

Letters to the *Fifth Estate*

Various Authors

1979

Jim & Sid

Bon Jours Cinque Etate:

Allors!—as France's leading Anarchist & Public Enemy Number One, I wish to offer my congratulations on your fine paper. As a revenue generating device, may I suggest an idea for a t-shirt: on the front a picture of padre Jim Jones w/logo, "He died for your sins" & on the back the picture of Sid Vicious with logo, "I died for mine."

Keep up the confusion.

Yours in Revolt,

Jacques Mesrine

At-large

Komboia Moved

Note: Lorenzo Komboa Ervin has been a prisoner of war for ten years in various Federal prisons after being convicted of air piracy in 1969 for a protest against the war in Vietnam and U.S. racism. Komboa was kidnapped by the CIA in East Germany brought back for trial and imprisonment where he has fought an unending struggle against prison abuse and for his dignity. (See FE June 19, 1978 for details.)

Komboia was moved at the end of last year from the infamous Marion Illinois Behavior Modification Program after a world-wide protest campaign in his behalf. Komboa is due for a parole hearing on June 18th and asked that people write letters of support to Cecil C. McCall, Chairman, U.S. Parole Commission, 320 1st Street, NW, Washington DC 20537.

A recent letter from Komboa follows.

Dear Comrades:

I was released from the Marion Control Unit in December because of a law suit I had pending in court, and because of the agitation and protest of my supporters, many of whom wrote letters, made phone calls to prison officials, as well as attended demos and rallies at the prison and other offices of the Federal Bureau of Prisons to demand my release.

I want to thank the FE (and other publications) for its series of articles on my case and I thank all my friends, comrades, and supporters for all their dedication and perseverance for my release.

On another matter: The article "State Fetishism" in the January 1979 edition of the Fifth Estate (#296) was filled with half-truths, distortions and omissions, and was motivated by the author's fear, bourgeois pacifism, and defeatism.

I would like to know why the FE continues to feature such tripe but does not allow proponents the same ease of having their articles printed as opponents of armed struggle are apparently allowed without reservation; even though FE does print critical letters in response to such articles.

Armed struggle is not “revolutionary suicide,” the acts of agent provocateurs, escapist or romantic fancy, or mass murder, and it is not of necessity authoritarian. It is just one form of class war, like it or not.

For Anarchy,
Lorenzo Komboa Ervin
No. 18759-175
Box 1000
Leavenworth KS 66048

Cogitate & Agitate

Dear Fifth Estate,

Sometimes it seems that Having Nothing to Say [FE #297, April 18, 1979] isn't half the problem of saying too much about nothing that Everyone can understand completely. You do drone on at times, you know. Cogitate is a good word for you'all but you're at your best dealing with agitation and instigation. You've provided a grand arena for not mere debate but clarification. For this the gods of the gutter bless you. So long as you keep listening to those voices Out There, there's hope for you. And by the bye, listen well to those voices from behind the bars, they are telling it like it is!

Yours, in-deed,
V.T. Lee
Rosendale, New York

Calif. Dreaming

To the Fifth Estate Collective:

It's probably somewhat cruel (although certainly fair) to resurrect the past statements of a newspaper collective to make them look like asses for what they are saying currently, but consider: In the July 1977 issue of the FE, the FE collective penned a response to several letters supporting Black Rose Books against one Joe Doaks, who correctly exposed the obviously capitalist nature of BRB's activity.

In this response, you stated that, despite “friendly” relations with BRB, you could in no sense call them “comrades.” In fact, you “...failed to see anything in BRB's activity which significantly marks it in any sense a libertarian project, a project outside of capital, or one even attempting to operate outside of capital.” Likewise, you compared your relationship with BRB to that of other firms such as Random, Harper & Row, and Dover, noting that an “identical set of definitions” applied to each transaction.

Why then, considering this seemingly definitive position, do you, in the Jan. 29 1979 issue of the FE, denounce the trashing and robbery of the Wooden Shoe bookstore, an enterprise with precisely the same features as BRB? After all, you have consistently supported attacks on capital, waxing enthusiastic, for example, over the trashing and looting of New York City by tens of thousands of people in the summer of 1977. Why the concordance with your apparent enemies, to the point of sharing the Wooden Shoe's description of the vandals as “thought police?”

Is it cynical of me to suspect your views have been tempered of late by your failure to adequately answer the charge that you share many of the features of those you have in the past attacked, and that, similarly confronted, you have begun to identify with your former enemies? (This identification is transparently apparent in the apt renaming of your (much criticised) bookstore “project” FE Bookstore.) You may answer that you have never considered yourselves a “revolutionary project” (such a project being, you feel, impossible within capitalist society), and that, unlike BRB or the Wooden Shoe, you are not fooling yourselves or anyone else about your activity (to para-

phrase your response to BRB), said response presumably exempting you from criticism or the need to reexamine your own lives.

If you really feel this way, there isn't much more I can say though it saddens me to see you collapse into such a self-paralysing position.

Sincerely,
Bob Brubaker
San Francisco

E.B. Maple responds: The change of climate must have fogged your ability to think. How did we leap from being inconsistent at the beginning of your letter to an identification with our enemies, to a "collapse," all in a few sentences?

Also, the glaring difference between your cordial, personal "cover" letter and the diatribe which appears here makes me wonder whether or not you have dropped out of the gang that advocates an end to the separation between one's personal and political life. Which letter should we take seriously?

It would be easy to take neither seriously, but since others have raised the question of our seeming inconsistency on this question, maybe a few remarks are in order.

In discussing Black Rose Books two years ago we were trying to make clear the processes of capital and to suggest that they are not suspended simply because one is selling revolutionary literature rather than pots and pans. It was also meant as an attack on the general arrogance (that we all have) about our revolutionariness.

It seems ridiculous to have to assert that our critique of BRB was not with intent of setting them up as a target for trashers. In fact, it is unfortunate that it was Black Rose which became the focus of the dispute since their sleazy business and political practices tend to obscure what we were trying to say about what constitutes "revolutionary" activity.

Perhaps Free Life Editions or Kerr Publishers would have been a better example since both also print literature about revolution, but manage their transactions in a fair and friendly manner. Still, our relationship with them is no different either than it is with Random House. As we said, "We send them money; they send us books." What astounds me is that you or the trashers could interpret this to mean that we advocate a "war of all against all" because the mode of capital exists everywhere.

What would have been consistent with our approach to BRB is the pamphlet the trashers put out attacking the Wooden Shoe practices in print thus allowing those involved on the project or "shoppers" to decide for themselves whether or not to continue their participation. There is something distinctly totalitarian about an act committed by a handful that leaves no alternative for those unconvinced by the argument It is like the Red Guard in Philadelphia.

We, of course, do have an extra sensitivity to this issue, since we, like BRB and Wooden Shoe, also sell things—newspapers and books. Does this set us up as a target for vandalism by these self-appointed avengers? If so, I suggest an approach with extreme caution, but even more important is Stodder's contention last issue that even the most radical find themselves on the other side of a tightly drawn line if pushed far enough. For instance, don't the trashers ever work or buy food or pay rent? If so, are they not complicit in the circulation of capital? If they steal everything and move every month, even stolen commodities contain the dead labor of other workers. No escape for them; maybe we should suggest suicide.

In no small part, my view, and that of several others here, was shaped by a visit from one of the persons involved in the trashing. The only interest this dour, self-righteous, zealous guardian of morality

seemed to have was to conduct an interview with each of us and in such a manner that only evoked feelings of a police interrogation. This inspector general took copious notes on our personalities, our relationships, and even our housecleaning standards before presenting us with a pamphlet on the trashing as she exited the city

When she arrived in San Francisco, two of us received “evaluations” from her complete with drawings showing us hanging from a gallows (the state instrument of execution). Someone here made the remark that we were lucky to have gotten off so easily since she probably could have justified trashing our houses given her opinion of us.

(One thing that troubles me, Bob, is that since you were always friendly to the Fifth Estate prior to your arrival in SF, could it be that you were one of the recipients of the above mentioned police notes?)

A final comment on our bookstore: we set up the operation and continue it today primarily with the desire to bring people books which excite us and which we want to turn others onto. Most titles in the bookstore have been read by one of us and nothing is ever offered simply for its “salability.” We sell only those books we have to buy ourselves, and we manage to distribute a large quantity of free literature each year. The bookstore is generally a pleasure and not a job or a sacrifice; its commodity nature is the only thing which mars the activity, but that is universal.

Generally, we expect and even welcome criticism as part of the process of intellectual growth, but there is something troubling about yours, Bob, that I didn’t find in the letters last issue. There is some thing joyfully cynical about yours; a happiness that another malefactor has been detected. Sorry to disappoint you.

Tit for Tat

To the Fifth Estate:

A few thoughts on the latest issue, which was a very good one:

“On Having Nothing to Say” [FE #297, April 18, 1979] is a poignant plea which certainly speaks directly to our current situation, though, luckily, I think it somewhat overstates the case, either for the sake of dramatic presentation or from personal anguish. (There’s a certain danger in totally believing one’s own generalizations—in that any one person or group’s presentation of the “facts” is inevitably going to be incomplete and oversimplified (for the sake of rational/linear presentation) and thus to a degree, “untrue.”

Still, after reading it twice I’m left with an uncertainty as to the enemy we all face and the potential solution. I guess the source of alienation and fragmentation is to be laid at the doorstep of Capital and its “massive culture of domination” ...but except for the rather abstract notion of re-seizing the language and the desire for a hypothetically “firm but not specific vision,” “nothing...announces itself as a way to regain our humanity.”

Further along, “8 Theses on Nuclearism” expands upon this domination as personified in nuclearism and civilization itself. The enemy expands beyond Capital’s alienated exchange relations to technology and then Western civilization. The immediate threat of nuclear wipe-out galvanizes a defensive action which offers the opportunity to promulgate the larger critique.

In going tit for Technology’s tat, one falls into the same mirror-circuit which finds the Leftist goons street-brawling with Nazi goons. Utilizing your IBM composer and the local offset press to print a newspaper and leaflet complete with half-tones, yet signed by The New Barbarians is, in part, to promote a romantic (and false) self-image and to further the illusion that change proceeds from the reproduction and spread of radical image/ gestures.

Technology and Capital are not strictly synonymous as Nachalo (in “Progress and Nuclear Power”) would have it. Presuming that you aren’t gunning for the big Meltdown of Civilization (which would have a probably fatal “fallout” if enacted en toto, everywhere at once) but rather a humane society characterized by true communication,

creativity and freedom, then it must be unromantically admitted that technology would be utilized in transforming the present nightmare. To loosen a screw you utilize a screwdriver, not claw at it with your bare hands.

Present technology and industry have been thoroughly warped in that they have developed under the reign of Capital. Yet we are presently dependent on them for the reproduction of our own lives in almost all aspects (from clothing fabric to typewriter ribbon). To assure that social transformation would not be accompanied by mass starvation and misery, one has to grant, I would think, that some elements of science/knowledge/technology would be utilized in that transformation.

The fact that not everyone can know everything does not make a scientist a villain because he knows of theories which most people do not. Technology can be transformed, cleaned up, scaled down, humanized and made accountable. If it can't then let's cut off our hands because any interaction between our bodies and any "tools" are by definition tainted.

If the enemy really is civilization and I have seen a vision of our future and it is Cambodia. Except to do it "correctly" we should all autonomously self-organize ourselves to march out of the cities and claw the soil, rather than have the Party do it to us.

In short, I can concur with the understanding that Nuclear madness is part and parcel of "progress" and civilization as we know it, and that they all must be transformed thru a revolution. But to dramatically castigate the very concept of civilization itself is to over-act in your own movie.

Jay Kinney
San Francisco

E.B. Maple responds: Obviously we don't think the problem was "overstated" or we wouldn't have written it as we did. Do you really think things are better than we described? Since the issue appeared several of us have read *The Culture of Narcissism* by Christopher Lasch and if anything he paints as more dismal the current state of the culture.

The contradiction involved in critiquing the impact of technology on the species all the while using its techniques seems so obvious as to hardly need mentioning. That we communicate in a world of separation through the technology of separation only emphasizes the problem we face.

Your suggestion that our distaste for centralized, massive technology means a return to scratching the earth with sticks, hunting for grubs doesn't seem to add much to the discussion. Much of what answers your objections appears further on in this issue in Marshall Sahlins' essay and its introduction.

Funds Return

In our Jan. 28, 1979 issue of this newspaper, we printed a letter from Jim Bumpas informing us that we no longer would be the recipient of funds raised at regularly held cenas (dinners) sponsored by a group of Italian anarchists. The events are held to raise funds for the world-wide libertarian press and it was felt that the FE's criticism of formal anarchism disqualified us from the group's support

On May 14 we received another message from Bumpas telling us that the group had re-considered its decision. His letter follows.

Dear fifth Estate:

Enclosed is a money order in the amount of \$50. Instead of trying to figure out some reason for it, please just accept it for what it is: a donation to help you continue your good work.

The last cena simply made a different decision from the previous one. No one present this last time objected to the FE donation. As anarchists we are not bound by prior decisions. None of us has any doubt about the value and interest of your project in the FE. We do consider it an anarchist paper, and a part of the anarchist movement.

The money enclosed is part of a fund raised at Negri's in San Francisco on May 12. The list of other donations which were made is: Black Flag \$85; Open Road \$85; Freedom \$75; Soil of Liberty \$50; Internazionale \$200; Volonta \$100; Re-vista A \$300; CDA \$75.

The dates of our summertime fundraising picnics at Santa Teresa Park, and San Jose, Calif. are July 8 and September 16.

Yours for the Works,
Jim Bumpas
Mountain View, Calif.

Support Rasputin

Dearly Beloved Fifth Estate:

People across the world think and communicate on Many levels. The resisters in the Soviet Union have adopted the religious strata because their bureaucrats can less easily follow them there. The old Russian religion had a degree of humanism similar to the old American Holy Rollers which put respectability entirely out of their society.

The common people everywhere have a similar attitude to WWII: avoid it entirely or minimize it to the fullest degree. We can show our solidarity and strength with our Russian brothers and sisters if we elect Rasputin the Patron Saint of the USA.

The alternative is the official appointment of Anita Bryant our Patron Saint. Yes, things are becoming crystal clear as to such a choice. No other candidates so perfectly embody the issues.

Rasputin brought humanism to the society of the Russian supermen and he nearly stopped WWI. For that reason he was assassinated and has been defamed ever since. We can reach across the language barrier by electing him our Patron Saint. The Russian people will understand.

John L Coffin
Madison, Wisconsin

fifth Estate

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/298-june-19-1979/letters-to-the-fifth-estate>
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