

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1982

FASCIST DISSENSION

Dear Friends:

I am resubscribing to the *Fifth Estate* plus \$1.00 extra for a prisoner's subscription. I support the work of the FE and believe that it is of critical value to all revolutionaries. However, I strongly disagree with your printing of the "Challenge to the Prison Movement" (See FE #307, Nov. 19, 1981) piece of fascist dissension.

As far as I'm concerned anyone who advocates for the present institutions, especially the prisons of this country is advocating a view compatible with the State's. We can read that kind of bullshit in the New York Times. The Fifth Estate paper should remain a voice of revolution and anti-authoritarianism and critical discussion, not reactionary politics.

In Struggle,
Paul Hetznecker
Amherst, Mass.

SCIENCE/RELIGION

Folks:

I saw a couple of articles in the local papers which started my mind thinking and I decided to share it.

One of the articles dealt with meteorologists' views of the big winter storm we had here January 3 through 5. The other was about the loss of a lawsuit by christians who wanted biblical creation taught in public school science classes along side of the theory of evolution.

In the first article, the meteorologists described a storm that killed at least 24 people, injured hundreds and destroyed thousands of houses as being not a particularly major storm by objective, scientific standards, but actually only an average storm. The second article says that the teaching of biblical creation was not to be taught in school because it was part of a religious belief, not a scientific theory. (I agree that biblical creation should not be taught in school. Nothing should be taught in school. But as long as there are schools, they'll teach children to obey some authority, whether they call it god or whatever.) These articles inspired me to do some thinking about modern science.

What could make someone see 24 people killed, hundreds injured and thousands lose their homes, let alone the thousands of plants and animals that may have been killed that the newspapers, of course, don't report, and then tell us that this wasn't a major storm? Modern science, of course. That system of belief that says that we can separate ourselves from the world and look at it in a purely "objective" way, eliminating the human (or as they would say the emotional) element in our observation. And this is not a religious faith?!?

Biblical creation cannot be taught in public schools because it is part of a religious faith, but evolution, which is taught in public schools as part of the faith in modern science, is permissible. Sure, I feel that life came to be through a process that could be called evolution, but why use this term with its implications of progress, of the later being superior to the earlier, and why bring in all of the trappings of modern science? Modern science is just as much a religion as christianity.

Both christianity and modern science see humanity as, at least ideally, separate from the natural world. Both are forced to posit something that is totally outside of nature that humans can turn to. For christianity, it's their god; for modern science, it's objective scientific laws. And, of course, both need an institutional form through which humans can participate in their separation from nature. For christianity, it's the church. For modern science it's technology.

Fuck god!

Fuck science!

Abolish all religions!

David N. DeVries

San Francisco

GREAT JOKE

Dear FE:

I really enjoyed your parody of folklore scholarship—that article on “The Gift” (see FE #108, Jan. 19, 1982 “Gift Exchange & the Imagination”). It was a bit long, although there was probably a good laugh buried in every column.

I hope you don't follow up that success with another such article. Once is enough; the point is made; don't beat a gift horse.

Keep up the hilarious work. We need laughs.

Moral Quest

San Francisco

Ad not sexist

FE Note: The following is a response to a criticism made by the Youth International Party in San Francisco that an ad by an anarchist commune which sought exclusively a female roommate was sexist. It appeared in the Nov. 19, 1981 FE.

Fifthstateland:

Three years ago a group of us in Columbia, Missouri formed a living collective in a conscious effort to put our own theories of anarchy into practice—i.e. to effect collective self-management of our own living space in a manner consistent with individual autonomy. Initially we had two three-bedroom houses. We decided that we wanted each of our households to be sexually integrated, and that it would be best to keep the overall number of men and women about equal. This works out to having two women and one man in one house and two men and one woman in the other.

Our collective is currently seeking a woman to move into the house I share with another man. To insure greater privacy for all concerned we plan to convert what is presently our kitchen into a bedroom this summer. As soon as this is finished, we hope to find a woman who is an anti-ideological, non-moralistic anarchy creator to join our collective. There are a number of reasons that we specifically seek a woman. The most important one as far as I'm concerned is quite simply that my housemate and I think it would be more satisfying to have a woman as the third member of our household than a man. (We've lived with both at various times.) You'd have to know us to understand why, but the reasons have nothing to do with hatred of men or desires of dominating women.

Secondly, there is the matter of collective policy. We seek to overcome the patriarchal customs of compulsory sex segregation. The distrust, fear, misunderstanding, fantasizing, and marrying of members of the opposite sex,

which has served to maintain patriarchy, has been largely a product of dichotomous male/ female subcultures. Men need opportunities to express positive “feminine” characteristics; women are increasingly empowering themselves with qualities which make them unladylike. We seek to create a living environment which helps support and encourage these tendencies.

Having said all this I have no desire to engage in a political polemic with the “mildly disturbed” Youth International Party of San Francisco. I am tired of people scoring petty political points on each other by righteously applying epithets to one another. If you can create something better than we have, then do it and perhaps we shall learn by your example. In the meantime, leave us alone and smash the state!

Topper
c/o C.A.L.
P.O. Box 380
Columbia MO 65205

FE terrorist

To the FE:

Please in future try to emphasize more Zerzan and less Ellul. Do not abolish technology yet. Did you know that in the movie “Wolfen” with Albert Finney the Fifth Estate was described as a “terrorist” organization? Let cops wear big cloth numbers like football players to identify them during riots—don’t let them take their badges off.

LP
San Francisco

Walk, run, fly

Dear Fifth Estatists:

Herewith some monetary appreciation for being the most interesting radical paper in the world. Not that I agree with your infantile ultra-“left” sectarianism, your neo-Rousseauvian anarchotroglydytism, and your nihilistic and futile rebellion against all the wonderful labor-saving devices Mankind has created. When will you Grow Up?

Never, I hope, at least not in the daring of your thought. Though I’ve chosen to give my energy to the mushy democratic left for now in hope of developing a broader movement, I still read FE more avidly than any other publication. I wish you published more often, and I wish more people in the “pragmatic” and intellectually poor left read and considered your ideas.

I...[have written an] open letter as a statement of position and appeal for libertarian socialists to organize within the broad left. I realize you’ll probably consider it hopeless, but I hope you’ll come to recognize the necessity for a less sectarian kind of activity, and for more extensive organization.

Your ridicule of the All People’s Congress, for all my dislike of “leftist brain police,” really copped out on presenting any idea of alternatives. How exactly do you propose we deal with our “crisis of civilization”? Sometimes I picture you folks as a band of paleoliths assaulting the Pentagon with bows and arrows. That won’t work, and neither will it work to try to dismantle the “megamachine” with words. We have to reach out to more and more people, try to draw them into the struggle in as many ways as we can conceive—and that means addressing their concerns, not imposing ours on them.

It doesn’t work to criticize people for not being revolutionary when they haven’t even gotten to the point of being determinedly reformist yet. Preaching at people seldom changes minds. They have to learn themselves, and one way they’ll learn is by engaging in reformist and reactive (anti-“Reaganist”) struggles. Of course, it’s inadequate in the long run. But there’ll never be a long run if we don’t learn to focus effectively on the short run. We have to crawl before we can walk, run, and fly.

Love and Rage,
Chris Nielsen

3925 NE 15th
Portland OR 97212

No blackmail

Folks:

Virtually everyone recognizes the excessiveness of the nuke issue. Please! Let's not succumb to such blackmail & extortion. Eclipsed?!? Let's tango toward our apogee.

Por la cumbre,
Paula Z.
San Francisco

Capitalist apology

Dear Fifth Estate:

Originally I was going to write you a really angry letter, but as I had to do the washing up to clear a place for the typewriter, you've missed out on the bitter irony and sarcastic comments that went through my head while my hands slid through the suds. The source for the anger has been your article "Gift Exchange and the Imagination" (FE #108, Jan. 19, 1982). In the past I've found your paper thought provoking, dynamic, etc. and in some ways an inspiration. That is why I take exception to the reactionary article you printed.

When I read "Capital is wealth taken out of circulation and laid aside to produce more wealth. Cattle devoured at a feast are gift, but cattle set aside to produce calves or milk are capital. All peoples have both and need both," I recognise the soft tones of the apologist for capitalism. Hyde's analysis of the gift is shallow, obscuring the way the gifts he talks about are both antagonistic and complimentary to commodities.

He makes much of the terrible consequences (death, hungry toads, storm damage) which befall those who convert the gift into capital. The fact that there is such retribution implied can only mean that there is a tension between gift and commodity leading people to make the conversion, but which has to be held in check. Or to put it more clearly, in England there is no law, taboo or moral censure which requires people to drive on the left hand side of the road. Similarly, amerindians had no social constraints against ownership of the land, the possibility of such ownership only arose when they were confronted by european culture. The widespread social constraints and retributions which accompany such ritualized giving shows its fragility.

What Hyde seems to have stumbled on is ritualised expression of an ancient communality which has passed away in favour of private production, barter and exchange. The Kula gift system serves to maintain the social unity of a people split up between several islands. As for the Potlach, the coppers accumulate value as they circulate, resulting in a form of credit which no doubt allows the generation of hoards which could not come about by simple exchange and barter.

Finally, I would question the whole view of art/poetry that is put forward. It smacks of Victorian sentimentality and romanticism. It places poetry in a spirit world (and all through the article such spiritual otherworldliness is alluded to). However, what gives poetry its dynamism is its ability to confront mundane life in a way which exposes certain significations and possibilities which had previously remained hidden within the mundane.

Capitalist progress and capitalist society itself have kept this dynamic in a straight-jacket, hence the position adopted by the Dadaists that art is dead. This is certainly true as regards art as a separate activity, which can only achieve a pseudo-spiritual piety. However, that dynamism and life can be rediscovered through collective actions which challenge commodity relations directly by developing relations beyond the commodity basis (which happens to some extent during riots and insurrections, and in other ways during strikes).

However, gift exchange remains parallel and parasitic to commodity relations. The point about communistic relations is that they do not involve exchange of any sort. Of course, people will still offer gifts to each other, but not in the stilted and formal ways described in the article. What is reactionary about the article is the limitation of our

perspective to what is possible as an “alternative” for a minority within capitalism. It is quite possible to set up gift exchange communities/relations as little islands in a sea of commodities. (The “community” of cigarette smokers relates to a great extent through offering each other cigarettes).

This is the limit of Hyde’s view of social transformation: the development of a gift-community alongside capitalism as an alternative to the overthrow of capitalism. He merely restates the views of a bohemian current that has surfaced in several forms (e.g., hippies) over the last hundred and fifty years. This current has offered the world plenty of platitudes and its begging bowl, but it has been unable to confront itself and the world which begot it.

Dana Ferentes
London, England

Fight fear

Friends:

What we proclaim is the right to well-being: well-being for all! But, if plenty for all is to become a reality, capital must cease to be private property. Hence, there must be expropriation.

But expropriation means revolution.

Also, if well-being for all is to become a reality, we must destroy the possibility of nuclear war. The State called “United States of America,” among others, makes nuclear war possible. Hence, that State, among others, must be destroyed.

But that means revolution in North America.

So, don’t write “NUCLEAR WAR ERUPTS” (see FE #308, January 19, 1982/FE #308, January 19, 1982) and play with the devil’s testicles. Write:

REVOLUTION ERUPTS IN NORTH AMERICA!

and fight the fear and despair the devils want all the people to feel.

Kropotkin
Warsaw NY

Sparts/fungus

Dear FE (aka dwindling band of anarchos):

Just got ahold of your November issue to see what the flap with the Sparts was all about (“Hail Red Army Nerve Gas!” FE #307, November 19, 1981). Liked the article. Any further info on the Soviet nerve gas the Sparts dismiss as a fungus?

I know the Sparts are more mouth than action; so I doubt that you were concerned with their “See You at Kronstadt” headline. But if they ever should try to give you any real trouble, I and I suspect a good number of my friends out here would delight in joining you to “see them at Coyoacan.”

A. Baron
Ypsilanti

(For a follow-up on the nerve gas controversy and the Sparticists, see Detroit Seen in this issue.)

Jesus OK?

Dear Fifth Estate:

I am a member of a Christian anarchist group here in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, called Two or Three Gathered in His Name. We are part of an anarchist coalition of groups and individuals, People for Direct Democracy.

We see Jesus as having an explicitly anarchist politics. As a regular reader of the Fifth Estate, which I get from the Red & Black Bookshop at West end, which the Christian group runs on Thursday nights, I feel common to you

and other secular anarchists is the tendency to give Christianity an undeservedly hard time. Terms like “reactionary clerics” and “conservative Christians” convey the sense that to be a Christian is to be conservative and reactionary.

We see that whereas Christian—Marxism is an attempt to synthesise two systems of thought on the basis of Christ’s concern for the poor, Christ not only showed concern but also pointed to a political solution—one of creating a free and freeing people basing their relationships on love and forgiveness and on an equality of wealth and power. Pacifism, a principle of Christ embodied in the crucifixion, is incompatible with the existence of a state, whose authority rests on the existence of armies, prisons and police. Jesus was a revolutionary who advocated far-reaching social and personal change and not simply an exchange of elites.

As Christian anarchists, we feel it necessary to confront the established church hierarchies over the role they play in legitimizing the death-oriented values in our society. In December of 1980, 4 members of the group were arrested outside the Catholic cathedral handing out leaflets advertising a prayer service about Poland.

In August 1981, 2 members of the group were involved in an action at the Anglican cathedral protesting the militarist nature of the annual Long Tan commemoration service, which celebrates the biggest Australian victory in Vietnam. Charges of offensive behaviour arose from this action.

As Christians who “refuse to burn incense for Caesar,” we call for a recognition on the part of Christians and anarchists alike of the revolutionary message of Christ.

Angela Jones
Brisbane, Australia

FE note: Space considerations do not allow a more detailed discussion of christianity and anarchism—see next issue. Letters are also encouraged. As for now, apart from the fact that your philosophy is founded upon an untruth, we can only say that no self-respecting anarchists would meet in anyone’s name but their own.

Related

See More Debate on Technology in this issue.



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