

# Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1979

## Funds Cut

*Staff note:* For at least two years this newspaper has received a portion of money raised at dinners (cenas) held regularly in California by a group of Italian anarchists. The purpose of the fund raising was specifically to support and encourage libertarian propaganda work. After the appearance of our last issue we received the following letter from Jim Bumpas of the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation (SRAF) who had taken over the role of disperser of the funds raised at the dinners.

Dear Comrades at Fifth Estate:

At the cena held Nov. 11, 1978 we decided not to continue support for the Fifth Estate. Our decision does not reflect any opinion of ours as to the excellence of your paper. We all agree the FE is an excellent paper. The purpose of our fund raising activities is to support explicitly anarchist propaganda efforts.

We profoundly disagree with your opinion that anarchism is a set of principles which subordinates any individuals. (*FE note:* see FE #293–294, August 21, 1978, page three for our blasphemous statement.)

In our view, anarchism is a set of perspectives which reflect unqualified belief in the freedom and individuality of everyone, without conscious restriction. One member present at our cena felt the last part of the paragraph in which you all disavowed anarchism was more anarchistic than we ourselves. But he was alone in his view. The rest of us felt only that the last part of your statement contradicted the first part of the paragraph and indicated, at best, some confusion or fuzzy thinking on your part.

Since we had been supporting you in the past, we felt we wanted to explain our decision instead of merely disappearing on you. We do not expect this letter to be published in FE. But you may do so if you want to raise the same question to your readers. Keep up the good work.

Freequally (sic)

Jim Bumpas

Box 4091

Mountain View CA 94040

*Staff note:* We, of course, have never disguised our criticism of anarchism—both the official variant which ended in the Spanish debacle of the '30s as well as ideology which tends to freeze critical thought upon those already agreed upon tenets. However, we do feel that we share a commonality with those who call themselves anarchists as we also call for the destruction of capitalism, the abolition of the State and the construction of a libertarian community. Apparently this is not enough for the California group which demands an obeisance to official dogma.

Well, it's their money and we guess they should spend it on those who don't challenge their comfortable, familiar theories of revolution.

Upon receipt of Bumpas' letter different members of the FE staff exchanged several letters with him and sent copies of the exchange to several people connected with the situation. The response from one of them is printed below.

## **To The Fifth Estate:**

This California group's action is in response-to the FE staff position, that: "...none of us...consider ourselves 'anarchists nor the Fifth Estate as an 'anarchists' newspaper, though obviously our ideas owe enormously to anarchism and anarchists. The mere idea of an 'ism' implies for us the subordination of the individual to a body of principles, to an ideology, all ideologies are reductionist, even those which appear to be liberatory." (From the FE, Aug. 21, 1978, p. 3)

The California group's letter is the most unequivocal vindication of the correct position taken by the FE staff towards every kind of ism. After twice repeating that the FE is an excellent paper, and urging you to keep up the good work—they proceed to punish the FE by not supporting it any further, for exercising the very natural right of "the freedom of individuality of everyone, without restriction"—that they profess to believe in.

Fortunately those who have a keener understanding of anarchism hold forth that the individual's right to freedom of expression in every sphere of life could never take the dubious position that this group has. It is good to note though, that at least one member of this group understood the real position of the Fifth Estate, who felt the FE was "more anarchistic than ourselves."

Stuart Christie, editor of *Black Flag*, and coordinating editor of the *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* stated in its Autumn 1977 issue: "A really excellent paper that combines sharp insight with a practical perspective to produce one of the best anarchist papers in the US. Highly recommended." In a previous issue of the FE, I also expressed the opinion that the FE is the most consistent anarchist newspaper that the anarchist movement in this country has ever issued.

I feel assured that because of the misguided position of the California group, the readership of the FE will feel impelled to render even more material support for the continuance of the Fifth Estate than they have in the past.

Marcus Graham

*Note:* Besides his words of support and appreciation Marcus has pledged to make up personally what had previously been donated by the California group.

Although this singular act of generosity is enough to bring him our hearty gratitude, it is only consistent with his over 50-year dedication to libertarian ideals and his participation and support for anarchist publications and activity.

## **Cat Hunting**

Dear Fifth Estate:

Please start my subscription with the issue after "The Pope Perishes." I've been a faithful reader since you turned libertarian but have recently moved to the "wilderness" with no bookstores that carry the paper.

I want to tell you that I miss the paper and it inspired me to go "cat hunting" while I still lived in Oakland County. Cat hunting is a fairly new sport I decided to take up after climbing Bald Mountain. Bald Mountain appears on maps of Oakland County and looked like an interesting walk so I climbed it one day—but found a hole where Bald Mountain used to be. At the bottom of this hole was the biggest cat I've never seen. A D-9 Cat bulldozer clawing and scraping away at the mountain's guts.

I decided this cat was dangerous to humans. In fact, a human appeared to be enslaved by this cat—riding in a big box on top of his body. The only chance I saw to kill it was at night when it sleeps. Armed with boltcutters for the protective fence around the enclave, meat for the dogs (real dogs) and poison Karo syrup. Two quarts of the syrup should do it—down the cat's oral cavity.

The next day I checked my work. The big yellow one I got was not there, but a red one was in its place. There seems to be an unending supply of them and most people don't see the danger.

This is one species that deserves extinction—they are dangerous, they eat anything and have a ferocious appetite. So, if you want a hobby, satisfying and cheap (no license required) take up cat hunting.

T. Raven

## Further Praise

To The Fifth Estate:

In response to your "subscription renewal" appeal

\* In the first place, we never had a subscription.

\* In the second place, your group (non group, anti-group) has been consistently irresponsible and unprincipled in relation to us. You don't respond to letters, for one thing. For another, you make us out to be "aspiring bureaucrats," techno-fascists, etc.

In general your paper is a farrago of hysterical and ideological anti-Marxism, cheap shots, slander, and every sort of confusionist bullshit. Personally, I want nothing to do with you.

Louis Michaelson

Berkeley

The End of Pre-History

*Staff note:* Tuff shit for our opinion of your letter, see our subscription blank.

## MOVE Again

Dear Fifth Estate:

As a resident of the Philadelphia area I have a deep interest in MOVE because of being bombarded by the media impressions of them for over two years. (See FE #295, November 3, 1978.)

Putting all previous labels of MOVE aside, I would like to add my labels: MOVE is a close knit family that believes in trying to survive in Center City Philadelphia. Due to extreme imperialism of the local colleges, MOVE were victims of Drexel University's growth. MOVE's old house was 40 feet away from one of its dorms.

MOVE was started by John Africa and has had many members and close supporters. Some are in Philadelphia now living 70 feet from the old house. MOVE displayed great courage for surviving in the crowded city. They have managed to prove that there is life in the city.

John Africa used to help abused dogs that had been thrown out by owners who no longer found them cute. The dogs of MOVE were always murdered by police. After the final shoot-out, close to 50 dogs were murdered by the animal shelter because "they weren't civilized and they weren't used to humans." Yet they too had to survive in the tough city.

MOVE humans have had it just as bad. MOVE babies have been murdered by the police. The police caused several miscarriages on MOVE women by beatings. At the final shoot-out Delbert Africa was not the only one injured. Another member was injured in the genitals. MOVE members have been almost murdered while in a police van. Throughout the years MOVE members have been thrown into solitary in jail for anything they could get away with.

Long Live the House John Africa Built!

Gary Wonderlin

Ocean View, NJ

## Armed Groups

Dear Fifth Estate:

This refers to Robert Howard's critique (See Letters, FE #295, November 3, 1978) of my article on Italy and on my criticisms of armed groups (See FE #293-294, August 21, 1978).

Although I am fully aware that the state and not the groups engaged in armed struggle, is to be blamed for repression on revolutionaries, the problem I pose in my article is slightly different. What I dispute is the effectiveness of a practice which focuses on the attack on functionaries of capital and not on their function. The groups actually practicing the armed struggle, not only in Italy but all over the Western world, pose the question of power in a way which, if not already obsolete in 1917, is catastrophically out of date for our times.

During the first period of capitalism, its domination was confined to the factory. At that time the goal was to take power from the bourgeoisie and to complete the program this class was not capable of carrying through before any transformation in the communist sense. In this situation it was conceivable for the workers' movement to aim for the conquest of the state, as the program of the First International shows.

Now, after 1945, we find a new stage in which the logic of capital, self-expansion of an anticipated value, has invaded all of the aspects of social and individual life. Not only commodities are subjected to the law of value and its contradictions, but tangentially all the relations between human beings. This obviously changes the whole picture for anybody concerned with its own emancipation.

The question of power, at last, must be posed in terms of its abolition and not of its conquest. There is no state power to take because there is no transitional period to accomplish what is already there: the possibility of another kind of human society. As for the armed struggle, there is no point in assassinating or kneecapping the functionaries of capital because for each one killed, ten are ready to take over. Danger gives a little taste to their otherwise senseless jobs.

What the Italian situation suggests is that armed struggle, practiced as it is on the model of national liberation fronts cannot do anything else than alter the balance of power in favor or against this or that political party faction. Right now, for instance, the Socialist Party (PSI) is obviously advantaged and the Communist Party (PCI) obviously disadvantaged by the Red Brigades actions.

Moreover, the underground militants are too busy constructing an acceptable social identity for themselves to take part in what is happening around them. For preparing their conspiracies, they have had to lead the hollow life of bank employees. They cannot afford to revolt because they have to avoid suspicion around them. If possible, they will be CP militants agreeing with the party line in every public situation.

In Italy the post-War situation clearly shows the truth of the "armed struggle": it expands in direct ratio to the weakness of the revolutionary movement. During a recent strike at the Alfa Romeo plant near Milan, the Red Brigade distributed a communique against the sabotage carried out by the strikers: It is not the organization of production which is to be attacked but only the bosses." Their words speak for themselves.

And this is not because these people are Mao or Stalin oriented (which they are); Azione Rivoluzionaria, a claimed libertarian group carrying out analogous actions, in the last analysis gets caught in similar contradictions. The only real difference is that instead of kneecapping Christian Democrats, they prefer to attack Stalinist bosses. Most people don't make any distinction between the two groups and in fact there is none.

As for "the groups of Social Revolutionaries who engage in armed activities designated to educate others," one has to simply recall what old Marx said a century ago, usually that "educators must themselves be educated."

The problem of revolutionary activity is neither to educate anybody nor to oppose "pacifism" to "terrorism." The anonymous rebels of Rome and Bologna, who for a moment got rid of all educators, have demonstrated the possibility of eluding the post '68 trap: back to the CP or in the Red Brigade? The solution continues-to be elsewhere.

Claudio Albertani

## Any Group

Dear People:

I'm a bit surprised that you include the FE in the category of just any media (see Letters, FE #295, November 3, 1978); for some reason I've always considered you to be one above journalism. You have done as much or more to clear up the falsification/mystification of history than any other publication I've come across so, yes, I do have confidence in you but if you ever try to get me to drink Kool-Aid out of a washtub you can kiss my ass.

In regards to organization, it is my opinion that Gianni Collu and Jacques Camatte's theory on that subject (See their "On Organization") is a defeatist's attitude if ever there was one. Camatte states in his pamphlet "The Wandering of Humanity" that there are three possibilities (in addition to the destruction of humanity) for Capitalism's temporary continued existence and the alternatives of State Capitalism or a regression to barbarism. Between the extinction of the human species and the two alternatives, I'll have to go with organizing to prevent either from happening.

Claudio Albertani (FE #293-294, August 21, 1978) and Jacques Camatte point out in so many words that Capitalism is in the process of destroying itself because Capital's reason for being is to recreate itself, i.e. continuous expansion. So industry pushes technology to increase productivity/profits (with little regard for the environment or natural resources) through mechanization that displaces workers which is intensified by the world population (whoever came up with the term "Industrial Revolution" had no idea how true their words would be).

Economic depression sets the stage for revolution (Italy being the perfect example) coupled with the fact that Capital has already entered practically every aspect of life, hopefully will lead to the crisis Capital won't overcome. That is, of course, unless Nelson Rockefeller and the gang don't get a war going somewhere or Madison Ave. can manage to sell Lincoln Continentals to Eskimos.

So, we don't have to organize so much to destroy Capitalism as to create something to take its place in order to prevent it from dragging humanity along. If we don't get organized I'm afraid some morning we may all wake up dead. You know-as well as I that the world "leaders" are sick, sick, sick and may go for it at any time (war, hopefully not thermonuclear) so wouldn't it be better to be a bit reductionist than to be an absolute dead ducktionist?

Your intro to the article "The Battle of France—May '68" (FE #295, November 3, 1978) states that the revolution there failed "in the end because of the intense violence of the State and the traitorous actions of all the leftist parties and organizations combined with the inability of the insurgents to go beyond their initial acts." How could the insurgents go beyond their initial acts when they tried to organize after the insurrection had started?

The reason most or all organization in the past failed is because it was organized from the top down, i.e. leaders and followers. Anarchism on the other hand places emphasis on the individual which will not only encourage a person to look for their self but will also prevent the ego and superego from hampering any progress in that direction. By being part of an informal libertarian organization or group I believe we'd be gaining more than losing because we don't see our faults as well as others do.

If the Anarchist Communist Federation had a publication similar to the FE as their centralization through which they could communicate, coordinate and criticize, they might avoid the dead end street they are on.

Maybe after Capital has been dethroned we can discard organization but for now I'd say it's a necessary vehicle to take us to a rational world where love of humanity instead of the almighty dollar is incentive.

At the very least organization deserves a lot more debate.

With Love,  
Mark Ferris  
Monroe

*EBM Replies:* You seem to be linking together two separate types of human association and calling them the same thing. On one hand you call for informal groupings of people and on the other the organization of the Revolution.

The first is almost a natural occurrence which is only abated through the imposition of mediated society, while the second has always been the-instrument of counterrevolution. The former is the manner in which we are organized here at the FE and certainly agree (as if our agreement were necessary) that groupings of friends/comrades/lovers heighten the pre-conditions for acts of rebellion. The second, which unites people around a program and begins to speak for all rebels, winds up in the position of

'30s CNT in Spain, which for all its base-level democracy, found itself reproducing the modus operandi of all organizations—leaders and followers. Lessons of the Spanish Revolution by Vernon Richards provides an excellent description of this situation in frightening detail. So, if in your workplace or community you are linked with other people who feel similarly to you and who you share personal bonds with—go for it!

## Ratspeak

To The Fifth Estate:

Nice try but your little poster “Art Attack” (FE #295, November 3, 1978) was a mundane failure. Since Tsara and the Dadaists made phenomenal statements (in context) attacking the art establishment and institutions of art, hundreds of would-be Dadaists imagine that any put-down of art, no matter how mediocre or juvenile somehow puts them in that imagined glow. The theme of art being in separate categories from daily life has been a major theme of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but your poster, while alluding to this point, added nothing new, was not even funny, in fact, denigrated the argument.

Actually it would be wonderful if you would have an art attack. It is ironic that you actually quote Artaud on the cover, he is THE most important and exciting art/drama theorist (perhaps excepting Breton and Jarry) of the past 1,000 years. He was a great advocate of art attacks though his idea of a presentation was drama the equivalent in force and significance to the Black Plague. He postulated that theatre needs to examine and take from demonic ceremonies as practised by primitive tribes. Using the Balinese dancers as an example, he was not hesitant in pointing out that there is a vast terrain of demonical, ecstatic, irrational and totally wild forces in the unconscious (the Marvelous) which can be ceremoniously, or otherwise released into mundane reality, adding (or actually ‘revealing’) dimension to the vapid Newtonian swamp of everyday existence.

Unfortunately, it would seem by your poster that you are on the side of Newton. Blake, another artist, says that artists are of the Devil’s party. WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON? Actually, though this poster did disservice to the argument, there is no doubt that the containing of art in museums and galleries is the equivalent of the Church attempts to monopolize cosmic consciousness, or of rationalists (like Reich for one) attempting to confine sexuality to mere quantitative repetitions of genital play. For the primitives, as with Artaud, art is imbued in the fabric of daily life but is given special time and space, as the ancients recognize the powers that lurk beyond and (through their works) synthesize them with the present.

Your suggestion that it would be a liberating experience to destroy works of art may be alright and effective symbolically in the short run, but in the long run the project of artists is to discover, and share techniques for the transforming of all reality into something truly marvelous. We cannot ignore the demons, they may be our best friends, operating spy missions from within.

Finally, I would hate, and would kill gladly any group or person who would try to thrust a world upon me that is lacking of grace, that represses the supernatural. For centuries dance and theatre was forbidden in Europe. Artists, unless they created religious material were punished as witches or as criminals. April Fools Day was the only time of the year in which society permitted the medieval peasants to release their feelings of the demonic splendor. The main instigator of this repression, is of course, the Church. Do you really join the Church in this holy war? Do you really feel that the only printable, presentable or topical mode of dissemination is political material advocating the revolution? How holy.

I suspect that your poster didn’t really express your true sentiments on this matter, that it was, in fact a flippant and cute attempt at metaphysical relevance that was a flop. A partial critique (there was something there) can be much worse than nothing.

Pattus Raticus

*EBM & Primitivo Solis reply:* It’s probably somewhat cruel (although certainly fair) to resurrect-the past statements of an author in order to make him look like an ass for what he is saying currently, but let us direct you to a passage you deftly penned in “Fli-Back”, February 1976. In an article entitled “For

A Renaissance of Arson” under the sub-heading “Burn Down the Institute” you state, “...It is a bright spark which can only inflame my general desire TO SEE THE INSTITUTE OF ARTS BURNED TO THE GROUND. (Emphasis in original).” And further, “...The art institute (is) the primal, spiritual embodiment of everything for which our society stands. That alone is reason enough to fire bomb the place, and the fact that so many bright and sensitive people get temporal (read illusory) spiritual comfort at such a mass receptacle of displaced and frustrated sexuality, makes it all the more necessary to bury any and all remaining ashes.”

Couldn't have said it better ourselves. Is it cynical of us to suspect your views have been tempered of late by the fact that the reviled Institute was kind enough to recently have invited you to perform one of your plays within its walls and you so graciously accepted?

## On Italy

To The Fifth Estate:

Claudio Albertani's article on the crisis in Italy (See FE #293–294, August 21, 1978) serves several purposes. As a participant in these events, Albertani has analyzed the manifold activities of the spontaneous groups that have come to life, each group carrying on revolutionary acts that challenge the prevailing unjust system of present society. Their background is of great interest: The Red Brigades consist of youthful members of the Communist Party who consider the leaders of the Party as having betrayed the interests of the workers. Their protest against this betrayal has been met by the government in broken heads and mass jailings.

It was but natural that this sad experience should lead them to react in kindred. Every revolutionary act that the Red Brigades have enacted and openly laid claim to was against the misdeeds of some government agent. The autonomous groups centered their activities in rebellious attacks against unjust acts by every institution of the present system.

Some of these manifold groups are anti-authoritarian and others are Stalin-oriented. It is this latter grouping that threatens—if and when triumphant—to replace the overthrown government with a new one, as happened in Russia in 1917.

It is this fear that seems to be upper most in the minds of most participants in the anarchist movement in Italy, and which has led them to ignore and minimize the significance of the continuous revolutionary activities that the rebellious youths are carrying on, risking their freedom and lives. Morally, it amounts to a suicidal position from a revolutionary standpoint that the anarchist movement has always stood for.

Claudio Albertani's comprehensive analysis is therefore most welcome from an anti-authoritarian point of view, in contrast to that of the anarchist movement.

Another encouraging sign in this respect is the statement of “The Comrades of Anarchism” of Catania, Sicily, reprinted in the October 1978 *Black Flag* which reads in part, “Even with all the limitations and negative considerations which we as anarchists have of the authoritarian vision of these organizations, from the moment in which they entered into clandestinity and began to attack the state, we have always supported them in principle, approving their operations...It should be noted that there exists in Italy today a different type of organization of armed struggle, ‘Azione Rivoluzionaria’ which clearly makes reference to anarchism, and is developing a critique of authoritarian marxism.

This critique has not only taken the form of documents, but also of certain actions, such as the destruction of special prisons under construction, attacks against medical officers, journalists (also CP ones) and attacks against production.”

The very betrayal by the Communist leadership in Italy should make the Red Brigades and affiliate groups realize that this has come about due to their entertaining the authoritarian concept that led Lenin to mouth “All power to the Soviets,” only to immediately subvert it for his plan of establishing a dictatorial state. The following stalinization saw yesterday's leaders such as Bukharin, Radek and others executed, as were hundreds of other dissenters.

The regimes that followed Stalin continued in kindred down to today, where, aside from imprisonment, intellectual dissenters are declared mentally deranged!

The same kind of mistreatment has and is being practiced in every marxian ruled country. These facts are striking proof that the establishment of any new government in place of the destroyed one must lead to the same disastrous counter-revolution.

A truly free society that every revolutionary works for, sacrifices and dreams of bringing about, will have no need of rulership and exploitation of man over fellow man. In its stead, the voluntary cooperation and free experimentation of new means and ideas that can enrich life becomes the aim of every participant.

Marcus Graham

## **CORRECTION**

In J. Camatte's essay, "May-June 1968: The Exposure" (FE #295, November 3, 1978), the second complete paragraph on page 9 should read:

This view has a chance of imposing itself because various obstacles to a different evolution have been destroyed: namely, the myth of progress and development of productive forces, the myth of the USSR as the country of communism, of China as a substitute model, etc. The same goes for their corollaries:..."

Also on page 9, the first sentence in the section headed "Struggling at the Heart of Capital" should read:

To a certain extent, the events following May 1968 comprise the confession-exposure that Bordiga was expecting from the Russians and from the world capitalist system.



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