imperfect per se, inadequate against the abstract purity of its own "beautiful soul." (*Phenomenology*, pp. 665–6) Though this attitude is no doubt simpler than the complexity of a historically specific theory and practice, it is likely that the latter is more conducive to the development of the Communist movement.

Ed Clarke, however inadequate and ideologically distorted his analysis may be, at least appears to be aware of some real issues. He makes a point so basic that it is appalling that it needs to be repeated, yet you dismiss it as "Leninism": We can learn to be something more to each other than members of gangs. While the theoretical avant-garde may not be aware of them, there are some concrete historical movements in the world (i.e. the women's movement, peer-group therapy, cultural politics à la 60's) that give historical consent (albeit distorted) to this, a most basic of human characteristics. These heartening, if contradictory, social developments are continuing to contribute, even in the absence of a mass movement, to people's ability to associate in ways that are precisely outside of the capitalist norm. This increasingly self-conscious process of social reproduction feeds into effective instrumental political activity, and is itself oppositional in more subtle ways that cannot be understood, let alone critiqued, by Camatte's reified approach.

E.B. Maple not only seems unaware of such complex phenomena as these, but with his love for exaggeration and snottiness in the place of analysis, is able to assert that all those who attempt to act in any organized manner face "a hierarchization even more extreme than society-at-large." Need I remind you that to spout the omnipotence of the existing social forms, the impossibility of any opposition to them, is exactly the essence (of capitalist ideology)?

Tom Athanasiou

Berkeley, Calif.

E.B. Maple responds: I appreciate the fact that you have had to repeat your advice on analysis so often, but do you really contend that you are being more historically specific" with your covert defense of organizations than what you are attacking?

Incidentally, the quote about "hierarchization" that you attribute to me is clearly marked as Camatte's, not mine (although I would support it fully). Also, the concept of the "real domination of capital" originated with Marx, not Camatte.

Your description of what we are "left with" is directly contradicted by what I wrote in the review about the imperative of rebellion and other FE article: such as the one last issue about the struggle in Germany against nuclear power.

Response to Stodder

Dear Fifth Estate:

I would like to respond briefly to the remarks of my friend Jim Stodder in the last issue of the *Fifth Estate*.

I don't believe I've ever said that the overthrow of capital "would be sufficient to end all domination." It is, however, a necessary precondition for the ending of all forms of domination. I have to agree with Jim that we don't simply want to overthrow capital; we want to be free.

In my review of Camatte & Collu, I accepted for the sake of argument their thesis that hierarchy is based on differing levels of theoretical development. Jim is quite right to point out that the matter is much more complex. The problem as I would formulate it is: how do we establish an enduring egalitarian relationship(s) within a group(s) struggling to overthrow class society? I have to argue that the best way to begin is in formal (or "constitutional") equality. Of course this is not sufficient in itself. Of course it could degenerate into intrigue and bureaucratic scheming. Of course we have to do more. What I favor is the development of a social context in which we could learn how to do more: the context being a national libertarian revolutionary movement organization. The little isolated anarchist groups which seldom even communicate with each other are simply inadequate to the task. After all, what could be more "impersonal" than our present isolation from each other?

I have to add that I do not share Jim's optimism regarding the various "alternative" service groups. It is to his credit, however, that he is trying to "move the future in a libertarian direction"...instead of whining about "unfavorable objective conditions."

Finally (and reluctantly) I would like to reply to E.B. Maple. Maple's "definitions" of a politician are simply silly. If I so much as suggest to a friend that we go someplace and have a cup of coffee together, that makes me a "politician" ("trying to organize others for purposes which are not directly theirs"). Horseshit! Maple does not understand the difference between making proposals and making decisions. Anyone should be free to propose any common activity they like (otherwise, what is the use of freedom?); but all of us must be free to decide whether we will carry out that social activity or not. "The politician uses force or manipulation to decide "for us" what we shall do or not do. Maple's "theory" equates the overthrow of authority with the end of all common human activity; there would never emerge the "free association of equals" because no one would dare suggest it. In practice, Maple throws this nonsense to the winds and participates in the Fifth Estate collective. Yes, it does "seem to make more sense to evaluate people's activity and come up with a definition from there." I guess I can't directly propose that Maple apply this valuable insight more consistently (for fear of exposing myself as a "politician"), but one can always hope!

for a life without bosses,

Ed Clark

Oakland, Calif.

Words of Wisdom

Comrades,

Ed Clark's fears are quite real and justified but he must remember it is always better to be pissed off than pissed on.

V.T. Lee

Rosendale, N.Y.

Humor Helps

To the FE:

The TV guide and the Dr. Hypocrisy column in the Dec. '76 issue constituted the first signs of real humor since that issue in the fall of '75 that brought the Sun parody and the Fuck Authority poster. It was a sigh of relief for me to see such input; I had more than grown tired of the usual FE-;Armageddon-style humor. Thank you for finally listening to those of us who have been pleading for something that is not both funny and depressing at the same time. Your serious articles have been generally quite good, but they have a tendency to depress and frustrate readers because of their reasonably accurate descriptions of economic and political reality. Humor in your paper, I think,

should have social content, but depressing social humor defeats the function of humor; humor should help liven spontaneity and relieve excess introverted seriousness.

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Ann Arbor

FE Take-Offs

Dear Fifth:

The Living Newspaper is a theater collective operating in the Cambridge-Boston area. We perform a weekly free show based on the current events reported in magazines and newspapers. [Our model was a similar Living Newspaper which developed during the Depression of the 1930s and produced—plays about people's oppression and exploitation].

The Fifth Estate is one of our sources for such dramatics.

Part of our show is the display and reading of ridiculous advertisements from the capitalist press. In our most recent production we presented your brilliant and hilarious "Un-Dewars Profile" (Leon F. Czolgosz) ad. It was one of our biggest "hits."

We want to de-mystify "the theater," to make it accessible to audiences, and to encourage and help others form such acting collectives. If anyone wants further information, please write to the address below—or call if you prefer.

The Living Newspaper

136 River Street

Cambridge, Mass 02139

(617) 492-8914

More On Councils

Dear Fifth Estate Comrades:

After following the protracted, tedious & rather sterile controversy about the nature of the Spanish Revolution and workers councils, I've decided to respond to the note sent in by Bob & Scott (Feb. '77 FE) which raises the crucial question of the "content of communism."

Again, I have to assert that neither Ned Ludd's nihilistic hysteria nor the righteous indignation of syndicalist ideologues can blur the historic significance of the fleeting revolutionary forms erected by the Spanish proletariat in 1936. I must further insist that no new discussion within the FE has brought any more clarity than the 1972 "Point Blank!" article although Luxenburgist Inter. Communist Current is bringing new information to light in their journals).

Certainly, all genuine revs. share along with Ludd a deep-seated, instinctual hatred for the industrial superstructure of capitalism. Our movement will most definitely destroy the entire physical plant of alienated labor, but this must be determined according to the pace set by the dynamics of social revolution...

If other workers choose to rashly obliterate the machines that dominate them rather than consciously reshape them, I'm not going to stand in their way. My argument (now & then) is that the period thereby needed to construct a new world from scratch—on the complete debris of the old—would promote scarcity & chaos, & possibly a reflux of the rev. The proletariat must have thought, as well as instinct, to create a new human civilization.

No one was more excited and empathetic than I when the *Wash. Post* pressmen sabotaged the computerized machines which exploit their daily lives. But in actuality, their actions showed the inchoate level of our present, real communist movement after a 60-year phase of almost relentless counter-rev. Working-class rebellion in the form of sabotage, wildcat strikes & absenteeism marks the limited plateau of opposition to capitalism of the past period that we are now about to supersede.

For the *Wash. Post* workers, wouldn't it have been better if they had expropriated the presses as their own property & printed wildcat, radical issues of the *Post*? Of course, they couldn't do this because our movement has not

yet reached the conscious and organizational level to support such projects. However, within its specific context, the wrecking of the presses was a most profound rev. act by the workers in that it assaulted the immediate source of their daily misery & was done on an autonomous basis (outside the union or any leftist party).

But we need to advance beyond these random, disjointed rejections of capitalist productive relations which in isolation can always be contained. No one with eyes to see can now deny that class struggle exists, that the workers are beginning to fight on their own terrain. What still needs to be achieved for this current period is rev. consolidation; to think hard & creatively about the appropriate form that an all-sided liberatory workers' organization must assume. To label such efforts as "leninism" (as some FE writers have done) is the height of absurdity, to say the least.

I think most people who have sent in letters on the Span. Rev. & the councils have not carefully or thoroughly reflected these problems, & have misinterpreted Jacobs & Winks' contention that the councils are only a point of departure for our contemporary rev. movement: "What was so difficult to accomplish in Spain in 1936, today becomes the absolute minimum for any proletarian revolution."

The kind of Bakuninist impetuosity espoused by Ludd is surely integral to the process of social insurrection, but, really, has nothing to do with the positive "content of communism." When Bob & Scott denigrate my call for the conscious & total radical transformation of the means of social production, they actually challenge the very synthetic language of dialectics! Anyway, in order to make my phrase more concrete, this is something of what I tangibly conceive the "content of communism" to be:

It means in rapid & combined succession the universal abolition of wage-labor, the production of commodities, the State, the market, & the division of labor. At the point of production, the communist method of social rev. means the generalization of self-governing units (assemblies) of all proletarians.

In the short run, it means these rev. units would seek the absolute reduction of socially necessary labor-time (perhaps 10 to 12 hours per week), the maximization of automated technology, the humanization of the work environment—enjoyable rather than repugnant sights, sounds & smells, the complete elimination of parasitic sectors of the economy (banking, financing, marketing, advertising, insurance, govt. welfare, etc.) & their integration into productive labor, the maximum rotation of all skills and tasks, the free & direct exchange of all food-stuff & products on the basis of human need & use, & the issuance of a universal producer-consumer card entitling everyone to all the wealth of the new world organization.

Next, according to the tempo of the revolution, it means the transformation of all onerous work into playful activity. It means the radical modification of industrial, agricultural & technical outlays to a human scale. Physical plants & machines would be systematically dismantled & retooled in harmony with newly acquired human needs & senses. Production centers would be converted to the greatest extent possible into opulent surroundings—playgrounds-of innovative, praxis in an environment of delightful colors, music & odors.

In order to move beyond the "natural" repressive familial forms of patriarchal monogamy & heterosexuality into a truly humanized inter-personal geography, a landscape suitable for generalized lovemaking would be created. It means that festivals, banquets, sports & games of all kinds would be continuously engendered.

Centers of humanized science—physics, astronomy, ecology, biology, zoology oceanography, human & animal health care—and centers of humanized architecture—to poetize all time/space—would be accessible for all. Everyone would be availed of the structuralization & fun of children's communes; all variety of flora & fauna would be ecologically enmeshed into all liberated areas.

This is some of what the positive "content of communism" means to me, & these are the ideas that I express as necessary for authentic human freedom now as a revolutionary & in the future as a participant in an assembly of fellow producers. Now let's get it on!

Ted Lopez
Tampa, Fla.

Staff Response: Apparently old Situationism never dies, and since it refuses to do-the-honorable thing and fade away, the best we can wish for it is that it would grow up, or at least begin "situating" itself in the real world.

What has always been most offensive about the American offspring of Situationism is that, while it invariably (and invariably arrogantly) poses itself as the most advanced of the advanced when it comes to radical theory, the fact is that it has always been nothing more than the infantile posturing of late arriving "radicals" hopping on a

bandwagon already abandoned. The net effect is that Situationism American-style is exactly that—a mere style of pompous formulations without substance, of once -living ideas become the latest dogma.

Case in point: your slavishly uncritical regurgitation of the worst of Situationisms blind technocratic utopianism.

Every ingredient contained within your recipe for communist upside-down ‘cake smells bad, not least your science-fiction fantasy of a unified global totalitarianism to supplant the fragmentary one we have now.

Outside of the lunacy of “universal producer-consumer” cards (a device which international capital has already beaten you to with its VISA world-wide charge card), outside even of the lunacy of the conceptual framework (again, capital’s) which allows you to continue to view real flesh and blood human beings as so many producer-consumers, outside of all this, could you please tell us who or what is going to issue such cards to us? Could you tell us what is going to administer and regulate (police) this universal production and distribution of goods and services if not an enormous centralized bureaucracy? Is this the “new world organization” of which you speak?

If so, let us make one small suggestion: Rather than beat around the bush, since they already have the organizational structure, hardware and experience, let’s have the FBI perform this function in North America, the KGB in Russia, Savak in Iran, and so forth around the world. Of course, this would only be after we have “consciously reshaped” them under a “radically transformed” CIA into a sophisticated global network of computerized data banks and satellite communications systems, all of which, having once been set in motion, will operate benevolently and neutrally to the ever-greater benefit of humankind for ever and ever, amen. And all with a “minimum of socially necessary” upkeep which will, at one and the same time, extend and “maximize automation” for the entire world while reducing said socially necessary labor time to a mere 10 to 12 hours per week. How long do you think this might take, Ted? And please don’t kid yourself that we’re being facetious with you about your collectivist fruitcake; we’ve already seen what the advanced management theories of others like you have done for the world.

As to the “Bakuninist impetuosity” (what a wise and understanding father figure you are to those of us who have not carefully or thoroughly reflected on these problems); we are pleased to note that it’s not a problem which is ever likely to confront you personally, since it’s evident that while the real “genuine revolutionaries” are out in the streets springing everything into the air, you’ll be sitting at home trying to decide for them what they should catch as it comes back down. We can only hope that, given, as you put it, 60 years of counter-revolution—largely as you don’t put it, at the hands of your Bolshevik forebears—when you and others like you present yourselves to these “rash” workers -as the complementary thought to their impetuous instinct, they will simply tell you to take your plans for the global consolidation of capital and go away.

We’re sorry, incidentally, that you had to sit through the protracted, tedious and rather sterile controversy, but on the other hand, imagine how we felt having to read your letter.

fifth Estate

Various Authors

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/281-march-1977/letters>

Fifth Estate #281, March, 1977

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