

Letters

Various Authors

Related: See Comment from the *Fifth Estate* regarding Black Rose Books, Ltd. in this issue.

Fresh Air

Dear FE:

The economist-minded, techno-fascist remains of the situationists, the socialist corpses who whine about the need for federations in their “libertarian” mouthpiece, *Synthesis*, and the worshipers and arbiters of commodity relations (i.e. Black Rose Books and their business-is-business cohorts) ought to rumble with SRAFers assembling their conference on Wildcat Mountain this summer. It would make for a better ecology; I know I’d enjoy the breath of fresh air.

This is to notify the proprietors of the reigning lifelessness—workerists, determinists, humanizers, professors, politicians, planners, architects, and other garbage-spewing ismists—that you’re of the world we intend to destroy. Away with your antiquated and imprisoning concepts. If I thought I had your world to look forward to, I’d be heading for the bridge.

Behold the rioters and looters of Chicago and New York, the authenticity of defiance. For imaginations ablaze!

Yours in Love and Nihilism,

Nedwina Ludd

San Francisco

Just Trashing

Dear FE:

Please, don’t try to insult our intelligence by claiming that your “libertarian criticism” is not in fact slanderous trashing. Why didn’t you check out the facts with BRB, or let them respond in the same issue? Are you prepared to bring down your self-righteous wrath on Stewart Christie and comrades at Cienfuegos Press? They also have copyrights, pay wages and commit other BRB sins.

Frankly, it appears that you and Black & Red manufactured Joe Doaks and his letter. [FE #284, July 1977] Some very active anarchists in Boston told me that they had never heard of “Doaks,” despite the fact that he claims to reside there. But you gave yourselves away with the B&R response. It smacks of the same attitude of “Doaks.” Also, everything BRB is accused of, B&R is guiltless.

In all sincerity, can you give us a realistic and positive alternative to BRB’s policy, given the facts that it is not morally Wrong, 1) for the BRB workers to have their main work support them, since not all libertarians are as “fortunate” as a certain B&R member to live off a state pension, 2) to use a commercial printer since BRB, unlike

B&R, doesn't have its own printing facilities, and 3) to choose to reach the general public with your radical literature, unlike B&R which chooses to spread its literature among the already politicized left?

Although you usually have the last word on letters criticizing your position, I find that your responses are often so defensive, insulting and dogmatic that you come across as Leninists. Worse, when "libertarians" slanderously trash others publicly, I question their maturity and commitment to revolutionary social change. You appear to be revolutionist (sic) eunuchs in my eyes.

Scott Weinstein
Our Generation
Montreal

Staff response: Although your junior detective work in discovering hidden identities and finding the sources of people's income may someday qualify you for a position in the revolutionary police, we regret to inform you that you have guessed the wrong culprit.

Also, it's hard for us to understand your indignation over the use of pseudonyms since their use has been common practice since the origins of the revolutionary movement. For example, you know perfectly well that a leading member of BRB uses a name other than his own in all of his communications, including letters to this paper, and that any number of BRB authors, including one of a book currently under discussion do similarly.

You make it sound almost peculiar that people involved in a printing project would have their own equipment, but of the many groups around the country that do, mostly they only needed the motivation to obtain it. We know of one group in a Canadian city near you that even went so far as to smuggle one in from the U.S.

These projects don't view this as only a cost-saving measure, but as part of an effort to carry out as many functions as possible themselves that would otherwise be done by wage workers. And it is not just a matter of principle—what really makes a project come alive is when the people involved learn to do as much of the work themselves. Any other way means you become a check-signer for the wages of those who really did the work or a clerk who fills book orders each day.

From BRB

Staff note: The following is a response from Black Rose Books, Ltd. prior to the appearance of the July 1977 *Fifth Estate* and follows a letter from our staff asking that their answer to the Joe Doaks letter be shortened to our space limitations. In the same message, we asked why Ammunition Books had not been receiving a 50% discount on BRB titles which they say they grant to "anarchist bookstores. —

Dear F.E.:

With reference to your letter of 28 June, we regret the fact that you do not want to publish our reply in full. Your suggestion that you want to reverse the trend of long letters is misplaced. Perhaps you can begin your new policy later on. As we stated in our previous correspondence, we must insist that our reply be reprinted in full.

If you would have offered us the comradely gesture of allowing us to reply in the same issue as the letter from Joe Doaks then perhaps we would have submitted something shorter. But the approach to this kind of slander is a very old procedure, used in the sectarian left as a right art, and leaves us with a great deal of suspicion as to the various motives behind this letter.

As to the discounts offered Ammunition Bookstore, our response is—do you consider yourselves an anarchist bookstore? Also in our experience anarchist bookstores do not take up to six months to pay their invoices to comrades.

With Best Wishes,

Jean Nataf
Black Rose Books
Montreal

For Wages

Dear Fifth Estate:

I felt that your editorial about the Black Rose Books controversy [FE #284, July 1977] as totally inadequate for a number of reasons.

1) You did not apologize to BRB for the inaccuracies of Doak's letter; 2) You should have asked for BRB's reply before you printed Doak's letter and you failed to state that this kind of thing will not happen in the future; and 3) You completely ignored the fine work BRB has done.

My main objection, however, to your editorial was your utter failure to distinguish BRB from other capitalist publishers. Random House will never translate or publish a book like Durruti until they believe they can make a big profit from doing so. BRB is a non-profit cooperative which is engaged in a service to libertarians that no capitalist publisher can undertake. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

Your editorial said, "We fail to see anything in BR B's activity which significantly marks it as in any sense a libertarian project." Nowhere in your editorial do you indicate just exactly what constitutes a libertarian project. BRB says it allows comrades to ignore their copyright. Isn't this a crucial difference between them and Random House? BRB is not the enemy.

Typesetter's note: Since the BRB letter printed above clearly implies that we are no longer their comrades, would that mean we would not get permission to reprint BRB copyrighted material? This writer is an idiot! Read on!

In a libertarian society copyrights would not need to exist. That day is still to come. I think it is a proper thing for BRB to protect itself against exploitation by using copyrights. Does FE have a bank account? Does FE have its equipment insured? The point is that all of us are forced to live under a lot of capitalist rules.

To imply as your editorial does that we can now live without obeying any of these rules is hopelessly idealistic. To fail to recognize BRB as comrades like yourselves in the struggle against the capitalist rules is outrageous.

How can FE in its editorial take pride in the fact that it knows friends who disseminate libertarian ideas but don't make a living out of it? What's wrong with BRB earning a fair living? If your answer is that no one can earn a "pure" living then are you suggesting that workers at BRB work for free and earn their living elsewhere? Why does FE pay its printing bills but not its workers? Because of principle? I doubt it. BRB is a cooperative business doing their best to promote libertarianism. BRB should be congratulated and encouraged, not be utterly condemned as FE has done.

Yours for Anarchy,
Tom Copeland
St. Paul, Minn.

Original Sin

To The F.E.:

Aside from the specific charges against Black Rose Books by Black & Red—charges that must be answered—the principle of attacking Black Rose for dealing in "commodities" is crazy. Of course, you deny that you are "pure" or "exemplary." Since it's impossible to not produce commodities, even with Black & Red's best intentions, this whole business begins to sound like the Marxist equivalent of Original Sin, with you proclaiming your own guilt—the better to stick it to Black Rose.

Look, if I can quit working in a shipyard and start selling my “libertarian ideas” for a living, I will. Does that make me “none of those we might call comrades?” To me, the questions to ask about some “libertarian” enterprise, whether it makes a living for people or not, is 1) How it serves a libertarian revolution; 2) how it is controlled by those who contribute to it (ultimately, the whole world, so 1 & 2 are the same question). I don’t know how Black Rose would look in such a test, and I still don’t after reading your attacks.

A related point about “gang activity”: your reply to Ted Lopez’s original mild criticism. You had the better of the argument, but such incredible verbal violence ! What is this except the answer for what-to-do among those who believe there is nothing, with the possible exception of terrorism, we can do while “waiting” for armed revolution? Nothing, but to dream of future executions.

Jim Stodder
New Orleans

Copyright or wrong

Dear FE:

In your Collective Comment on “L’affaire” you note: “As for the copyright—a copyright is quite simply an announcement of private property and it is absolutely unprincipled for anyone claiming to be libertarian to assert such a right...For ourselves, we have utterly no respect for copyrights and will reproduce anything with or without permission and hope others do similarly.”

This FE remark was rather dis-settling coming three pages after your reproduction of my cartoon which was done for you and signed by me and copyrighted by me. By using the cartoon, complete with copyright notice, were you humoring me while covertly considering me “unprincipled?” By using Cover-Up Lowdowns and Young Lust art with my and Paul’s permission, with copyright notices intact, were you violating your own principles?

I think you fail to differentiate between “private” property and “personal” property, to state an old cliché. As a cartoonist and writer, my copyright is one of my few protections against undue capitalist expropriation and profit on my labor. Obviously, living under capitalism, and trying to make a living as an artist, my published work inevitably turns into a commodity right before my very eyes. I may not like this fact, but the copyright at least “supposedly” gives me some control over the process—discouraging media hustlers from appropriating my labor without my permission.

I copyrighted my cartoon for FE not to prevent other libertarian papers from reprinting it (permission from me to reprint such art in other similar publications is either implicit or easily come by), but rather to give me some leverage in case it is used without my permission in some profit-making context.

Despite your protests to the contrary I do find your point of view too “pure” and abstract. I thought that one lesson to be learned from the disintegration of the so-called “counter-culture” was that it was not totally realistic to try and create the alternate economy within Capitalism itself and assume that it would remain untainted. FE may ignore copyrights, Ammo books does not ignore Mich. sales tax.

Jay Kinney
San Francisco

Staff reply: When someone has become a comrade by jointly contributing to the same project as we do and a friend through letters, it becomes much more difficult to use harsh words like “unprincipled,” and makes one choose something more like “inconsistent.” Of course, we had noticed yours and Paul’s copyrights previously, but we actually didn’t notice it in your cartoon of last issue.

All of us are familiar with the misuse of the work of underground cartoonists like Crumb, Cobb, Williamson, etc., by commercial publishers who did not return a dime to the artists. However, that work took as a starting point that it should be income-producing and had a particular marketable quality to it

On the other hand, you violated the norms of capitalist society by the gift nature of your FE cartoon—you labored for no income—and creatures of capital—capitalists and wage-workers—cannot understand this. This “abnormal” behavior is what makes activity exist to the extent it does outside of capitalist relationships, The copyright, as an announcement that it is your private property, brings it back into it just that much more.

The *Fifth Estate*, when it began as a libertarian project in July 1975, specifically decided not to carry commercial advertisements, not to pay salaries, or to copyright material. None of these choices are the traditional way newspapers are run and the first two have created problems in lost potential revenue and keeping full-time staff. Still, it was and is more important to us to maintain our existence through activity consistent with non-capitalist relations, than to reproduce ourselves no matter what

And what if our stories or your art from the FE is ripped off and someone makes a fortune from it? We didn't enter the activity for the money, so how are we being hurt or losing anything? Those items you draw “to make a living” from are property and should be protected, but they shouldn't be confused with a project that tries to operate on a different basis.

As we said, the work of a cartoonist is often subject to being used prejudicially by a commercial publisher, but this isn't the case with the matter under discussion. For instance, Black Rose Books, Ltd. has copyrighted titles originally translated and printed by Black & Red and specifically published without such protection and against their wishes to have such a copyright applied.

These are titles now called Black Rose Books' Yet BRB tells us their sole reason for copyrighting materials is to prevent unscrupulous capitalists from publishing and copyrighting unprotected materials. The fact is, the only publisher we know of who has done this is Black Rose Books.

Advice for Leftists

Dear People:

... My three years of work at a Boston area publishing house gives me sufficient background to observe that Joe Doaks knows little about the realities of publishing. Here I am referring to the ever-soaring costs of paper, typesetting, printing, advertising, rent, salaries, and so on.

His comments on copyrighting are snide and poorly informed. In my experience, it makes a great deal of sense for a leftist to protect his/her work by means of a copyright from unscrupulous persons of all sorts...

Martin Blatt
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Friends:

Some of us here in Rochester have been members of Vanguard Parties at one point or another. We got to thinking awhile back that it would be fun to do a book on the tyranny of vanguardites. Not wanting to play any favorites with regards to one group or another, we were hoping you could run a blurb for us on gathering up stories, accounts, “confessions” and testimonials. No party too big; no party too small!

Rick Sprout
(expelled from YSA, 1970)
Mutualist Books
P.O. Box 1283
Rochester, N.Y. 14603

FE is twirpy

to the fifth estate:

it seems to me that you would know better by now than to write such a twirpy article on the alleged escape plot of joe remiro. at least if you're going to report the incident, you should have the courage and decency to give it the pizzazz that it deserves. the quotes from him scattered throughout the article obviously left out the meat of what went down; merely reporting, "aw, they did it to him again." in the future, for the benefit of us all—this brother ain't no victim who can be helped with 'letters of protest.'

—s.b.

new york

Defending Marx

Dear Friends:

Your criticism of Marx in the March issue ["Marx: Good-Bye To All That" by Peter Werbe, FE #281, March, 1977] falls short of exposing any so-called "contradictions" within his developed philosophy. Your claim that to Marx "human beings are essentially producers and have never been anything else" is absurd. It shows a very basic lack of knowledge of what Marxism is.

Neither Marx or Engels held that the concept of production "rules" a society. All that Marx and Engels ever maintained was "the simple fact that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc." (Engels, "Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx"). This is far from the productivism or economic determinism of which you accuse him. And it is within this that Marx laid out his materialist conception of history.

The purpose of a socialist society (a society of collective or common ownership—negating the existence of property, private or state) is to make man the master over the means of production, with production geared towards use (need) and not exchange (profit).

Furthermore, in reply to your criticism of E. Plawiuk's letter, Marx did sympathize with those workers who destroyed machines because it took away their employment. One has only to read *Capital* to be aware of that. Marx wrote and urged workers "to direct their attacks, not against the material instruments of production, but against the mode in which they are used." (*Capital*). From what you write it seems that you would have urged that Marx demanded the destruction of the factory system itself.

Destroy the factory system and you end capitalism according to your vision. But what would take its place? Only a reversion to feudalism since socialism (again, a society which meets human needs) presupposes an advanced technology to meet these ends. The workers could not simply will socialism. It would have been suicide.

Finally, your idea that Marxism contains within it the germ of Soviet or Chinese state capitalism is based on pure ignorance. To Marx, the socialist revolution could be nothing other than the "self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority" (*Communist Manifesto*). Not the party, but the working class itself would seize the state, "lop off" the bureaucracy and military, expropriate the capitalists thus negating themselves as a class as the state dies since it is no longer-needed to maintain a class divided society from where it first arose.

To Lenin "Socialism is nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people" (*The Threatening Catastrophe and How To Fight It*). It was the party which would smash the old state, build a new "worker's" state. All this at a time that Russia was just coming out of its near feudal state. Quite a difference.

Your argument just does not hold water and reminds one of the polemics that Marx had with the followers of Andreas Gottschalk and Wilhelm Wietling who held the stance similar to yours. Because of it they nearly destroyed the revolutionary movement. From beginning to end your article was a humorous distortion.

Yours for socialism

Len Wallace

Windsor, Ontario

Soviet Dissident to Speak

Leonid Plyushch, former Soviet Ukrainian political prisoner and Marxist dissident, will address a rally in defense of human rights and Soviet political prisoners, Sunday, September 11 at 7:00 pm, at the Community Arts Auditorium on the Wayne State University campus. The admission is free and a question and answer session will follow the talk.

Plyushch was confined to a Soviet psychiatric prison/hospital for over two and a half years because of his active opposition to the repressive policies of the Soviet regime. As a result of international pressure, including that of several Western European Communist Parties, Plyushch and his family were exiled in January 1976. Currently residing in Paris, Plyushch is on a North American' speaking tour promoting defense work for Soviet political prisoners.

A pamphlet, "An Interview with Leonid Plyushch," is available for \$1 from Dialoh, P.O. Box 324, Station P, Toronto, Ontario or from Ammunition Books.



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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/285-august-1977/letters>
Fifth Estate #285, August, 1977

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