

# Comments on Revolutionary Violence

The authors respond

Paula Zerzan  
Muswell Hillbillie

1977

## Muswell Hillbillie Responds:

Hi FE Folks,

After reading the two letters (FE #287, October 28, 1977) responding to my article in the August FE (#285, August, 1977), I have decided to abandon the use of the term “terrorism,” because I think it does tend to obscure more than it clarifies.

I agree with Laurance Kisinger that there is nothing essentially terrifying about an empty government building or an isolated utility being blown up; but I don’t think that there is necessarily anything revolutionary about it either. I don’t think that this kind of activity is “mindless violence” as Ervin—who obviously refused to really read the article on principle or perhaps sent his letter to the wrong address—asserts. But we all have to become more aware of what challenges and what perpetuates the status quo.

There certainly are and always have been “good reasons” for subversive activity, including those provided by the conditions of life in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s, and those provided here and now. And it’s certainly more than “worth the fight.” And beyond this, I refuse to accept the limited definition of the struggle—armed guerrilla resistance in the lead and anarcho-syndicalism right behind—offered by people like Ervin.

We all have to become more assertive in our own behalf, which involves transcending the conventional understanding of what constitutes the possibilities for resistance, and not just demanding, but taking the impossible. If everyone were to become urban guerrillas, the distinctions and social relations now prevalent would only become generalized, not obliterated.

Self-sacrifice leads to the demand that others also sacrifice, which is only a continuation of the demand for sacrifice that the present social order imposes on all of us. Heroes are people who are better than others. A revolutionary transformation must engage us all as social participants in our own behalf, not as heroes.

The reason I discussed the SLA and the CNT-FAI in the same terms should be obvious to all those who read the article. For the benefit of those who didn’t, I’ll repeat: neither “good intentions” nor “good ideology” guarantee the revolutionary character of activity.

My criticism of the CNT and FAI is not that they should have waited until the people were ready. It seems to me that the “people,” as usual, showed themselves to be more ready than the “militants,” who inadvertently contributed to the destruction of the revolution. This includes Durruti, who argued against, but went along with (and even participated in negotiating) the collaboration rather than actively resisting it. What he might have done later, had he lived, is a matter of speculation but many other guerrilla leaders became absorbed into the new authority structure, albeit against their will.

I have learned, and still am learning, that it's far better to decide for yourself rather than take the word of even the most respected, well-intentioned or informal authority. So rather than "proving" anything—as Ervin insists I should be forced to do—I'd just like to recommend that everyone who's interested in the historical problems raised by my article read everything they can get their hands on about the subject, including Richards' *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, Carlos Semprun-Maura's *Revolution et Contre-Revolution en Catalogne*, Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Morrow's *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*; and talk to as many veterans and friends and relatives of veterans as they can.

This is what I have done and am doing, and how I have reached my conclusions. Others must decide for themselves.

Nowhere in the article did I suggest that I either believe in or argue for a "peaceful transition to anarchism," as Ervin states. I didn't and wouldn't think of it, because I'm not an anarchist pacifist or any other kind of ist; they'll never make a zombie out of me.

And in all fairness to the anarcho-syndicalist CNT-FAI and IWW, they don't believe—as Ervin asserts—that the capitalists will simply give up their property peacefully as the result of a general strike, but rather that the "workers' organizations" should be prepared to take it away from them in a general strike.

To be against this representative mediation of action and its results, as I am, is not to reject all possibilities for collective activity, but to begin the search for new forms that will transcend and destroy the old order.

Yours for real life,

Muswell Hillbillie

(since I happen to be a woman)

## Paula Zerzan Responds:

To The Fifth Estate:

It is at best facile and otherwise incoherent to assume that breaking the laws of capital perpetuates crimes against women and children—as do both of the "feminist" critics (FE #287, October 28, 1977) of our article on the New York City blackout. (See "New York, New York" by John and Paula Zerzan, FE #285, Aug. 1977) and responses in our last issue). Violating property and its relations can only be liberatory—sets right the human posture and does not foster the rape of consumerism: undoing property nullifies, women as property.

As in other insurrections, there was reportedly no increase in rapes or assaults in N.Y. (probably very much the opposite)...Which brings to mind a related illusion or role—that of the mother being a passive victim of her children. What oppressive relations are engendered by parents who buffer their lives with their kids! The ugliest violence is the parent assuming reformist values "because of the kids," the "family" being terrorized by survivalism... It was already pointed out that whole families partook in the N.Y. looting in dozens of neighborhoods.

Our third critic tries to deprecate (or at least minimize) the N.Y. events of July 13–14 for more general political reasons. He tells us that surely not much could have happened in the absence of good old "consciousness," that "capitalism is so ingrained in all sections of society," that "we are dealing with people, in this case, whose TV sets are on almost constantly."

When Joe Jacobs wrote (FE #283, June 1977) of those who "don't see the revolution going on under their noses," he surely described every politico, everyone who is threatened by autonomous movement to the point of having to try to rob it of its truth. We are principally attacked, of course, for bringing out obvious facts; for this, critics call our accuracy into question without advancing one single contrary point, and characterize our minimal conclusions as "notably wrong" and even "infantile."

In closing, some recent news might be relevant as to the condition of the "unconscious" masses. The October 26 *Christian Science Monitor*, in an article on youth unemployment, spoke of the "widespread disdain for work," quoting a Houston high school counselor that "The work ethic is dead." The November 11 *New Times* cover story, "Wild in the Stands" reflected the decline of the role of well-behaved spectator.

An AP story (November 9 *San Francisco Chronicle*) on soaring employee theft reported that John Reid and Associates will administer about 15 times as many lie detector tests to workers and applicants as it did four years ago.

The Nov. 9 *Chronicle* also reported that the SF City and County election of the day before attracted the lowest turnout “in at least 44 years,” despite fine weather; one campaign manager characterized the voters as “just bored to death.”

Time magazine’s cover story of November 14, “High Schools in Trouble,” discussed the high truancy, falling test scores, and vandalism that now mark suburban and rural as well as city schools. A November 16 New York Times article dealt with the Defense Department’s alarm over a drop-out rate (in terms of recruits not finishing their first term of service) that is twice as high as during the draft period of the Vietnam war—over 40%.

A San Francisco news program of November 22 (on Channel 7, ABC-TV) spoke of the new dearth of secretaries in the Bay Area, the fact that despite the unemployment few will assume the role; “life is too short” was a typical comment reported. The Nov. 22 *Daily Californian* recounted the results of an election to choose 4 representatives to the Berkeley Community Action Administering Board: of 21,000 eligible to cast ballots for this federal poverty funds program agency, only 78 bothered.

Of course this tiny sampling only hints at the strong developments afoot, basic currents that are illumined by events like the 25 hours of a New York July.

For the rhapsody of punk,  
Paula Zerzan  
San Francisco

# fifth Estate

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