

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1977

Obscene Competition

To the FE:

Let me make some observations regarding the recent debates in the FE on organization, worker's councils, and so on. I hope you take what I say as friendly criticism rather than as the beginning of a polemic.

First of all, many of the statements in the paper, both by correspondents and by FE staff, display considerable pomposity, as well as a desire to dismiss as idiotic or reactionary the views of opponents. This kind of revolutionary one-upmanship not only fails to clarify the issues; it also risks discouraging the participation of people who doubt their own glibness or literary skill.

You may want to shoot me for this, but I think these debates illustrate Camatte's point that revolutionaries engage in "an obscene competition" with each other, "in order to attract notice."

Secondly, even without polemical excesses, the adoption of hard and fast positions on questions like "the revolt against work" doesn't seem like a good idea to me. We may well get trapped into defending these positions at all costs, which will make it harder to deal honestly with whatever problems or ambiguities they entail.

Last of all, a number of FE replies to critics (e.g. to Ted Lopez) imply that when the "real" revolutionary movement comes along, it will have the same contempt for such people that the FE staff does. True or false, this comes dangerously close to speaking on behalf of the proletariat—something you rightly objected to on the part of Charles Reeve.

Sauce only for the goose?

Larry Cohen

San Francisco, Cal.

Same As Von Braun

To Whom It May Concern:

In your February 1977 issue of the Fifth Estate, I noticed on page two, "A Premature Obituary." [see "What a Difference a Day Makes," FE# 280] You mention Werner Von Braun's terminal case of cancer and "wish him a speedy death".

Also, you cite the instance where Von Braun wanted to send V-2 rockets every two minutes instead of every hour. Although I don't condone or overlook Von Braun's actions during World War II, I certainly don't agree with your article wishing for a speedy death. Every heinous crime of humanity started with a thought and a "wish for death".

So what makes you, and any reader agreeing with that article, better than Von Braun? In fact, he wanted to hurry the V-2 attacks which meant a hurried death and you want (or would like) his “speedy death.” Before you criticize and judge others, take a look at yourself.

A Concerned Reader

End To Politicians?

To The Fifth Estate:

Although I have seen probably more day-to-day resentment come down around commune members having not carried out their share of the household tasks, Michael Betzold is undoubtedly correct in his assertion that sexuality produces the strongest emotions in a communal situation (“Communal living,” FE #281, March, 1977). He didn’t mention any direct experiences of where the problem was dealt with other than to say that “each household must find its own solution among the options of prohibiting sexual relations, group marriage, couples or variations.

He states that leaving the “sexuality to chance is a dangerous approach.” Yes, but probably no more so than in any other living arrangement. Setting down a list of rules governing sexual behavior is no different from what married couples do and probably meets with about the same degree of success.

What do you do in a communal situation if all have agreed to prohibit sexual relations among the members and then two people violate the decision?

It seems difficult to put sexually mature adults together in a living situation and expect that no sexual liaisons are going to develop. Or if you have a “group marriage” what if one member wants a divorce; is he or she expelled from the commune: The plans seem to create as many problems as the solutions. Are there practical experiences?

Where I’ve lived things always were left up to chance and nothing too disastrous ever developed, but maybe we were lucky.

A final note on leftist and libertarian politicians since your answer to Ted Lopez last issue [Letters, FE #281, March, 1977] seemed to be the definitive exposure of the covert authoritarian mentality. However, you may have taken his word too literally for politicians never produce what they promise. Lopez’ utopia sounds like it has all the potential of the Soviet Union where without their version of the “universal producer-consumer card,” you cannot work or buy food—one’s life, as you indicated, becomes dependent upon the issuers of the card (Lopez and his ilk).

Also, you hit at his contempt for “Bakuninist impetuosity” very nicely. What that translated into is workers are the cannon fodder for the revolution, then he steps in and sets up the “correct” version of communism.

This exchange of letters has been extremely beneficial to me, both’ in terms of what tendencies it exposed in others and what it caused me to re-examine. It probably also means you have heard the last of Lopez.

Yours for Politicians Ablaze,

Ned Ludd

Guess Not, Ned

The following was received as a xerox of the original and was preceded by a painting of grotesque figures titled by the writer: “Slob’s Gallery: The *Fifth Estate* Staff.”

To The Fifth Estate:

With the publication of the “Marx: Good-Bye To All That” article (FE #281, March 1977), you of the *Fifth Estate* staff (better known as “Friends of Abbie Hoffman Bureau”) have definitively passed (away) to the Hides of (genital) rot.

You F.E. staffers, morbid followers of Jacques Camatte (himself Adorno’s poor ghost) that you are, must be acknowledged as one more organization of (petty) bourgeois gangsters—which you yourselves readily admit anyway. We feel that you F.E. capitalist racketeers should quickly meet the identical fate of another like-minded fellow mobster: Sonny Cordleone (sic).

A team of 100 Wilhelm Reichs, working steadily for 30 years, couldn't cure your acute orgasmic impotence and anti-polymorphous perversity: analysis, interminable. Without exception, all of your (feeble) libidinal energies are channeled into sadistic (masculine) aggression and reaction formation (i.e., a chronic hippy-militant posture).

Another revolutionary sentence to be executed upon you is to let you sleep in your own bed every night and look at yourselves in the mirror every morning for the next 60 years.

Your ideas of "revolutionary violence" in practice is to throw a cheap pie at an even cheaper Oriental adolescent pimp (and then get the shit kicked out of you by the goon-squad of a rival gang). When you skeletons hit the streets the only thing that's going to be sprung into the air is you. For you to paraphrase Marx is very anomalous seeing as how you've discarded all pleasurable methodology from dialectics to diaphragms.

Your "anarchist" ideology is a New Left sour soup of hippy-individualism, ecologism, reformism (i.e., feminism), voluntarism & Dodoism. To the contrary of your choirboy purity & paranoia about "Leninism," you all-too-conveniently forget to mention your reprinting of tracts from the I.C.C. (whose membership is vanguardist, gives critical support to the Bolsheviks & retains the notion of a State after a "proletarian revolution") & the spectacular promotion of falsified information from the maoist-front "Gary Tyler Defense Committee."

With your glaring affinity for the global blousons noirs (your class), we suggest that you join the Erroll Flynns & hire yourselves as bodyguards (armed with The Wandering of Humanity) for the next Bob Seeger concert for a couple of kegs of beer (your drink). This way you can vent all of your death-instinct desires against fellow hippies: Viva la Muerte!

Everything Marx ever said about anarchists, & was true, you are. In fact, everything real anarchists ever said about fake anarchists you also are. If you had somehow been in his militia column (which is really impossible for your kind of braggadocio-coward & limp snake), it's no wonder Durruti had to shoot some of his own men.

If we, as revolutionaries, offer proposals before the proletarian class that are not emancipatory, then this can always be self-corrected through class-wide discussion & action within workers' assemblies. On the other hand, you F.E. staffers, the ejaculatia praecox of the anarcho-hippy New Left, have absolutely no concrete ideas or practical suggestions as to the self-organization of the "world historical party" of social revolution; you don't even have any cognizance of your own social origins.

In your puerile taste for nihilistic violence you would like to repeat the futility of Detroit '67, gleefully watching the State tear up the bodies of young black rebels. And by the way, someone ought to tell Zerzan, anti-leftist careerist & cheerleader of the terrorist underground, that the workers were defeated at Watts in 1965 & in Paris '68, & if they had moved to directly confront the State at that time, they would have been thoroughly slaughtered (but we guess that's what you "Hot Day in July" hippies like anyway).

Ted Lopez

Tampa, Fla.

P.S. Who wants to "grow up" to be an adulterated like you?

Staff Response: Gee, Ted, does that mean you don't like us any more?

Reject The Racket

Dear Fifth Estate:

I'm afraid that the discussion of "On Organization" has done more to obscure Camatte/Collu's real contribution than to illuminate or further it.

In "On Organization" Camatte and Collu try to express their reasons for rejecting a mode of practice which many have taken and many still do take to be synonymous with "revolutionary activity" or "revolutionary organization". They approached a question that others have tried to deal with, by means either of a political criticism of "sectarianism" or a psychological criticism of group dynamics or character, with a socioeconomic criticism.

The racketist dynamic, they suggest, is a spontaneous development in a society dominated by capital. Capital transforms the social fabric, molds it in its own image. So that when we find ourselves involved in, or meet oth-

ers involved in, little political rackets in combat, we are not witness to an accident, deviation or product of bad intentions but to a social tendency rooted in capitalist production relations.

Opposing this society is thus inextricably tied up with opposing this tendency. “The critique of capital ought to be, therefore, a critique of the racket in all its forms, of capital as social organism.”

Unfortunately, much of Camatte/ Collu’s piece is obscure, inconsistent and, in my opinion, mistaken. However, their description of how a gang operates (pp. 13–18) is quite good—familiar to anyone who’s been involved in one—and their position on organization, in its very inconsistency, at least leaves open the possibility of a dialectical supersession of the sterile sort of debate (organization vs. anti-organization) we’ve seen in the letters section of *Fifth Estate*:

“The refusal of all organization is not a simple anti-organizational position, To leave it at that would be to again manifest a desire for originality, to try to set oneself up as different and thereby reach a position from which to attract people. From there the movement of racketization would begin all over again.” (p.25)

Camatte and Collu themselves try to preview “becoming organizational” (p.26). But they are unable to advance beyond some suggestive abstractions. In that, I think, they truly express a stage most of us are in. Common activity is at times a necessity and at times a real pleasure; we need it and we want it. But we’ve often been disappointed to see it devolve into racketist non-communication. *Fifth Estate* is a case in point; it shows signs of becoming, ironically enough, a sort of Camattist, anti-organizational racket.

The point isn’t to accuse. I’ve been encouraged by the fact that over the past few years more and more people—whatever their terminology—have at least come to see the necessity and importance of rejecting the racket. I’m hopeful that this desire can, over time, find the means for its realization. Non-racketist organization, just as communism, is both a goal and a real movement.

R. Reiter
Albany, Ca.

Hazel Pork

High FE:

I just got hold of last year’s editions of the *Fifth Estate* at a public library in Warren. Browsing through, I came across a couple of articles concerning your legal battle with Mutha Bell [“FE Beats Ma Bell,” FE #272, May 1976]. This repressiveness reminded me of some of the shit I am now experiencing at Hazel Pork (er, Park) High School in my senior year.

This is a recount of the events. One day while in a calculus class, I was conversing with two other students while the Teacher was lecturing (a great sin for an inferior adolescent to commit in a publik school). The Teacher then turned to me, and in the manner of all great fascists, told me to sit in the back corner of the room.

Like a nice sheep (baa!) I went to the back of the classroom, trying my hardest not to tell him to fuck off. Like a typical authoritarian-disciplinarian-totalitarian pig dog he wasn’t satisfied with that punishment. He was power-tripping so he kept ranting and raving.

He said that if anyone came near me or even talked to me they would be automatically removed from class. This was the breaking point. I got up out of my seat and told him I couldn’t handle his bullshit anymore. I then walked out of the classroom.

The next day I Walked back into the classroom with a speech in hand. I stood before the podium, in front of the class, and gave my speech. I explained the reasons why I was dropping the class. I talked in a calm manner and didn’t use fuck or shit or any profanity at all. I described the Teacher as a “highly mechanized robot” and a “power-tripper.” The speech lasted about one minute and then I calmly walked out of the classroom. Perfect theater!

The next day the administration was shitting bricks. It seemed that the Teacher wanted to have me immediately expelled from school. He also threatened to sue me in court for “defamation of character” if the school didn’t act accordingly. This incident occurred about a month and a half ago and it still hasn’t been settled.

The Teacher has had a warming of heart and only wants a three-day suspension for me or a written apology which I would publicly proclaim to the class. All three principals have passed this case around to each other and none of them know how to handle it. It went to the superintendent of the school system two weeks ago and I have yet to hear anymore

The principals have really reacted strangely to this situation. The first principal who handled it resorted to emotional pleading to get me to make an apology. He tried to come on as a "radical friend." He even made a confidential statement to me that "sometimes I feel that if the system won't give in to changes then I should burn it."

He said that I would be hurting myself and "the cause" by not giving in. I didn't give in so it went to the next principal. He handled it in a different manner. He gave me the choice of suspension or making some kind of written apology to the Teacher. I made a written statement and submitted it to the Teacher.

He rejected it because "it didn't admit I was wrong" in my speech procedure. After this rejection the case was turned over to the superintendent.

I live in a fairly conservative community and this is the first case of open defiance to a teacher by a student to go to the super and possibly the school board. The "crime" which I have committed is not following proper procedure. I didn't ask the teacher for permission to speak in front of "his" class.

The principals themselves won't suspend me because they know I'm serious about what I say and they feel threatened. Confrontations with teachers is an annual event with me and I've never been punished yet. Last year one teacher threatened to quit unless I was withdrawn from his class.

This above story is a typical example of the bullshit and repressive techniques which we, as students, have to go through every day. I have never seen an article in your paper dealing with high school students and their predicament. This is an exceptionally important issue in the struggle for liberation because, unlike college students, we are forced by this piggish society to go to these schools. For us to be able to have a firm hold on our minds, we must attack that mind-erasing object which we all have in common. Namely, authoritarianism and repressiveness in public schools;

This Teacher is still threatening me with legal action. He has already consulted his lawyer. I would like some advice on what chances this fascist has of winning this possible court case and what I should do as a next step in this important battle for the basic freedom for the youth of this society to have their minds given back to them. If they don't soon give it back to me I will have to take it back.

Fuk Publik Skools

John Dick

Throw It

Dear People:

I have a comment, or a hope: which is that the woman disguised as a hippie earthmother accompanying the stilted article on communal living (see last issue [FE #281, March, 1977]) will go ahead with throwing that thing in her left hand, I mean really...

Noa-Noa

New York City



fifth Estate

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<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/282-april-may-1977/letters-to-the-fifth-estate>
Fifth Estate #282, April-May, 1977

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