

Readers Comment on Recent Bombings

Various Authors

1983

The following two letters were received prior to the arrest of the Vancouver 5 (see story on next page) and raise again the question of revolutionary violence and terrorism debated so many times previously in these pages. The debate has engaged the anarchist and libertarian movement since its inception and we welcome further comments on the subject.

The first letter makes reference to us being “contradictory” on the subject. If such is the case, it is due to the participation of several writers, each of whom may have a different opinion on the question. The FE has no “line” on the matter, and we often disagree among ourselves about the effectiveness of violence, its ethical considerations, etc. One such opinion appears after the reader’s letter marked “Direct Action.”

DIRECT ACTION

To the Fifth Estate:

I was chagrined at the lack of support for the Direct Action Litton bombing (see “Direct Action Bombs Litton,” FE #311, Winter 1983). I was heartened to see that the article was not a categorical rejection and denigration of the action, though not much; the implication was there and the criticism seemed overwhelmingly negative, more so than was warranted.

Do you really think that the power elite will give up without repression on all levels, physical repression that must be physically resisted in order to survive? And what are we supposed to do while that elite continues its thefts of the people’s power and subjects them to ever greater danger in furthering its own interests?

Action is an essential element of praxis. If people on our side of the barricades want to build some security, increase our freedom, and wage people’s war, we have to carry the fight to the enemy in real terms. The Direct Action people have done this, even if their tactics and method could have been better. And the present is the time and place and conducive to the war of the flea.

If the conditions for mass insurrection are to be set up, we have to take direct action in order to lay the groundwork. I also agree with their statement that people do not have to be “professionals” in the administration of violence in order to attack the enemy and that such attacks can help get people’s attention, raise consciousness and encourage others to act directly in furtherance of the struggle...

An action should have three goals: It should produce some concrete benefit in the here & now. Direct Action has won this in slowing down the technology of death, even if only for a minute. It should make a clear and unequivocal statement. Direct Action has done this with their expression of its members’ (and others’) willingness to resist by whatever means necessary—a demonstration of the seriousness of their inclination and intent—this misuse of the people’s power at the expense of their freedom, life and health. It should also provide a demonstration that Big Brother is not omnipotent, can be successfully resisted, and should be as well lessons for its perpetrators and observers on how to act more effectively. Direct Action has done that, too, as its own and others’ analysis of their

action indicates... As strategy goes, theirs is implied more than stated in anything I've read, but it is still there as it rightly should be. All such actions by people on our side of the barricade are not only aimed at the immediate end but at being another step down the road toward a libertarian future.

Accordingly, these operations' second and third goal are presently more important than the first and making them as effective as possible demands a strategic view. "Choosing a terrain of struggle" (as you say) would be a limitation in this regard. The struggle is multi-faceted and requires the building of cohesiveness and diversified ability, not the development of turfs. Sometimes we must strike where and when we have the ability to put a hurt according to our best analysis. Also, this notion of specialization is plenty strange coming from you.

It also seems like another contradiction for such a condemnation of principled, progressive, active people to occur in the same paper as the uncritical glorification of a mere theft of money (see "Robbers Was Here"). (Expropriation, if it is as great as the author of that article makes out, should be undertaken more instead of just wallowing on the brink of poverty and ineffectiveness.)

Lastly, DA made an excellent observation that I think has much more to do with criticisms of them—not to mention passivity or legality—than the reality of their action. In reference to the development of militant direct action, valid and necessary practice, DA writes: "Whether this happens or not depends on the integrity of the existing movement to develop commitment and courage to carry the struggle beyond the legality and the personal security and privilege of comfortable life styles still aspired to and attainable by middle class dissidents in North America."

BD

Lewisburg Penitentiary

Lewisburg PA

Bob B. responds: One can hardly disagree with B.D. that direct action is a necessary aspect of the struggle against this society. What is at question, however, is the accuracy of his assessment that high-risk actions like bombings are justified because they "raise people's consciousness;" and therefore, that they are "strategic" in nature.

In my opinion, the question of "consciousness" is more complicated than this writer (or Direct Action) acknowledges. Analysis of past revolutionary movements shows that consciousness (that is, a shared vision of a new society and the means to attain it) is formed in the midst of struggle, rather than being its precursor. Although many groups have acted on the assumption that their activities could create (or, as B.D. puts it, "set up") the conditions for mass insurrection, their dismal record of success makes B.D.'s optimism suspect. While one cannot categorically dismiss the possibility that a dialectical relationship exists between the actions of revolutionary minorities and the resistance of the larger population, it is certainly not a provable assertion. (One thinks here of the Spanish guerrilla Sabate, who for decades conducted a lone campaign of armed harassment and propaganda against the Franco regime—despite the censure of the CNT in exile and the indifference of most of the Spanish population.) It is highly questionable in the present climate to think that armed activities meaningfully contribute to some sort of "revolutionary strategy." Worse, it is potentially suicidal, because it might goad people into extreme "all or nothing" actions in the belief that these are the "missing link" between their revolutionary consciousness and its generalization.

Does B.D. really believe that "slowing down the technology of death...for a minute" was worth the price these people will pay if found guilty? (I do not want to imply that the Vancouver 5 are the same people who conducted the D.A. bombings.) Perhaps, for the people involved, it was. The decision to bomb Litton, and the risks thereby assumed, were theirs alone to make. But I'm not willing to try to convince others to undertake similar activities on the flimsy premise that they will "raise consciousness." Nor can I take seriously B.D.'s assertion that Direct Action demonstrated that the state "is not omnipotent" and "can be successfully resisted." While the state is far from omnipotent, the rapidity with which Direct Action apparently was reduced to the Vancouver 5 does nothing to reinforce this belief. Finally, does B.D. really believe that our puny libertarian movement constitutes a potential "support network" for guerrilla warfare in the face of the probable indifference of the majority of the population?

By all means, let's have direct action. But let's face it, there is a boundary—ill-defined to be sure, but existing—beyond which direct action is transformed into something different: the specialized activity of armed groups. Before crossing this boundary, let's consider without illusions what there really is to be gained by doing so.

DEBATE ON SEX

To the Fifth Estate:

The following is an open letter in reference to “Red Hot: Whodunnit?” and “Porn Fight Catches Fires” in *Open Road*, Spring 1983. The address for *Open Road* is P.O. Box 6135, Station G, Vancouver, British Columbia Canada V6R 4G5.

NOTE: The term “pornography” is derogatory. It implies wrongdoing and literally connotes that only women who are “harlots” or “whores” cause sexual intercourse.

We anarchist communists are disgusted” and appalled by numerous anti-erotica articles which have appeared in *Open Road* and elsewhere. “Hard and soft pornography” do not necessarily entail violence—the “violence of rape, battering, racism, nuclear insanity”. or any other form of violence.

“Pornography” per se does not “teach men to equate sexuality with violence” because not all “pornography” entails violence. “Pornography” is not “hate propaganda” because not all “pornography” entails hatred. Eroticism, and not violence or degradation or hatred, is the only inherent characteristic of both “hard and soft pornography.”

The Wimmin’s Fire Brigade and other “feminist” fascists who protest “pornography” per se in actuality oppose erotica, and in so doing effectively deny human sexuality. This denial is perhaps the most pernicious form of totalitarian repression. The struggle for universal sexual freedom ought to be a top priority among anti-authoritarians.

The assertion that all “pornography” entails violence against women is particularly absurd. What about media produced entirely by men and distributed among men only; media which depicts male homosexuality but no violence, degradation, hatred or women? What about erotica produced by women for women?

If the “anti-porn” crusaders really oppose violence and not eroticism per se, they would always, without exception, distinguish between media which depicts violence and degradation and that which does not. They would not indiscriminately destroy media which depicts healthy human sexuality.

We are engaged in the struggle to eliminate police and government—any and all authoritarian, unequal relationships, including those depicted in some, but not all, present-day erotica. The “bondage” genre, for example, ought to be eradicated.

We want to preserve and promote media which depicts consensual, equal, cooperative, mutually affirmative and loving relationships among people regardless of gender, age, race and so on. We urge anti-authoritarians to repudiate the puritan “anti-porn” movement and struggle for sexual freedom.

Autonomous Action Bisexual Liberation Task Force
Cleveland

T. Fulano responds: I agree that pornography does not necessarily entail depictions of violence and that sexual freedom is fundamental. But your letter seems misdirected, since as far as I can tell the Wimmin’s Fire Brigade was attacking the Red Hot Video stores for their sale of explicitly violent sexual material. They seemed to make distinctions between erotica and pornography, just as you do. Of course, opinions differ widely as to where these distinctions lie, but one thing seems certain: the ability of small, moneyed groups to produce and market images of human beings for consumption by others is a relationship of domination.

Bombings, of course, do little to recognize such subtle distinctions, and there is reason to at least feel uneasy about the actions of the WFB. But without falling prey to the repressive sexuality typical of so many feminists, I would argue that “media- is not neutral, and is rarely convivial and self-created. People taking photos of themselves for friends or making drawings, sculptures, etc., of erotic character, is one thing. Conglomerates churning out a product, a depersonalized pseudo-sexuality of objectified strangers, is quite another. We don’t make any “choices” in this process. As in the culture industry as a whole, the choices, the “freedoms,” the images, are mass produced for us by businessmen. Is there any wonder then that the pornography—the commercialized sex industry—reflects the domination, the degradation, the violence, particularly against women and children, which characterize the society as a whole? The mutual bloodletting and absorption of smaller firms by larger ones in the capitalist (including the porno) marketplace cannot help but be reflected in the images that it produces for purposes of capital accumulation. For the same reasons, however, porn is an inadequate target because the violence is pervasive—the WFB might do better to topple television broadcasting towers if they want to attack a violent, sexist, violence-promoting media industry.

On the other hand, not having any interest in defending the private property of sleazy businessmen (the owners of such businesses are hardly crusading for sexual liberation—they simply have a product for sale), I hesitate to attack their choice of targets. As anti-authoritarians we must defend the freedom of sexual expression. But we must also recognize that freedom from sexual exploitation and dehumanization is equally valid. The “right” to view or produce images or to engage in certain relationships doesn’t exist in a vacuum—under capitalism all is reduced to the cash nexus. Within the marketplace, everything is permissible—violence, bondage, depersonalization—all is permissible, that is, except the abolition of the market. When people can truly create erotica in a convivial, autonomous fashion, human sexuality may be free to develop in a natural direction. But as long as erotic imagery is marketed as a commodity, people—especially women—will continue to feel violated, even by “innocuous” porn, and the stores will probably continue to be burned.

fifth Estate

Various Authors
Readers Comment on Recent Bombings
1983

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/312-spring-1983/readers-comment-on-recent-bombings>
Fifth Estate #312, Spring 1983

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net