

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1978

At the Picnic

Dear Comrades,

At a picnic held July 9 at Los Gatos we received an income of \$841 in which we distributed as follows:

Freedom \$75; Black Flag \$75; Open Road \$75; Fifth Estate \$75; Rivista A \$200; L'Internazionale \$150; Volonta \$121; Interogation \$70.

Some of the contributors were not present—those being: John Vattuone \$20; T. Martocchia \$20; Peter Puccio \$20; Fred Francescutti \$20; Dal Fondo Nicola \$100; San Vitulli \$10; Armando \$10; Romeo \$10.

We wish to thank everyone. The next picnic will be on September 17.

L'incaricato

Staff Response: Whew!! Thanks again comrades. As usual, we're turning in our pennies to keep the paper going and the help couldn't have come at a better time. Thanks again!

Demoralized

Dear Friends,

Hi— just a little note to thank you for sending me a copy of the *Fifth Estate* (#292, June 19, 1978).

I'm certainly glad that you haven't made a hero out of Aldo Moro. Death seems to be a valuable asset to all politicians. No matter how vile they have been during their lives they can rest assured (or rather, R.I.P.) that with death comes redemption via the media and colleagues. Behold the cenotaphs built daily of paper and ink, cemented with lies, the image of which are accepted as history.

A word on behavior mod. I firmly believe that behavior mod is self-imposed. Consider how many prisoners glue themselves to a damn idiot-box day in and day out. What "torture" could subdue prisoners as efficiently and effectively as can TV? The drugs which the state uses are dangerous but what about the drugs prisoners procure for themselves, e.g. scag, alcohol, etc.? Heroin is far less dangerous than Prolixin and all the phenothyzines so "popular" in prisons, but is the net result, the control, all that different?

In Struggle,

Bob

Prisoner

Staff Note to Prisoners: When writing for publication, we would appreciate it if you could indicate how you want your letters signed.

Qube TV

Dear Fifth,

You have provoked me enough to break a promise not to further announce myself in your letter columns, but not enough to grind out an “article.” Monsieur deLusory has written that “TV is...inherently authoritarian. It necessitates such incredible technological complexity and centralization that...it would be impossible for each individual to have complete control over their tube” [FE #292, June 19, 1978]

My question is whether it is possible or desirable for each individual to have complete control over anything in social life. Certainly this newspaper, as you are fond of admitting in your critically self-conscious way, would not qualify. But let’s move down the scale a bit. What about a house, clothes, a meal? Certainly it is possible for one to assemble these materials without another helping hand, but why bother? In any case, the notion of complete control is delusory—there must still be some give and take with Mother Nature. But the question is more precisely asked: What about language? And then the absurdly solipsistic bent of deLusory’s demand becomes clear: Certainly, one can have complete control over a medium of communication, but only if one is willing to communicate with one’s self alone. And although the discourse of our little ultra-left is already considerably advanced towards this end, I do not think there are many who would admit this is where they really wish to go.

This is not to deny the real question about the degree to which various technologies necessitate centralization. But I am not quite ready to consign TV to the dustbin on the count of it’s needing some form of central coordination...which I am not even sure is strictly true. Why couldn’t TV operate like ham radio, with anyone beaming their own program to anyone who cared to receive? (I am almost convinced, however, along the lines of the Rudolf Steiner freaks, that TV has evil rays which scramble the mind.) But again, the question of centralization, specialization, and complexity cannot be posed as moral absolutes. It becomes obvious that in any global human community, as opposed to a return to an absolute tribalism, some degree of centralization of resources and planning would be reasonable and desirable (notice that I do not say necessary, although that may be true, but the problem with technological determinism is that it assumes too much as necessary). We are then forced to consider a political problem, not how to abolish any centralization or specialists, but how to control them.

Marxists and syndicalists, having, theoretically at least, rejected the nation state, have then tended to idealize the unifying powers of technology. Technology has become for them a sort of new inorganic community that will proceed beneficently according to its own laws, carrying us along towards the kingdom of Reason. M. deLusory, having seen through: this. But in his efforts to abolish technology, he only succeeds in bailing out of human society and even the physical universe. The right question, it seems to me, needs a very complex and painstaking answer. It is how to design and limit technology, how to politically control technologists, and how to organize both around the desire for a loving human community. And what form will that community take? That’s another huge question, and I don’t know the answer to it either. But it’s become clearer and clearer to me that one of the reasons we of the libertarian left, if you will pardon the rather pompous sounding assumption of community, have difficulty getting much together is that we don’t have the slightest idea what it is we want. Only what we don’t want. Our vague longings must urge us to search for and create their real objective, or else we will be left with nothing but stale self-contempt. Or I will be, anyway. Nihilism never appealed to me, you know, it never seemed to have much to offer.

yours,
Jim Stodder

Newsletter I

Dear Fifth Estate people,

What is wrong with a newsletter (Anarcha-Feminist Newsletter, FE #291, April 30, 1978) wanting to limit their audience; after all, the *Fifth Estate* wants to discriminate against the 3,001st person who wants to subscribe to your mag no matter what their sex. Are male egos being threatened by the thought that some women feel no need to communicate to them? Of course I can’t judge the content of the Anarcha-Feminist Newsletter—that is not the

point—nor can I know the reason for not sending the newsletter to men but I can guess that they would rather not talk to each other if they knew that their communication would be read by those who they see as being their oppressors. I'm sure if you had the choice, you wouldn't want the FBI to read the FE.

Autonomy comes from the ability to choose people you wish to interact with and build a struggle. Some women wish to associate only with each other and feel that their energies are drained by having to deal with men. Through each other they are better able to define the sources of their oppression and to assert their own needs. This process can be taken to an extreme, resulting in unnecessary man-hating and sexist attitudes in reverse but there are definite reasons that this occurs. Although individually we may not be capable, it is males who have created and still inhabit the power structures that oppress us all (on an individual basis, we still have to examine to what degree we reproduce that hierarchy).

You wield the word "feminism" as a club to knock down the achievements of the women's movement. In their years of struggle, women have done more than throw up another ideology and gain more positions in upper echelons of capitalism. Through their own efforts, they have built up a culture of resistance and have extended the critique of the family and the state further than the male left. The monogamous, nuclear family has never been so threatened as now when women are realizing that they don't have to put up with that shit anymore and are leaving. The women's movement provides a supportive environment through c-r groups, transition houses, self-help clinics, music festivals, conferences, etc. They are doing more than some male anarchists who, it seems, would rather sit back and masturbate about the coming apocalyptic overthrow of the state.

By pointing out how feminism has played into the hands of the bourgeoisie and by saying that it confuses the issue, your critique differs little from the leninists. You have yet to seriously deal with the revolutionary import of the women's movement, it cannot be written off as another ideology. It will be the fusion of successful autonomous struggles, i.e. when everyone decides to act on their own desires, that will make for the most thoroughgoing revolution to date.

yours for a new reality,
Stu Vikars
Kitchener, Ont.
Canada

Newsletter II

Dear Fifth Estate,

As a paper which seems to accept the autonomy of an oppressed section of society (i.e. employed workers) as vital to their liberation, I am amazed that you cannot apply your analysis to another extremely large oppressed section (i.e. women). Your snide comment about being "sorry that we ran the address of these segregationists. We hope that we'll not make a blunder like this again", with reference to the English "Anarchist-Feminist Newsletter" shows yet again the extreme defensiveness only just becoming apparent within the anarchist movement as feminists are making the connection between their anarchism and their feminism, and women in the anarchist movement are getting involved in the women's liberation movement. It seems based in an arrogance that the purpose of women being liberated is solely to enable them to participate fully in wonderful (largely male-dominated) mixed organizations. The fact that many women including myself still want to work in mixed groups doesn't stop us wanting to be involved in a perfectly valid autonomous movement for our own liberation.

I'm glad you didn't make the blunder of assuming any of these women might read your paper.
In Struggle (it is a bloody struggle)
Mandy Vere

Oops!

Staff Note: In the last issue of the FE (#292, June 19, 1978), we made a mistake and left out an important section of Jay Kinney's letter (sorry Jay). The forgotten section is printed below.

[Archive note: the correction has been made in the letter published in issue 292.]

Regarding Revolutionary Violence: In a situation of widespread frustration and support, it may be practical and effective. In a situation of isolation and non-support, it may be cathartic but counter-productive. It is never desirable.



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