

# Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1979

## Bad In Stone Age

Dear Fifth Estate,

After reading the June 19<sup>th</sup> issue [FE #298, June 19, 1979] I would like to make some comments regarding your attack on “civilization” and your glorification of hunter/ gatherer life.

First, I agree with the point that increased technology does not increase leisure time and in fact has the opposite result. However this is not a new “revolutionary” theory. Marvin Harris has made the same point in *Culture, People, Nature* several years ago, and has drawn similar conclusions about the “virtues” of technological progress.

Where I part company with your treatment of the subject is your seeming conclusion that this lifestyle is therefore superior to an industrial one. I would prefer to live in neither an industrial capitalist/socialist culture nor a hunter/ gatherer culture and therefore will not take sides for one or the other. However, I would like to point out some drawbacks of the societies you think are so “affluent.” (I think we all agree about the drawbacks of modern culture so I won’t bother with these.)

Sexism is rampant in most of the modern hunter/gatherer societies where women do most of the work of gathering food and in general contribute much more to the nutrition of the group than the men. Despite this they are held in subordinate positions and more often are victims of direct or indirect infanticide than are male children.

These people also engage in warfare with and raids on their neighbors, much as do the modern societies. This is not to say that these cultures are any worse than the ones in which most of us now live. I only bring it up to show that hatred and killing and authoritarian relationships predate civilization and even the state.

Besides the things just mentioned, it seems that the individual person in these societies is certainly no more free than most people in modern societies. Although as a group, a hunter/gatherer band may be considered “free” in some senses, especially regarding property and economics. However the “tyranny of the normal or normative” which you discuss elsewhere in FE is a very powerful force in these cultures, as it is in the rest of the world.

In conclusion I would just like to say that authority and suppression of individual freedom are evils which exist everywhere in the world today, and most likely existed in prehistory as well. They must be fought on their own terms and not by looking for a scapegoat (like “civilization”) on which to place the blame.

Joe Peacott

Jamaica Plains, MA

## Response On Violence

Dear FE,

We were surprised that the letters it printed in FE #297, April 18 reflected such a profound misunderstanding of the article “State Fetishism”. These letters adopted an attitude that rejection of the errors of the RAF was equivalent

to rejection of armed struggle and that because the RAF had fought, they were above criticism. Recognizing that the demise of the RAF signaled the end of the lenino-guevarist theory of guerrilla action, the purpose of the article was to determine how and why they failed.

It seems necessary to articulate the most elementary assumptions upon which the article was based. First, no part of the critique was founded upon any belief in pacifism or in the notion that “armed struggle is futile.” To quote the article itself:

“if it’s true that small groups can exercise a useful terror against the representatives of bourgeois society, their action is effective only if it takes place within a context of social warfare and not if it is undertaken in order to create this context. Their (the RAF’s) error lay not in engaging in isolated and violent actions, but in the fact that these actions did not correspond to any practice on the part of the proletariat.

“The RAF wanted to radicalize the proletariat, yet they placed themselves outside of it, thus succeeding only in progressively isolating themselves.”

Which brings us to the second point: this critique was not of the use of arms, but of their leninoid conviction that their armed action would “educate” the ignorant, complacent masses and “spark” them to action.

Setting themselves above and beyond the people created the very isolation which resulted in the ultimate critique of the RAF by the west german state. This defeat—and it was a decided defeat notwithstanding those who prefer to worship the bloody ascension of revolutionary martyrs to criticizing their errors—resulted from profound misconceptions of the nature of the state, the people and the process of revolution. The isolation of the RAF was not a physical consequence inherent in guerrilla activity, but was the result of the notion that revolution is primarily a military question and that the superior technique of a few could replace the participation of the many. Thus, the very skill with which each attack on a member of the capitalist/state apparatus was carried out only served to make the RAF more remote from the very people they sought to organize.

Rather than setting an example, these actions suggested no possibility of involvement or activity on the part of people other than as cheerleaders. This relation, ship between spectacular action and mass passivity is not inherent in the nature of armed resistance.

When some comrades fall into the trap that capital has set for them by initiating violent actions against the state while running the risk of destroying themselves without having changed anything, it is unthinkable not to warn them. In stating this we neither ignore the incredible violence perpetuated day in and day out by the bourgeois state nor do we imply that the coming social revolution will arrive peacefully.

While individuals may choose to deal with the madness of modern life by taking up arms, there should be no delusion that such a choice is anything more than a personal choice if it is made without consideration or regard to its relationship to the actions of others. Built into bourgeois society is an allowance for violence and such individual action when uncoordinated with the actions of others does nothing to weaken the state. To put it another way, the physical elimination of a few lackeys, whether cops on the street or those in the highest offices, will not eliminate their function because there are always others ready to take their places. The question is not the surgical removal of a few parasites, but rather the transformation of the social dynamic that reproduces society as we now know it. This transformation cannot take place either in isolation or through the use of violence alone.

Where there is no mass activity against the state, it serves no purpose to attack it spectacularly or symbolically. If some of us cannot accept this, it is because violence has become a dominant principle and need of their activity. The social democratic illusion that violence has no place in social transformation is merely replaced with the illusion that violence alone will bring about that transformation. The bankruptcy of parliamentarianism and “communist” organizations is not resolved by putschism or self-immolation. The phenomenon of representation (symbolic action) is characteristic of statist politics: in this context, even “revolutionary violence” is just politics in a different form. This is not to say that the attacks of the state should be passively endured. But there should be no mistake that capital drives those who rebel towards fringe cultural, political and drug-oriented communities in the same way it drives them to the community of violence—in the effort to first isolate and then ultimately to physically destroy them.

This dynamic which originates in the positive move to create a human society and which falls when caught in its own limited and immediate goals thus starts in contradiction to bourgeois society and ends in its confirmation—

Just as the RAF started as an effort to eat away at the strength of the state and ended in developing the ability of the German state to repress any motion for social transformation.

In the realm of violence, naivete equals death whether such naivete takes the form of the belief that the masses are just waiting for the right deed or group to act or the belief that all revolutionary sacrifices equally move the struggle forward. Only by seriously and critically examining the mistakes of those who have tried and failed can we hope to end such naivete. Perhaps most disturbing to us is the realization that there has emerged a tendency which views a critical understanding of armed struggle with the same religious horror as the Maoists view criticism of Lenin, Mao and Stalin. This attitude can only result in more wasted lives and empty gestures. To study the past, to learn from the mistakes of comrades, to evolve a viable theory of armed struggle appears to us the only path out of the madness around us.

The Spectre Publications Gang  
New York City

## **To the FE Staff,**

Last Saturday I attended the demonstration at the Fermi II plant near Monroe and received a copy of an extra edition of your paper entitled "Jr. Cops and Anti-Nukers." I would like to respond to that article (FE #298, June 19, 1979) as a member of the Lone Tree Council

You say that the Lone Tree Council is "committed to 'peaceful, legal, nonviolent demonstrations' and apparently feel that only close cooperation with the authorities can assure this." What the membership form actually says that as a member "I will be non-violent in my activities to stop nuclear power." It doesn't say anything against civil disobedience.

I was a Marshal at the march in Midland and I did not report anything to police. My contact was with them after the march when I wanted to know what happened to the tapes they had taken. It is true that the police did inform the marshals, ahead of time that they were going to video-tape it. Since this was the first large march like this, nothing was said ahead of time. There was much discussion after, however, by Lone Tree members and was stated that in the future we inform the police that we do not appreciate their video-taping of the demonstration.

Yes, it is also true that Dow Chemical did not want us at the top of the hill. We had to agree to try and keep people from that area or we would not have been able to have the demonstration near the plant such as was the case on Saturday in Monroe. The organizers finally had to agree to hold it in the park about five miles away. I could go on but feel it would be a waste of time since your article doesn't seem too open for differing views. I have to question when I read something like this who's side are you on? Suggesting a possible boycott? It makes one wonder if one ought to be checking the backgrounds of those responsible for writing this!

Your article seems like a group of people who would like to see the various groups in the state be at one another's necks. There is power when there is unity and it is only a strong force of committed people that will close those plants. We don't have time to waste bickering among ourselves.

Carol Gilbert  
Saginaw

## **Advice to FE**

The following was sent as a Western Union Mailgram:

Dear Fifth Estate:  
Since you have nothing to say why don't you shut up?  
Bob Black  
San Francisco

## Advice Wanted

Dear Fifth Estate,

Listen, I'm 17 and part of a rare breed—aspiring young anarchists. I'm sick to death of this grotesque perversion called capitalism and materialism. I've got a point to argue with you though, what good is it to have a paper like FE if it doesn't help people.

I must admit FE does help dissatisfied people like myself know we aren't alone in our disgust of the present social economic system. However I need more—I need concrete advice on how to spread anarchy.

Your "interview with Abbie" [FE #298, June 19, 1979] wasn't bad—only help us along. Tell us how we can disrupt and bring about the downfall of this system. Tell me how to make free calls, rip off Ma Bell, how to watch pay-TV on Channel 20 for free (as if I should be watching TV anyway), break computer bank codes. and rip off bucks from night tellers, get free service from the utilities (who rip off starving senior citizens).

I know these things can be done, just tell me how. I don't want any ideological bullshit. No theories, man. I want action—Revolution NOW!

Dominic Howski  
Wyandotte

## Kombo Ervin III

Dear Fifth Estate,

I am in federal prison at Leavenworth Federal Pen. It has been discovered that I have TB, yet the prison officials refuse to take me to an outside hospital for medical treatment, even though the prison has no tuberculosis treatment program. The Kansas Univ. Medical Center is the only local medical facility available to examine and treat TB cases, but because the prison officials are not concerned about my health, they are refusing to give me a medical furlough. At this stage the disease is manageable and can be treated with no threat to my life, but the prison officials plan to hold me in prison until the disease consumes me, with apparent hopes that I will then quietly die behind bars.

Since it was filthy prison conditions and the medical malpractice of prison officials (who placed me on a TB ward-when I caught pneumonia) which caused me to contract the disease in the first place, then they should be forced to assume responsibility for its treatment. If you are interested in human rights, justice and fair play, then please write to the Warden of this prison and demand that he move me to the KU Medical Center for medical examination and treatment:

Mr. Id E. Day, Warden  
U.S. Penitentiary  
P.O. box 1000  
Leavenworth, KS 66048  
Lorenzo Edward Ervin, Jr. No. 18759-175 box 1000 Leavenworth, KS 66048

## A Parable

Dear Revolutionaries,

Does this sound familiar?

First Looter: Is it wrong to steal from Wooden Shoe Books?

Second Looter: Not unless you get caught!

No? Well, never mind. Please print "before" and "after" pix of your staff in say, 1976 and 1979. I want to see how many of you have been turned into shrubs.

Curbing my Teng,  
I remain,

The Legendary Hitchhiker  
Not Abbie

## To the FE:

The June 19, 1979 issue of FE was one of the best. Excuse me if that sounds fanish, but there are two things in particular that I wanted to comment on, both from that issue.

First, I am disgusted with what I read about the Huron Alliance. It seems to be the fulfillment of the tendency of several “liberal-type” no nukes groups. Some local Yippies were recently hassled by a member of the Keystone Alliance (in the Philadelphia area) for carrying an amerikan flag with ANARCHY written on it, but he cooled out eventually (now he just gives us looks). However no one else from that organization has hassled over that or the black flags, but we still keep our eyes open. But the Huron Alliance is the worst case that I’ve heard of.

I believe that it is of utmost importance for all no-nukes groups and activists to deal with the questions which come out of the Huron Alliance deal. How far can pacifism and “cooperation with authorities” go? Non-violence is great—especially in the no-nukes movement—but their antics have reached the point of destructiveness (to be nice about it). Nuclear power will never be stopped if the entire movement comes under the state’s control, manipulation, co-optation and pacification. What a shame to see a movement with such spirit, energy and potential, die an ugly death.

Also in that same issue was an interview with somebody claiming to be Abbie Hoffman. I think it’s possible for the interviewee to have been Hoffman, although lean more towards disbelieving him. The combination of the dissimilarities between present-day Abbie and the person in the interview bring me to that conclusion.

First of all, in an “interview with Abbie” which I do trust (published in OVERTHROW, June/July 1979), “Abbie” called it quits for interviews. The part about the “grippies” doesn’t sound like him, as well as the rap about the media, judging from his writings of recent years. He also does not talk like the bit about putting LSD in the water any more. However, the idea to cleverly zap the conventions towards the end of the interview, did sound like Abbie.

Another question is why would the real Abbie risk coming to your offices to do the interview and announce who he is verbally. Underground fugitives do not stay free when they show up at offices of revolutionary newspapers and announce who they are. But whether or not it was Abbie Hoffman in the interview, the Yippies will be zapping the conventions, as always, in 1980.

Keep up the good work and please -continue coverage of the Huron Alliance. And avoid all pigs like the trashers of Wooden Shoe (thank you E. B. Maple for putting it all into perspective for those outside this area).

“Keep the faith and never break it.” (Tom Robinson)

Yours in Anarca-Feminism, Love,

Dragonfly

Philadelphia, YIP

# fifth Estate

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