

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Fifth Estate Collective

1977

Dolgoff & Cuba

Saludos Companeros:

Your review of the Dolgoff book on Cuba (FE #286, Sept. 1977) left a lot to be desired. As anarchist propaganda that book is a disaster. At the least, it's sloppy work and may be even worse than that. One thing anarchists do not need to do is run out a line of bullshit rhetoric, exaggerate and distort when attacking an authoritarian enemy. Soviet style authoritarians provide sufficient ammunition and targets; there's no need to create new ones. For sure, "names will never hurt them."

I don't know what Dolgoff's excuse is but I find it hard to swallow his use of so much reference material from financed anti-soviet think tanks set up by the CIA, etc. And, it took me a minute to realize that naming a book, date and city left something out and I suddenly realized that in some cases it meant the failure to mention that the publisher was Praeger, notorious CIA conduit. Ramparts knew it, the *NY Times* knew it, lots of little periodicals knew it, even the US Congress knew it, but a supposed leading historian of the anarchist movement didn't??? Bad news!

Dolgoff is up the creek without a paddle with that book, but where the hell is the rest of the anarchist movement when it uncritically accepts so much without investigation? Where are you when you overlook that those bullshit "libertarians" (as opposed to anarchists) haven't seen fit to worry about the terrible persecution of homosexuals in Cuba but are quick to DEMAND the perpetuation of the nuclear family?

Section 4 of the Libertarian Socialists Declaration from Havana, 1960 (p. 137, Dolgoff) says: "In the final analysis, the family is the basic unit of society and its supreme responsibility is the moral and physical protection of its youngest members. This responsibility must not be taken away; that of the formation of character, and ideological orientation of new generations within the family, the home itself." Talk about turkey shit! And those turkeys shit with almost every step.

From their exile in Miami (to the ivory towers in NYC) in one line they say: "Over 90% of the Cuban people are against the political system..." (p. 145), and on page 147 are quoted again: "The masses are naive, they know nothing about the kind of despotic 'communism' that those agents really want to impose." Question: How many percentages do a masses make? "Naive masses," what an outrageous insult. Screw you, leader!

That book is so full of inaccuracies that it would take another book to go over them point by point. But what is really bad is the selection of source material which is so exclusive of so many other books. There are now probably more books written on Cuba than any other country on earth and yet only certain ones were used. I'm not for a minute arguing that any Marxist-oriented authors are to be used without criticism, but what about uncritical use of all that material so acceptable to all the good ole boys in Washington, D.C.?

What Dolgoff and his libertarian friends omit is serious and so is the omission of all anarchists who continue to refuse to deal, for instance, with the realities of third world peoples and leave them to be exploited by careless

communists. Cuba was one of the worst white racist societies anywhere and Castro got the non-white majority support by picking up on it.

Hey, Dolgoff, by U.S. standards there are far, far more non-whites than you admit and Cuba was so racist that Batista was denied membership in the country club because he wasn't white enough! This was while he was dictator. (He later changed the vote with machine guns.) Cuban libertarians nowhere in that book address this problem and it was apparent they didn't address it enough in Cuba before Castro either.

They addressed so little, so ineffectually that hardly anyone knew they existed. Many people who were intimately aware of the Cuban situation had to await the Dolgoff book to learn of Cuban libertarians. That says a lot.

This Cuba book and the Black Rose affair and all the other crap that permeates the anarchist movement needs not to be laid to rest but ripped apart until anarchists have their shit together and become a fighting force, not a singing society!

V.T. Lee

Rosendale, N.Y.

Goon Memo

To the Fifth Estate:

We stopped by your office to see if we could take care of business, but no one was there. Since your office hours appear to be as erratic as your "spontaneist" politics, we have been forced to resort to this non-action response to your misguided remarks in the Oct.-Nov. issue.

We obviously see our work in the Cockrel campaign in a quite different light than what was suggested in your "Open Letter from Ken" spoof [FE #287, October 28, 1977]. As serious socialists we are committed to breaking down the alienating and anti-equalitarian division between mental and physical labor. Therefore, we welcomed the chance to do office shit work in the campaign. If revolutionaries don't learn how to take care of shit, how are we going to get rid of all that crap that Marx saw as weighing down on the forces of radical change.

Your charge that our efforts in Cockrel's campaign were exercises in humiliation misses the point and, thus, mystifies the unconscious prostitution which is part of any electoral effort in this "wonderland of democracy." Being turned into willing cogs in a slick new political machine did not result in humiliation, only a mild case of recombinant reification (a new case of Clean for Gene) inevitably induced by the traditional electoral lobotomy. Can you keep up with these mixed metaphors?

This operation, however, was not without its positive consequences. As victims of the vindictive dialectic of everyday life in capitalist Amerika (Franz Kafka, where are you now?), we noticed that we can now separate practice from theory in a way that allows us to act as political hacks without any pangs of socialist guilt (let alone anarchist angst).

So, take note! The hack is back. In the immortal words of Jimmy Hoffa: whore today, goon tomorrow.

Yours for a brighter tomorrow,

The NUM Goon Squad

State Murders

Dear Comrades:

I commend you on your series of articles on the murder of the three RAF members, Raspe, Ennslin and Baader, and especially the article (in screaming headlines, no less!) on the "suicide" of Kidnapped industrialist Hans-Martin Schleyer [FE #287, October 28, 1977]. In reading the Government and German establishment press versions of how the deaths occurred, I could not help but think of how much it resembled the murder by California State prison authorities of revolutionary Black prisoner George Jackson at San Quentin state prison on August 21, 1971.

Although there was no claim of George having committed "suicide", here was a bogus story of an "escape attempt" and that he was killed "while trying to escape." If you will recall there was also a claim that he had received a

pistol from a “radical lawyer” (Stephen Bingham) and there was an equally implausible story that he had hidden and transported the pistol under an Afro wig. Then, as now, it all added up to one thing: murder by State authorities!

In furious struggle,
Lorenzo Komboa Ervin
Atlanta Federal Prison

Garbage Power!

Staff Note: We unfortunately lost the name of the author of this letter, but thought it interesting enough to run all the same. Our apologies to the writer.

Dear Fifth,

Well, I decided I can't live without my monthly fix of anarchy so here is my early renewal for another year's worth of *Fifth Estates* plus a little extra to help the movement along.

For the last two and a half years I have made a small movement-wage living out of going through apartment house and motel garbage dumpsters and selling everything I find—primarily newsprint and aluminum cans but also other scrap metals, deposit bottles, paperback books, old car batteries, etc.—the archetypical scavenger. I know this sounds like petty bourgeois ego tripping but before I started this bizness I worked as an accountant/auditor for a CPA firm; little personal revolutions here and there May one day succeed in toppling the imperialist monster. Yours in the struggle. Garbage power!

People throw everything in the world away. Among the things I have found, all in functional if not excellent shape, there were: clothes and shoes of all descriptions (I haven't had to buy any in two and a half years), furniture, sporting equipment, books, record albums, radios, tapes, cassettes, money, 16 small pot plants, and everything else imaginable. I have over 200 pairs of jeans I have found and washed that I sell for a buck each to friends. I hate to get down on people because I realize that it's capitalism to blame for the waste I witness every day.

Well, I'll close up and go drink a dumpster beer.

Cheers!

New Publication

Dear Fifth Estate,

Several of us here in Kitchener-Waterloo are discussing the idea of starting some sort of periodical devoted to anarchism and sexuality/gay sexuality. As we haven't yet had any organizational meeting, we can't be any more specific as to aims/directions/etc. If there is anyone there who might be interested in contributing to such a publication, feel free to send your name and address to us at the following address:

The Some People Can't Read Until Their Backs Are Against the Wall Collective,
20 Fairview Avenue
Kitchener, Ontario
Canada N2H 3E8

Support Needed

Dear Friends:

On August 7, 1977, a rally was sponsored by the Abalone Alliance on Avila Beach (San Luis Obispo County, Calif.) to protest the planned opening of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear power plant. Daniel Ellsberg and Barry Commoner addressed nearly 1,500 people on the proliferation of nuclear power and nuclear weapons. At the close of the rally 47 people were arrested in an act of civil disobedience while walking on Pacific Gas & Electric's access road to the

Diablo Canyon Plant. All were charged with two counts of trespassing and one count of failure to disperse. Two of the arrested have since been revealed as police agents.

The original defense counsel had agreed to donate all legal services, but due to unforeseen complications, it has been decided to retain a paid attorney to handle the remaining trial and further appeals. Thus far over \$3,000 has been spent on legal fees and significant costs still remain.

This unexpected financial burden has necessitated an urgent appeal for funds. There is substantial evidence that the court system and the utility companies are working together to intimidate and bankrupt the growing anti-nuclear, pro-survival movement in California.

Please make donations payable to the Diablo 45 Defense Committee and mail to People for a Nuclear Free Future, P.O. Box 2324, Santa Cruz CA 95063. Thank you all very much for the support and NO Nukes!

Steven Belling for PNFF
Santa Cruz CA

More Black Rose

Hi folks:

We think we have something to add to "L'Affaire Black Rose Books" [FE #284, July, 1977] which, hopefully, will help make the problem clearer rather than merely add to the antagonisms.

We have been rather disappointed by the response to your criticisms of BRB and agree with you that it is apparent that most people on the left do not understand how wage work affects what otherwise might be creative revolutionary activity. Apart from being perhaps the most central problem of capitalism as a global system, wage labor as a means of survival is a very personal problem and seems to make it all the harder for us to challenge our own way of life and to begin to build alternatives. People are not nearly critical enough of the act of doing "revolutionary" work for wages.

However, while it's not so easy to radically transform our daily survival activities, we could at least redefine why we take jobs and what "revolutionary activity" might really be at this time.

Dumont Press Graphix has existed for six years as a typesetting co-operative which initially saw itself as a revolutionary alternative to capitalism and capitalist forms of work and eagerly began to seek out left-wing groups to produce their projects.

Despite our original intentions, every job we have ever done as a collective has been commercial (i.e. has been charged a price out of which we have extracted both wages and profit). That: 1) our prices are generally lower than other shops, 2) our quality is better than anyone anywhere near our price range, and 3) we usually have a friendly and co-operative relationship with our customers, especially our left-wing ones, does not in any way negate our commercial capitalist nature. We are fully aware while engaged in all our commercial work that we're doing it for a wage and we try to do it as fast as possible so that it's over with.

The only work that escapes these conditions takes place when some of us, alone or in small groups, along with other people not employed at Dumont, use the equipment and materials there-in, in order to produce, at absolute minimum cost, work that is meaningful to us; work that is intended by us to be part of the creative communication between us and other people.

To not charge wages for this work means, mechanistically, that we can spend as long as we feel is necessary working on a project without increasing its cost, thereby making it available at high quality to people who could otherwise not afford it. But apart from this, to work without wages on a project means that one is doing it for its own sake, and that the activity is not being separated from a real-need.

In other words, one is not typesetting a book in order to earn wages in order to eat, one is typesetting a book wholly because one is interested in that book. I might be so interested in what that book means to me as part of a communication between myself and friends that I will free it as much as possible from the sticky web of wages and the economics of business (large or small).

It's a myth of capitalism to think that this separating (i.e. alienating) effect of wage labour can be solved by worker-management co-operation or even worker-worker co-operation. As long as we have to earn wages from a

particular job we will always be compromising on our creativity on that job. Anyone who thinks this is simplistic better raise these questions for themselves next time they're doing something they think is relevant or "revolutionary."

A number of people at Dumont feel that if we are going to work for wages, we'd prefer to do radical work such as books from BRB. But by doing so, the only people we are doing a favour for is ourselves. We're invariably adding to the cost of that work and thereby decreasing its availability. Even if that work is being paid for by wealthy left-wing philanthropists (or the money falls from the sky or whatever) the effect is the same: if we would do it without wages and allow the philanthropist to spend the money on materials for other books.

We've often heard from the BRB people that raising money, even for printing equipment, is not much of a problem for them. If that's the case, they should be capable of decreasing the commercial costs of their books (by doing the production work themselves instead of just the mental work). Depending on what their sources of money are, they might have to do commercial work anyway on such equipment in order to finance it but commercial work is what all of us who earn wages do already. The major differences would be that they would be able to print more books (not larger quantities, but greater variety).

We would ask in a comradely way that Black Rose Books stop masquerading their commercial operation as revolutionary. It's not revolutionary if only because it could be done in a far more creative (less alienating) way.

We have two rather minor complaints about how this debate has been handled at the FE end. It hardly seems fair to insist that people write short letters on this matter while the FE collective can write long responses. We gave up trying to make this letter short because it's impossible to raise the number of points necessary and to properly explain them in a 12 (or whatever) column-inch letter.

We also don't think it's necessary to be so snarky to others in the debate. Collective relationships will never develop out of accusations of "stupidity." On the other hand, perhaps you're just writing these people off.

This, by the way, is a letter from a few individuals at Dumont, and not the entire collective. We're also sending a copy of this to BRB because it's time we opened up this issue with them directly.

Steve Izma
Linda Lounsberry
Jane Harding
Bill Culp
Dumont Press Graphix,
Kitchener, Ontario

Staff Note: The above letter has been edited for length. Taken out was a detailing of the experience Dumont had with BRB regarding the publication of *Durruti: The People Armed* by Abel Paz. The entire letter is available from Dumont at: 97 Victoria Street N., Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

To allow letters of unlimited length to appear in the FE would very quickly fill our pages with the opinions of those other than ourselves. We are always pleased to get letters that challenge our ideas or make us reconsider our views, but we don't see ourselves as a "movement forum." People with a lot to say should consider publishing themselves.

Also, we make no apologies for being snarky with those people whose opinions we detest.

Don't Touch

Dear Fifth Estate,

In your September issue you published two sections of a four-part article that I wrote, attaching to it your own sensationalist-sounding subtitle "Workers fought for their Lives at Nuke Plant" ["'76 French Strike at La Hague," FE #286, September, 1977].

In fact you performed a mutilation job on the original that is comparable in some respects to the more dubious editorial practices of bourgeois journalism. Your editorial changes included:

a) you published what amounts to a fragment of the original piece without giving any indication that you were excerpting.

b) on the thematic level you removed what, in my opinion, was the most important part: the first section which dealt with what is really happening in the anti-nuclear movement in Europe—the tactics that have been employed recently and which have been developed over the past two and three years. I took the occupation camp at Grohnde as an example. Without the work of small groups throughout Germany the large demonstrations of the past year and a half would not have been possible. By removing the first section you destroyed the fabric of the article as a whole and made the theoretical conclusions at the end appear more abstract and “out of the blue” than they would have otherwise.

c) you removed the second section of the piece which dealt with the development of nuke plants in Russia, again without giving any indication that you did so.

d) you used your license as editors to remove words, phrases and whole sentences in order, in some instances, to substitute your own hyperbolized version of what I wrote (examples: “...implicit in all the rhetoric spewed out of the plant” or more objectionable, “a closer look revealed simply another disgusting media blitz of gross falsification”). In some places your changes in sentence structure radically changed the original meaning. The most serious example occurred in the second to last paragraph where, referring to the anti-nuclear movement, I wrote:

“And like and unlike the movements that were born in the 1960s—the student movement, the women’s and men’s sexual-social liberation movements, the reformist and revolutionary ecological and health currents; the revolt against work inside and outside the factories, the anti-nuclear movement is a response to capitalist development as a whole and not to a ‘one-issue’ abuse...”

In your printed version the first line of the above appeared as “And unlike the movement of the 1960s.” This deliberate change or typo (I don’t know which) totally falsified what I had written. It would be less than true to characterize the ecological movement or the women’s movement as “one-issue” movements.

Hoping for a better relationship,
Michael Lucas

Dear Michael: We are, of course, sorry that your experience with the FE hasn’t been a more rewarding one for you. On our end, we have valued the articles you have sent and felt they have lent a particularly sharp insight into the anti-nuclear struggle in Europe. Unfortunately, the practice of “bourgeois journalism” you mentioned is necessitated by the distances involved between us. To submit an article to a publication, which is then edited, typeset, layed-out, and printed by others is the way all bourgeois media operates. That process cannot be overcome in your case since you live so far away.

We shortened articles, made editing changes for style and clarity because we thought they were improvements—obviously you didn’t. We, like you, hope for a better relationship in the future.

The FE Staff



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Fifth Estate #288, December 1977

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