

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1983

Expanded Sexuality

Fifth Estate:

The debate on sex; the burning of Porno Palaces, etc. was quite amusing. Last issue's letter writer fumed over the actions of the Wimmin's Fire Brigade who stated with alarming urgency—"the struggle for universal sexual freedom ought to be a top priority among anti-authoritarians" (see FE #312, Spring 1983).

The *Fifth Estate* deserves part of the blame for this person's fearful palpitations, your bookstores still carry Wilhelm Reich, the most likely culprit in this devotee's obsessed frenzy.

It is well known that humans are the only creatures that have jobs and exist in such desensitized conditions. Excepting certain insects.

Human sexuality is polymorphous in origin. Children find no separation between their psycho/physical realms. The word "sexuality" implies a category distinct from spirituality, from productivity, all the alienated categories. The exquisite multisensual relationship with nature, the almost infinite expressions of wonder and pleasure in our lives as in nature are reduced to slotted moments of genital release.

The very essence of maturity in this society, of adulthood, is the reduction of playtime. We renounce our bodies for the serious pursuits of knowledge and/or employment. We bust ass and postpone gratification in order to function as productive members of society. Our reward, our *raison d'être*: sex! Wow. To think that all my life is supposed to fit in that one little hole!

The Wimmin's was right; burn, baby, burn. They did not, as the letter writer stammered, "Indiscriminately destroy media which depicts healthy human sexuality." Such media would require a few light years of space for even a momentary glance. Indeed, by definition such a depiction could never exist. A truly erotic society would not have mass media.

What finally drove Reich crazy was his inability to recognize his sexual liberation for the quantitative liberation it could only be. Centered in genitalia, or even (giving him the benefit of a doubt) in his various orgone infested limbs, he could not be free. Infantile sexuality, our original endowment, is indeed repressed, and needs liberation. Infantile sexuality, though not necessarily preclusive, is NOT OF THE GENITAL KIND!

Expanded sexuality is more in the nature of a unified existence within the multiple freely flowing energies of unharnessed, undirected time, and all that it contains in a given moment. Dig it, qualitatively liberated sexuality is nothing more or less than SPONTANEITY.

Indeed, your so-called erotica enforces our captivity. As the dominant image of our "sexuality" (words fail this argument) ersatz erotica is false hope; a bribe, a banana in a b3x for a monkey, an extremely pleasurable delusion, panacea, placebo, palpitating juke box until you run out of quarters.

I agree that genital sex should be the sole responsibility of individuals. It too should be freed, such as it were. Ditto drugs, volleyball, firebombs. To confine sexuality to lovemaking is precisely what a dictator would plan for you, as both the carrot and the stick. To me, that is a violence to which all other images quaver. Burn.

Raticus

Sardonic Wit

Dear FE:

Volume 18, Number 1 [FE #312, Spring 1983] is my first taste of your paper, and I love it. The “Tool of the Year” article is filled with long, vague, abstract terms, but the idea is right on target. I also read “Money, Money, Money,” “Pentagon War Plans” and a few other things already and my impression is that FE’s articles are not so strong in the area of persuasion, but since I’m already in agreement for the most part, I find it very interesting to see what’s on the minds of my peers. I also like the fact that FE has specific contemporary themes (news-like). I do suggest that the authors steer away from verbosity, though.

The ad on the back page is great! I think that sardonic wit is a very important element of an anarchist newspaper. That ad really sets your paper apart from the few others that I have seen.

with you,
Brian Grimm
Pasadena CA

RASCAL Report

To the FE:

Greetings from RASCAL...It’s been quite a while since we last heard from you. Happy 17th birthday) Make it 17 more.

Some local news...We recently showed the film “Anarchism in America.” The turnout was good, qualitatively as well as quantitatively. About 75 people attended 3 showings, which is above average for this town. What was most encouraging however were the new faces in the crowd...not the usual handful of lefties that drag themselves to every political function in this area.

It was a good mix of local rascals, punx, tofu farmers, hippies, and assorted anti-authoritarians, with a few professors and other curiosity seekers thrown in. And of course we were hassled by a couple of the pseudo-authority figures at the university, asking if our papers were in order, etc.

We sold a lot of buttons and gave away old (and new) FE’s. But we were somewhat disappointed with the film, particularly its overemphasis on (what they interpreted as) “individualism” and american anarchism, and its omissions (Mexico and Canada are also “in America,” and there was no mention of the wobs, Haymarket, recent anarchist attempts at federation, etc.) I agree with a fellow rascal that the film would have been better if the Dead Kennedys had done more of the talking and Bookchin had sung a song at the end!

Other activities: we are working with a local club, the Underground R.R., to host a Rock against Reagan benefit. The group Millions of Dead Cops will be playing, with some local bands. Also, we’re trying to organize an Anarchist Association of the Americas conference here in the fall.

Well, that’s all of the news from the mountain state. Please keep in touch.

Another Rascal,
Morgantown, W. Va,

For New Forms

Dear Comrades:

The piece “A Family Quarrel” [FE #312, Spring 1983] is just great—not the most magnificent piece of theory ever or anything like that but so many lefties are so hung up on ultra-individualism and on thinking of people as atoms unconnected to one another. I don’t support the nuclear family, which is, after all, an oppressive institution,

but people cannot become happy healthy adults without some sort of family—a group who make an unqualified commitment to love them and help them grow up to become capable of loving and raising children in their turn.

The destruction of all institutions that stand between the atomized individual and the State is surely not a thing lefties should encourage, but something we should fight.

We must build new forms of family but we've got to recognize that human life is also animal life—we can't make up these intellectual constructs in the absence of experience and especially body experience, and expect happy healthy people to result. (Luckily, only the lefties are so committed to trashing the family that they might be doing some children harm. Everyone else has more sense.)

I want a return to the tribe!

Sam Wagar

Toronto, Ontario

Dubious History

Dear Fifth Estate:

I would like to offer some comments on your Spring 1983 issue. I am aware of your sweeping anti-technological views, though I do not entirely agree with them. I was not a reader of the FE at the time you first formulated those views, so I am not aware of all the thinking that went into their formation. So, excuse me if some of what I say is old hat.

In his article, "A Family Quarrel," in which he discusses Jean Elshtain's writings on the family, Bob Brubaker mentions Ivan Illich's book *Shadow Work*, and quotes approvingly his thesis that women's oppression dates from the rise of capitalism. Not only is this dubious history, but, as his most recent book *Gender* makes clear, the hidden ideological thrust of such a position is to call for a return to the allegedly "separate but equal" state of affairs when each sex enjoyed "dignity" in its respective station (in accordance with its specific biological "nature").

While the situation may have been aggravated by capitalism, the restriction of women to the household economy, and the devaluation of this "private" sphere vis-a-vis the public "political" sphere of men, began long ago. Indeed, back in your beloved "primitive" society. As Lynn Clive notes in her review of *The House of Obedience* (FE Spring 1983), in pre-Islamic Arabia "women were treated as chattels, to be bought and sold or inherited." The practice of clitorectomies also dates from that period.

All of which is a roundabout way of making the following point: we must combine our critique of technocracy with a critique of scarcity. You do not ever mention Murray Bookchin, so I do not know what if any antipathy you may feel towards him, but I think he is one of the few thinkers who does this. On one hand, he criticizes technocracy—a state of mind as much as a set of techniques—for destroying our bond with nature and undermining genuine forms of human community, and, on the other hand, he points out, that, to quote Marx, "Without (a material basis of abundance) want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities and all the old shit would necessarily be reproduced."

We have to ask ourselves: why did hierarchical society develop? Its roots must have existed in tribal society. My view (and perhaps these "antiquated" views have already been sufficiently exploded and require no refutation) is that the insecurity of material existence nourished the values of efficiency and delegation of authority—all of which were bound to lead to class division. Now, I am not unaware that hunting and gathering societies have been designated as the first "post-scarcity" societies. But their lifestyles were based on an extremely low population density, and, with a growth of population, the possibility of making a living in the old way was destroyed. Consequently, tribal peoples were forced to adopt more technologically intensive (and more exploitative of nature, I might add) production.

Today, obviously, there's no way you could support four billion people with hunting and gathering techniques. I quite agree with you that we need to destroy centralized economic and political structures, and get back to human scale decision making, and community intercourse constitute our paramount concerns. But to do that does not require junking all technology.

As Murray Bookchin points out, new alternative technologies exist that could both minimize toil as well as re-harmonize our relationship to nature and to one another. Contrary to Bob Brubaker, we cannot follow “that river called Progress” all the way back “to its source.” Like it or not, people have discovered the realm of “freedom” (albeit in grossly distorted form), and capitalism’s ability to retain the loyalty of its subjects lies largely in its ability to tap this aspiration.

Are we to be like the Weathermen of a decade ago—telling people to prepare for a revolution of sacrifice in which our days are consumed in drab, never-ending toil? I am not suggesting, as Marx did, that the “realm of necessity” (i.e. work) must always remain hateful. Properly integrated into a satisfying existence, work can be an extremely important source of joy and self-realization. But work involves responsibility, and too much work (and hence, too much responsibility) kills spontaneity as surely as anything will. We have to have a balance between the two. Therein lies the secret to a happy existence.

True, as you suggest in your “Notes on ‘Soft Tech’” [FE #312, Spring 1983], appropriate technology can be just as authoritarian and soulless as any other sort. The key thing, as you say later on, is to recapture control over our daily lives. But once that is done—so long as we operate on the basis of a clearly ecological and humane ethic (which would include adopting only those technologies which could be understood and handled by all) I see no reason why we could not experiment with various soft technologies in an effort to lighten our time spent in labour.

Jazz musicians of the early ‘60s were scornful of the attempt to use electrified musical instruments. Today, only a dinosaur would refuse to see beauty in the creations wrought by amplified instruments. Today, we are confronted with a barrage of computer music. Despise it as I do, I am not so dogmatic that I cannot recognize that musicians such as Clive Robertson and Talking Heads have done humane things with electronics. There is an interpenetration between means and ends. They are not absolutely static poles.

I want to live a creative life in which I can be a writer in the morning, a herdsman in the afternoon, and a musician after dinner. What do you want?

Ron Hayley
Toronto

Bob B. responds: Our pro-technology critics almost invariably delight in pointing out how absurd we are to imagine that four billion people could be sustained by hunting and gathering. The dismal increase in our planet’s human population does not, however, induce in them a sense of caution, humility, or despair; on the contrary, this fact is usually cited as the prelude to an optimistic panegyric to technology, or as in this case, to a confident lesson about the proper admixture of freedom and responsibility in utopia.

Our admonishers demonstrate not so much that our thinking is myopic as that radicals are often unable to think outside the context of a “program.” It seems astonishing to have to say this, but we are not the “primitivist party”; we have no program calling for a return to a hunter-gatherer existence. This does not, however, mean that we should ignore the critique a primitive mode of existence poses to our moribund way of life, or that we should fail to incorporate features of that existence into our lives in whatever ways we can.

For the same reason, Ron is wrong to say that Illich or I contend that women’s oppression dates from the rise of capitalism, or that there is a hidden ideological thrust in Illich calling for a return to separate, but mutual and inter-dependent, roles for men and women (any more than to appreciate the significance of the Luddite rising against the factory system is to advocate the ‘Putting out’ method of production practiced by the British weavers). But if we want to understand how completely women have been disempowered by industrial capitalism, or how in the past they were full (if less than fully equal) participants in community life, then we might find something to learn from Illich. I think it is much more degrading to women to describe their plight as total, continual enslavement by patriarchy since the dawn of human society; the important work being done to uncover the suppressed history of women’s activities in past cultures shows how narrow minded is this supposedly radical perspective.

An examination of the past reveals not “blueprints” for a new society but different modes of being which, contrasted with the spiritual hollowness of capitalist society, are suggestive of the rich possibilities of human existence. Like Jean Elshtain, we marvel at the emotional strength of her grandmother, a member of a society which nurtured a rich community life. We should like to consider the implications of such lives for shopworn radical shibboleths about the alleged discovery by capitalist individuals of the “realm of freedom.” And like poet and anthropologist

Stanley Diamond, we are engaged in a “search for the primitive” in which we consider the primitive mode of being a serious and desirable alternative.

All discussion of accompanying tools is therefore strictly a local and secondary problem, subordinate to the construction of an emotionally rich social existence. At the same time we have endlessly analyzed technology (understood as a system of domination based on the absolute reordering of social life to conform to the disciplined order and synchronous pace of the machine process; or more recently to the omniscient, feedback-oriented processes of cybernetics) not just because we despise it but more importantly, because it is destructive of the living tissue of community.

A full discussion of what constitutes a living community is not possible here, but the interested reader might want to have a look at Lewis Hyde’s long-awaited new book *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*. I haven’t read it yet, but Jackson Lears eloquently and admiringly reviews the book in the June 4, 1983 issue of *The Nation*. As in his long article “Gift Exchange and the Imagination” (see *Fifth Estate* #308, January 19, 1982) Hyde shows how gift exchange is the spiritual nexus of community life in primitive and other non-capitalist societies, contrasting this with the spiritual emptiness of capitalist commodity exchange.

As for Murray Bookchin, it seems to me that he has modified the quasi-Marxist line of argument central to his post-scarcity analysis, concerning himself of late more with the way capitalism “hollows out” and destroys communities. That “cunning of history” which would reveal it as a necessary project to develop the means to overcome scarcity has apparently been consigned to the margins of Bookchin’s thought.

Or to the footnotes: in a note on page 58 of *The Ecology of Freedom*, Bookchin nastily and unfairly criticizes Marshall Sahlins and others who accept Sahlins’ characterization of hunter-gatherer life as the “original affluent society.” Calling this notion “simplistic and regressive,” Bookchin links it to “atavistic feelings” against civilization as well as to an antisocial, fascistic survivalist movement. [1]. He continues: “Leaving aside the significance of such crucial social developments as writing, urbanity, fairly advanced crafts and technics, and even the rudiments of science—none of which could have been developed by Paleolithic nomads—I hold that the case for hunting-gathering as humanity’s ‘golden age’ is totally lacking in evolutionary promise.”

Excuse me, my good barbarian—but you are lacking even the rudiments of science. We’ll leave it to Bookchin to explain just what the significance might be of these “crucial social developments”; or how one might conceive non-tautologically the phrase “the case for hunting-gathering as humanity’s ‘golden age’ is totally lacking in evolutionary promise.” Suffice it to say that primitive people have never voluntarily accepted the “benefits” the civilized have tried ceaselessly to bestow upon them—they have always had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into civilization’s fold.

It’s no secret Bookchin prefers the “higher stage” of human association exemplified by the slavery-based Athenian polis. (See his soon to be published *Forms of Freedom*, where he extols the political forms developed in the Greek slave states). Perhaps it is sheer coincidence that his prized evolutionary developments—writing, urbanity, science, and technics (which either had begun to appear or were flourishing in ancient Greece)—all have been, at various moments in the “evolution” of society, linchpins of domination.

As always, the arrogance of the civilized mind is boundless.

E.B. Maple responds: I suppose “aghast” would be a bit too strong a word to indicate my surprise at someone within the anti-authoritarian milieu quoting Marx to support their contentions, but it comes close. Why does Ron think that a quote from such a source, entirely unsupported, obviously quoted only for its authority, would carry any weight, particularly in these circles? The old shit that is getting reproduced shouldn’t be coming from those who say they have left it behind.

Music: There are a few nice things being done today within the spheres of amplified and electronic music, but to raise the issue of jazz certainly does his argument little good. Jazz was at the height of its creativity in the early ’60’s (evidence John Coltrane) and I would ask anyone to compare the music of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Sonny Stitt, Lou Donaldson, Stanley Turrentine or the many others who were at their peak during that period, with their contemporary sound after a surrender to a commercialism and mechanized pop/funk that today barely makes them worth listening to.

Every middle-class marxist I’ve ever met has expressed the same desires for a multi-faceted life after the revolution. It doesn’t sound bad, but I’ve never heard one of them say that they wanted to be a coal miner in the morning,

a forge operator in the afternoon and a micro chip board assembler after dinner. Tasks like these, done by zeks, are the foundation of industrial capitalism and if we drag the same old shit into our new society, they will also be done by zeks. Technology is the basis of industrial capitalism; industrial capitalism is the basis of technology.

These replies always come out in print a bit harsher than they are intended. We simply disagree with Ron's opinions, but hope neither he nor others are dissuaded from continuing the debate within these pages.

I Am A Punk

The Fifth Estate:

Recently, because I am a punk, I have had many questions concerning anarchy directed towards me. Unfortunately I am not very knowledgeable on the subject. I have met very few 'true' anarchists but a lot of 'poseurs' who aren't the least bit sincere. I have always been a strong believer in personal anarchy (no authority, don't let others exploit you for their benefit...) and I would like to learn about political and universal anarchy (and related topics). Hopefully I will learn enough so that I might help to inform others of its true purpose (not 'just to have an A on their leather jackets). I am very sincere about making things change and waking people up out of their dormant state induced by society and its politics. I would very much like to receive a copy of your publication. Unfortunately I am only squatting for the time being and it would be difficult to get a subscription and I have no way of sending a check etc. I hope that you will be able to help me in any way possible (even if it is in the form of a short note or even a definition!)

A. Ransom Youth
P.O. Box 7540
Menlo Park CA 94025

Anargate Continues

To The Fifth Estate:

Five members of the Montreal Coordinating Committee of the Anarchos Institute have resigned. The present coordinating committee felt that the distribution of our letter was an "inappropriate use" of the mailing list. Since they had already removed the membership files from the Anarchos office, we were not in a position to dispute this decision.

Therefore, we are attempting to inform present Institute members of our statement through the anarchist press. Our letter of resignation is available from:

P.O. Box 1415
Station H
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H3G 2W4

New Size FE?

Dear Friends:

I thought I'd take this opportunity to drop you a note. I always enjoy at least a part of the *Fifth Estate*. (The "Money, Money, Money" thing in the last issue [FE #312, Spring 1983] was great).

I'd like to chip in a couple of cents worth of advice though. I know you have already responded to comments about form and style, but...I edit a publication out here called the Resource Center for Nonviolence Newsletter. For a few years we put out a tabloid quarterly (or so) of either 8, 12, or 16 pages. We thought it was just fine and we got quite a few nice comments. Two years ago though we did a combined issue with *WIN Magazine* of New York. After that we did a long analysis of the Newsletter. It had become a lot more than a "newsletter" over the years in a fairly haphazard manner. We wanted to now improve it in concrete and organized ways. We became very

impressed with the magazine, as opposed to tabloid, format. It made for higher readability, easier layout, and an easier understanding of the space we had available.

Like the FE we were notorious for cramming print on pages. It is amazing to me how a full page magazine print (or two or three) does not intimidate or tire the eye nearly as much as the same amount on a tabloid page.

After much discussion we decided to switch formats. (I dragged my feet more than anybody. I always considered newspapers to be more populist and accessible than magazines.) The response we got was astounding. We received more money and letters of response than in two or three years combined after the first magazine issue went out. People responded that they kept it around longer; left it on the coffee table with the magazines rather than threw it away with the newspapers; read it rather than leafed through it; passed it on to friends; xeroxed it; and liked the way it looked.

Additionally, street circulation increased greatly in spite of the fact that the publication still had no real title. So we got more money, readers, encouragement and supporters. The ultimate triumph of form over content. Right? Well not completely. We print pretty much the same stuff, but now more people read it. You'd be surprised, I still am, at how much difference an attractive cover and short pages make.

The cost difference is \$100 per issue. We more than make that up in increased contributions, though we still lose money.

We print from 5,000 to 7,000 copies an issue and we've cut back to only 16 magazine pages an issue (though we'll probably expand next year to 24 pages), so our experience isn't exactly applicable to the FE but it's damn close.

One other thing. Some of your articles are just too long. It is my own feeling that if a social change publication can't make its point convincingly in 2,500 words or less people will remain unconvinced. There are exceptions but not many. This is a whole other subject which I can't deal with in a few words, but this has been my feeling about many FE articles. The "Revolt against Work" stuff for example would have been more compelling at 2000 words. Of course this is the editor and publisher in me speaking now; as a writer there have been times when I couldn't find that last 600 words to cut, but I wish I could have.

In newsprint,
Steve Belling
Santa Cruz, CA

FE Reply: Resource Center of Nonviolence magazine is available from P.O. Box 2324, Santa Cruz CA 95063. Sure, Steve, your mag and WIN look good, so do a lot of tabloids, but most of us like our format both visually and because of the work it saves. Our twelve-page newspaper would translate into a 48-page magazine and an accompanying four-fold preparation for each issue. No thanks.

Second Try

Dear Fifth Estate:

This is my second attempt at writing you after the Winter '82-'83 issue [FE #311, Winter, 1983]. The first was more generally laudatory. I just realized I've quit reading the long theoretical articles you publish (my only comment on their quality). The shorter stuff though ("A Day in the Life," "Robbers was Here," "Notes from the Cesspool," and especially: "Direct Action") is superb and an essential element in the growth of my own consciousness. Here in rural N. Calif., the height of progressive politics is the Freeze movement and I often find my thoughts stagnating in old conclusions from years past. The quarterly issues of FE keep my thinking alive and are sincerely appreciated. They are sparking interest among my friends here too. Just wanted to say thanks for your participation in the struggle.

Much love,
Peter L.W.
Santa Rosa, CA

fifth Estate

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