

Letters

Various Authors

SRAF Report

To Whomever Is Interested:

Well, it seems it was a pretty tame bunch of tabbies up at Wildcat Mountain late in July. Once again, nothing was accomplished at a Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation (SRAF) conference, but the determination of a time and place for next year's rerun. Some people were disappointed that nothing of substance was produced, while others, such as myself, wondered why the temporary assemblage of such a heterogeneous group had to "accomplish" something anyway.

At every large gathering of anarchists I have been to (Des Moines, 1976, Champaign-Urbana, 1976, and Wildcat) at least one group is bent on getting everyone, else to agree to some set of abstract principles, a contract or constitution that must be laid down, before any common action can take place.

In Des Moines it was certain "Principles of unity" which had to be agreed to, outlining a "more oppressed than thou" hierarchy of revolutionary priorities. At Wildcat it was a group of people who felt threatened by the fact that there exist individuals who call themselves anarchist-capitalists, and who felt it was necessary to exclude such people.

Examining the root of this fear, it seems that a group of SRAF "heavies," are disturbed that one Joffre Stewart (a sort of whacked-out anti-Semite who believes in the coming of the anti-christ) is allowed to be published in *Black Star* just because he is a member of SRAF. In fact, in addition to eliminating capitalists, these folks declared that they would like to get rid of "crazies" and individualists as well. That was too close to home for me!

What I really fail to understand in all this is how these people think they can eliminate undesirable ideologies by changing their name! Obviously, anyone can tell themselves anything, yet by their actions be something entirely different. Requiring people to call themselves anarchist-communists instead of simply anarchists amounts to creating a law.

There are other ways in which to deal with the problem of Joffre. The editors of *Black Star* can just refuse to publish him because they don't like what he says and not feel obligated because he calls himself an anarchist.

This whole incident sadly shows how unfree we still are. More than just a response to the problem of certain weird and even destructive ideas within the group, it is an indication of a deep need for the security of knowing everyone agrees with you. But, (insert expletive!) we don't have to declare our interdependence because we are interdependent! We all want the same things.

Instead of wasting so much time trying to define the organization in order that we can do something, we should be doing things and let the organization build itself in the process: For example, primitive, pre-capitalist communities (such as the Balinese in Indonesia) never create organization for its own sake. Countless organizations are formed and reformed for every purpose of living. Groups for planting and harvesting, art, dance, trade, and pure celebration are easily formed and just as easily dissolved when their purpose is accomplished.

As anarchists fighting the rigid monolith of capital, we should be as fluid in our structures. We can come together on common projects and let our ideology work itself out in practice. When we disagree we should be as free to disassociate as to associate.

The weekend at Wildcat was by no means a total bust. There were plenty of good moments sharing experiences with the variety of interesting people who showed up. A workshop on touching, personal space, and domination helped sensitize us to the importance of micro-communications. I was pleased to see also, for the first time in an anarchist gathering, a group of men (however small) who had some coherence as anti-sexists or effeminists. That is men, who want to destroy sex-roles for their own pleasure and who are not motivated by guilt. My only complaint about the women's meeting was that we didn't have time to do it again!

We also had some pretty wild times running around the mountaintop unencumbered by clothing, and skinny-dipping in the Kickapoo river (discreetly submerging ourselves for passing Amish families in canoes). The public highlight of the affair occurred when Scott Polar Bear had the undaunted audacity to burn the black and red flag (the anarchist school colors!) in the communal bonfire. Jay Amrod, revolting exhibitionist that he is, then tossed all his clothes to the flames.

And as the guitars strummed the night away, and the joints floated freely, I was reminded of how good life is and of how much better it can be.

In Surrection
Kelpie Willsin
Champaign-Urbana

Doaks Rides Again

To the Fifth Estate:

When I first saw your July issue [FE #284, July, 1977] I almost felt sorry that I had begun such a ruckus over Black Rose Books, Ltd., but after seeing the self-exposures those cockroach capitalists and their apologists wrote in the August issue, it suddenly seemed worth the effort.

Speaking of effort, my comrades and I have decided not to bring out a so-called "pirate" edition (actually, I really like the term as it is counter-posed nicely to the legitimate merchants at BRB) of the Durutti biography for two reasons: 1) There are so many typographical errors that the manuscript would almost have to be re-typed to make it a decent edition, and 2) I've really been convinced by some readings I've done lately and by the Muswell Hillbilly's article in the last FE ["On Terrorism and Authoritarianism," FE #285, August, 1977] that Durutti did become part of the counterrevolution in Spain and that Paz' book just covered it up nicely.

Regarding my remark at the end of my original letter [FE #284, July 1977] that "Durutti would have shot those (BRB) fuckers," I think I was wrong and he probably would have loved them, toadies that they are. He would have shot you people for not following CNT dictates.

Finally, why didn't you mention the contradiction in "Nataf's" letter about the translation of the Paz book where he said that the task of translating a book from French to English seemed like an "overwhelming" task? Besides the fact that this meant they obviously weren't able to read its contents and saw it only as a commodity, here are these phonies in a French-speaking colony that don't even know the language!—what colossal frauds!

With Best Regards,
Joe Doaks
Boston

On Lib Lit

Dear Friends:

I'm glad you printed the Joe Doaks letter [FE #284, July 1977] even though it turned off a number of people. As someone who works in publishing (no, not a movement publisher, a straight one) I am all too aware of the costs—

and time—involved in putting out even one book. Black Rose’s defense of itself was good and quite articulate; unfortunately it was a response more befitting *Publisher’s Weekly* than an anarchist paper.

Yes, the whole point of publishing is to reach as many people as possible, to generate a universal awareness and understanding of anarchist ideas. One of the greatest problems we have is that most anarchist books and tracts (including the “classics”) tend to become nothing more than “in-house” reading materials, missing the very people we most want to reach.

Part of the reason for this might be the fact that some books are poorly produced and, although they might contain a wealth of acts or ideas, they look like shit and people pass them by. The other reason is, of course, the price. People resent having to shell out six dollars for a book, especially when money is so tight.

True, Black Rose Books look good—slick and very professional. They could compete with Dover or Random House and could even be proudly displayed at a trade exhibition or booksellers’ convention. But emulating capitalist or statist enterprises is certainly not revolutionary, and it appears that this is exactly what Black Rose does, even judging by its own response. Perhaps it might be more productive for them to attempt to develop a new publishing aesthetic. A book can look good without having to invest a small fortune in its production. (Some cases in point: Black & Red editions, some of the pamphlets printed by Come!Unity Press here in New York, and the *Fifth Estates*). By destroying the bourgeois concept of visual attractiveness, we can expect more people to start browsing through, and reading, our books.

But what I find most offensive about the Black Rose response is its implied/attempted self-propagation as an economic entity. “We did the work. You have no right to use our property.” Does Black Rose exist to develop itself as an enterprise or to advance the ideas of anarchism? It can’t be both ways. It all comes down to the old idea of whatever form the revolution takes is the form you will get when it’s over (if it is, in fact, ever over).

Black Rose seems to me to be more interested in self-perpetuation than in revolutionary change. If someone can do a better—or cheaper—job of printing a book a truly anarchistic response from Black Rose would be to yield to the other group and not quibble over petty matters such as contracts or copyrights.

I strongly agree with the FE staff comment regarding “wages.” If Black Rose is so up tight about being exploited, why do they bother with the movement? Is it an anarchist dream to write a best seller and make a lot of money? Should I be reimbursed or financially compensated for the small amount of time I spent writing this letter? Have I exploited myself?

The FE rightfully asks if Paz or MacDonald did the work in order to be paid or in order to aid the movement. If it is the latter, and I’m pretty sure it is, I really doubt that they will be upset if somebody else reproduces the book cheaper than Black Rose has done.

Bill Koehnlein
New York City

Agree on Technology

Dear Fifth Estate:

I’ve really agreed with the recent direction you have taken with the criticism of technology. This is an incredibly important area, and the looming battles over nuclear fission, DNA recombinant research, computerized information and media systems, etc.—all seem to say that from here on out, the social struggle is going to appear not in the form of the control of governments or abstract production, but technologically specific production.

It’s all incredibly complex and exciting. And marxism is not so much just wrong about it (as were most syndicalists) as just not having anything to say about it, especially with regard to the specific kind of social power wielded by scientists and technicians. (Anyone looking for a new revolutionary vehicle?)

It’s interesting that the leading popular struggles in both the U.S. and the S.U., whatever differences they may have, are both, at this stage, dependent on a breakaway sector of the scientific elite, and mostly nuclear physicists in both cases.

“Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires.”—Blake
Jim Stodder

New Orleans

New A-Plants

Dear Editors:

I won't object to Mr. Peanut's plan for 400 new A-plants if he builds the first one in Plains, Ga. and the second one on the White House lawn and the third inside the Pentagon.

Alice Godfrey (alias Aunty Nuke)

Cockroach Capitalism

Dear Comrades:

"Joe Doaks" letter [FE #284, July 1977] about Black Rose and their edition of *Durruti: The People Armed* is a bit non-productive to say the least. Of course, any dedicated price-cutter can produce a cheaper edition once a publisher has had a book written, translated, typeset, printed and bound. It's done by photo-copying. But that has little to do with a free society either—unless you count Taiwan as such; it used to be known as cockroach capitalism.

Certainly, why not shoot them down with Joe Doaks' type piracy—but that isn't the Black Rose situation. How can they possibly run an anarchist publishing house, bringing out original material and only just managing to keep their head above water—a bit more successfully than us, mind you—if people like Joe Doaks, pretending to be more libertarian, manage to beat them out of the market—to whose benefit would it be? Joe Doaks wouldn't be able to "price-cut" them any more, he'd be driven to price cutting the commercial publishers, which he ought to be doing now, but isn't.

So far as the last line about Durruti is concerned ("He would have shot those (BRB) fuckers.") it shows a basic misconception about him and I'm sure he would have certainly resented being cast by Joe Doaks in the role of an authoritarian heavy and father substitute. Durruti gave a great deal of financial assistance to many anarchist presses without having to shoot cockroach capitalists, even of the Joe Doaks type.

Before I go I'd better tell you about the next issue of the scintillating *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* (due out in late September). Apart from the usual spine chilling and riveting reviews and new news we have some fascinating articles lined up. We don't know yet exactly how many pages the review is going to run, but I imagine it will probably be more than 84 pp. originally estimated price for this issue will be at least \$3.00, but it will be worth every cent. A better bargain is the sustaining sub., however, as your readers will receive a copy of everything we publish automatically—long before it gets round to the bookshops.

Well, comrades, keep up the good work with the F.E. It is one of the few papers I can look forward to opening with pleasure and anticipation—apart from Black Flag, of course!

Abrazos

Stuart Christie

Cienfuegos Press/Black Flag

Box A, 'Over the Water'

Sanday, Orkney

Scotland

FE Like Teachers

Dear People of the FE:

I want to give you a few of my thoughts/observations on the exchanges between yourselves and Black Rose Books. I refuse/reject copyrights and the reproduction of capitalist production or patriarchal relations within or among libertarian collectives. What angers and disturbs me is what I perceive (especially in your editorials and staff replies to letters) to be labeling of individuals/groups as a way of exchanging criticism.

I mean that I reject copyrights, but because BRB uses copyrights because they believe it prevents them and authors being ripped by the bourgeois press doesn't mean I respond by declaring (and dismissing) them as "salespeople of libertarian ideology."

I need to hear more from them to understand how they reached this decision, to explain how I reach my viewpoint/actions before I pass judgment. Sometimes you sound like the preachers I hear echoing in my childhood—the voices of teachers, parents, bosses. I sometimes react more to this than the accompanying comment. It makes me wonder how you speak/relate to the non-libertarian actions and voices of the people you relate to in your daily lives? Like the fantasy sometimes is foaming and screaming.

So that's one of my observations. I'm asking you for less labeling and more explanation/defining how you got to that label. I do see that BRB will use capitalist marketing and distributing channels as a means to large scale distribution of libertarian writing—that's not to conclude that they relate in a hierarchical manner producing a salable commodity. It is an issue we need to work on.

In Solidarity
Carl Craft
Norristown, Pa.

Revolutionary Purism

Dear People:

Would you revolutionary purists please explain how one of your regular contributors (who always sees the conspiracy of capital to recuperate rebellion behind every social phenomenon, e.g. therapy) has a book (*Marxism and Council Communism* by Peter Rachleff, published by Revisionist Press) published which sells for \$49.95?

Since I can't afford a copy, I can't be sure, but I would venture to suggest that it is also copyrighted. If one of you believers in the destruction of the commodity economy would give me a copy, I would be glad to check (as well as perhaps read the book). I hope you keep up your purity. With a few more books published, your contributors will be rich.

I am a therapist and so, according to Pete Rachleff, the same as a cop. However I have not had any books published at \$49.95. Joe Doaks please take notice.

In Curiosity
Stephen Soldz
Cambridge, Mass.

Staff reply: What strikes us as curious is your bitter use of the phrase "revolutionary purist." What are you suggesting? That since all of us have been debased by capital, we put forth less than "pure" critiques that permit enough latitude for anyone to do anything as long as they mouth the correct libertarian slogans?

Rather than making a personal attack on Rachleff, we would be much more interested in a response to his charge that therapy (your profession) is part of the police apparatus of capital. If in fact, Rachleff (or any of the rest of us) contradict what is written in these pages, then that activity should speak for itself, but we don't think you get very far defending yourself by suggesting someone else is just as compromised.

On Reformism

Hi:

I've been following the Black Rose Books affair with interest. BRB sent me their original response they sent to you with a cover letter asking for support letters. Since I agreed with much of what "Joe Doaks" said (it matters

little to me whether that's his/her real name or not), I wrote them back a long letter stating why I couldn't really support them.

Also, I'd just finished reading the Durruti book and found it interesting, but badly done.

I might add here, I've been distributing books, mostly Anarchist, the past year and a half—trying to cut down the high profit margin, and getting out a lot of copies of these works. The only time I got a 50% discount from BRB was when I ordered a large number of the Durruti book, pre-paying almost a year before the book ever came out. I tried a similar deal with them on the Portugal book *Solidarity* (London) brought out and BRB claimed as their own, and they would only give me 50% if I ordered more than I thought I could get rid of to friends.)

I feel the letters from various BRB people and their supporters have reacted badly and I feel the criticism (some of it) has been more alienating than need be (Tom Copeland is probably not an idiot although his thinking has many contradictory thoughts). The argument of most BRB supporters that “while under capitalism, we must do as the capitalists do” is just reformist. I've been thinking on this for a long time—“What do revolutionaries do when there's no revolution going on?”

I've been involved in a food co-op and community organizing work the past three years, but I've found that also to be reformist, creating a social worker mentality.

I found the letter from Black & Red in the July issue and your comments in the August issue excellent. Seems like BRB defends the worst of their activity because they've settled into a capitalist mentality—I can understand this for work does this to my thinking too. But I don't defend it, just acknowledge it as something that has to be combated in this society. There are other ways of dealing with production/distribution/consumption/life other than the capitalist mode.

I personally feel Random House has contributed as much as Black Rose toward a revolutionary perspective, using BRB's own criteria of judgment—mass distribution of revolutionary works. A look at Random House's publications, and these are not ripped off from other presses, is indeed as impressive as Black Rose's.

I find this thrashing out of problems long overdue—a welcome relief from the usual back patting for past “achievements.” This is not to say I'm a Fifth Estate “supporter,”—I've seen all too much “supportism” on the “Left” to get dragged in that much.

Bruce Huebel
Seattle

New FE?

Dear Fifth Estate:

You make an interesting point when you say that “the nature of the domination of communication by capital is the centralization of resources in the hands of a small number of active communicators with an immense number of passive receptors eagerly taking in whatever is given out.” FE August 1977.

The response you make is to suggest self-limitation—you will not print more than 3,000 copies of the *Fifth Estate*. This, you believe, will force the 3,001st reader to put out his or her own libertarian newspaper. If any self-proclaimed libertarian presumes to communicate with more than 3,000 people, the elitist blame will be on someone else, not you.

It seems to me that there is a pretty obvious alternative, if not several alternatives. What does “domination by capital” mean in this context? It means a small group decides what gets communicated and what gets suppressed. Right now, the small Fifth Estate collective decides what (at least) 3,000 people get to read in your paper—if someone sends in an article you don't like, you can exercise your “domination” by refusing to print it.

All you have to do is...stop deciding! Print anything and everything anyone sends in (in chronological order of arrival). This means that anyone of those 3,000 or 30,000 or 300,000 readers of the *Fifth Estate* who wished to communicate—to their sisters and brothers could write in, knowing that they had an equal voice with all the other readers, knowing that no one's “domination” was going to come between themselves and their comrades across the country.

Of course, you would be giving up something. It wouldn't be "your" paper any more. It would belong to all those people who cared enough to write for it, be that 3,000 or 3,000,000.

Finally, you know that I'm in favor of a multitude of local libertarian newspapers. But, in my own experience meeting with a number of libertarian collectives and individuals in the Bay Area, I've found that people are extremely reluctant to undertake a project of the magnitude of a newspaper. It is a small version of our major social problem—we could overthrow capitalism any time we wanted to except... we don't believe we can do it.

If one or two libertarian newspapers become mass newspapers (as you say 30,000), I believe this will encourage (rather than discourage) more' libertarians to start and carry on newspaper projects. Right now, the Fifth Estate is the most frequently appearing and has the largest paid circulation (by far!) of any libertarian newspaper in North America. So the choice really is, at least for the moment, yours.

For A Life Without Bosses,
Ed Clark
Oakland, Calif.

P.S. In what may be a minority opinion, I think you're right to call people "idiots" when that is your honest opinion. I do the same thing myself—for example, the verbal "Luddites" who've been crowding your pages the last few issues. There was a time when nihilists were activists.

Staff Response: Clark, you are an idiot. Your idea sounds good on the face of it, but don't you think it would raise our cucumber quotient to the ceiling?

Issue Not Violence

Dear Fifth Estate,

I appreciate your printing my letter about the Clamshell Alliance ["Did Pacifists Block Militant Action?" FE #285, August, 1977]. However, I felt your choice of photos and their captions tended to define the question in terms of non-violence vs. violence. In this regard, you fall on the opposite side of the same coin as the Clammies. They were always trying to divert people's attention from the real question of whether we were to engage in direct action or make a martyr's appeal to conscience. Whenever such discussion erupted they cried, "Violence or nonviolence, which do you want?"

It wasn't because we wanted a violent demonstration that we broke with the Clamshell. (Clamshell was more than willing to accept violence, as long as it was police violence.) The violence of an occupation wouldn't have been the measure of success (as the caption of your photos suggests). The success of an occupation would be measured by

1. Getting onto the site, staying on the site, and blocking construction; and
2. Doing so in a directly democratic, communitarian fashion, where self-confidence and initiative were strengthened in each and all of us. Ideally the possibility of generalized expropriation would be advanced by the occupation.

It became obvious early on that the leaders of the Clamshell Alliance were out to prevent any such success.

Violence/non-violence is a separate question. No one was excluded from Clamshell because they advocated a violent demonstration, because no one made such an advocacy. (Unless you accept the Clammies definition: "Cutting a fence is an act of violence.") Exclusion, achieved through the screening process of the "training sessions", was based primarily on the criteria, "Will you obey the rules?" By coming to the training sessions one was stating, "Yes, I will obey the rules." From that point one's militance fades and the will to overcome all obstacles to a successful occupation succumbs.

For incivility and disobedience,
Rudy Perkins

More Blackouts!

Dear Friends,

Conversation Between Two New York Looters:

First Looter: Is it wrong to steal a book published by Black Rose Books?

Second Looter: Not if you can get away with it!

Naturally enough, leftists are incapable of criticizing daily life; hence the numerous defenses of the business practices of BRB. The real question is not whether or not BRB has committed this or that capitalist "sin," but why some people can in any sense feel satisfied with lives whose content consists in working for a business enterprise.

Here in Madison we know many people who are really serious about making a co-op business work, naively hoping their "collective decision-making" and "worker's control" will fill the void in their empty lives. The smart ones (and there are many) see through the illusions and quit. Others continue to be mesmerized by the jingle of the cash register.

The *Fifth Estate* and Black & Red are to be applauded for the critical attitude they always have taken toward their own activity, and for their continuing attempts to act outside the framework of capital. The others can kiss off.

For an international power blackout,

Mad-City Looters

Madison, Wis.



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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/286-september-1977/letters>
Fifth Estate #286, September, 1977

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