

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1984

Eat The Rich

Dear Fifth Estate,

"Meat as Murder" in last issue's letters [FE #317, Summer 1984], should have been titled "Vegetarian Fascism." Vegetables are also living and to eat them is also murder. We suggest sucking on rocks or having a solar device attached to one's skull.

The freedom to be a vegetarian is a struggle in the corporate controlled food industry. Most vegetables, fruits, and grains are just as chemically poisoned as meat and dairy products. We would not want anyone (the A.M.A. included) to dictate our diet or any other aspect of our lives.

Animals (besides the human ones) eat other animals as part of their diet in nature. Is (Wo)Man to conquer nature and alter these animals' habits?

EAT THE RICH

CANNIBALS ANONYMOUS

P.O. Box 57

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E. B. Maple replies: All of us who work on the *Fifth Estate* are conscious of the role a proper diet plays in our health and attempt to eat sensibly which includes at least limiting our consumption of meat. Although I'm a vegetarian myself, I don't believe any of us, save one, would be willing to go as far as our letter-writer, Felice Rizzo, in labeling meat eating as murder, but neither would we be as derisive of her motives.

You are just plain wrong to state that vegetables contain and retain the same amount of chemical poisons as does meat. The latter stores the toxins fed and injected into it in its fatty tissues and transfers the poisons to human tissue in a manner not approximated by plants.

Is eating meat "natural?" Vegetarians have long argued that the human digestive system is designed for an herbivore and it is human culture which has produced a primarily meat eating species. However, prior to the appearance of meat as a commodity produced within a market economy, it served as a minority source of protein in most pre-modern cultures. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins argues, for instance, that pre-agricultural societies should have properly been described as "gatherer-hunter" rather than the reverse since it was the women who provided the majority of protein through foraging and rudimentary horticulture.

Hunting may have arisen, less for its capacity to produce food, and more as a distinctly male social activity which provided the men of the tribe with a function heavily laden with mythic qualities. Hunting, and its ancillary activity of war, placed men in the forefront of tribal life, and although the hunt could often result in a protein deficit (more protein expended in a day long hunt than the prey provided it may have been part of the process which ended the egalitarian and matriarchal patterns of early humans by giving prominence to the strong hunters—the men.

That, of course, is all speculation, but in the societies we do know of directly, meat consumption is almost universally highly valued with its presence considered indicative of abundance and often cause for celebration. However,

most pre-technological peoples invested both the kill and often consumption with differing mythic requirements to realize the relationship between hunter and hunted Ceremony and ritual such as blood drinking expressed a unity with the fallen prey.

The modern consumption of meat in the massive quantities ingested by North Americans bears no resemblance to these past patterns Meat appears today as another commodity in the supermarket, packaged and cellophane wrapped disguising its animal nature and hiding the process of slaughter. It's safe to say that if the majority of Americans were to be witness to death in the packing houses or even the cruel manner in which livestock is raised, there would be a massive and sudden increase in vegetarianism about

I've been a vegetarian for 13 years and my personal rule of thumb is to eat only that which I am personally willing to kill. I know people who hunt deer, even squirrels, muskrats and coons, eviscerate them, cook 'em up and gobble them down. Fine. If they are willing to wade through the blood and guts, I have less problem with them, than with those who are unwilling to face the reality of the slaughter and eat meat because they "like the taste."

The modern conditions of livestock production, its transportation to market and the mass production slaughter process have always evoked images of the Nazi displacement of Jews and the extermination camps. Hogs, a particularly bright and friendly species, realize quickly their fate in the stockyards and begin panicking when they hear the death shrieks of their brethren.

Modern livestock management is based on increasingly cruel methods, all geared to eke out the last nickel of profit from its investment. At the pinnacle of cruelty are the calves who are shuttered in from all light, raised in boxes and then slaughtered to provide extra-white veal to genteel gourmets; chickens who are locked by the head into stalls and a host of other unbestly methods.

The more I write this, the more sympathetic I become to Felice's letter. Why do people who want a world of peace and love participate in a process which brings such pain and suffering to sentient beings when the only rationale for consuming meat is preference?

***Hustler* Defended**

Dear Fifth Estate:

I felt your criticism of Larry Flynt and *Hustler* magazine ["News & Reviews," FE #316, Spring, 1984] was unfair and unwarranted. Whatever Mr. Flynt's shortcomings may be, his magazine is the only mass circulated periodical in the country that contains no large advertisers, fights tirelessly for press and sexual freedom, and regularly excoriates politicians and corporate polluter-murderers.

And please concede that of the millions who buy *Hustler*, several thousand at least must actually read it. And of those, perhaps several hundred or more will be inspired to act. That was the case with me. Until I saw Woodworth's article, I had no idea that publications such as the *Match!* and the *Fifth Estate* even existed.

I also take exception to the reader in the Summer 1984 issue who claims that vegetarianism is a prerequisite for radicalism. Consider that nature itself is a continual struggle for survival. Every second that goes by sees trillions of living creatures—insects, fish, birds, and mammals—devoured by voracious enemies.

Wild animals that escape being eaten, weakened by advancing age, invariably starve or freeze to death. Billions are destroyed every year in severe cold, droughts, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.

I might also add that war, infanticide, torture, and killing for fun are not unknown among the non-humans of the world, and that beaver dams are small-scale ecological disasters for their neighbors. Behind its beautiful green and blue facade, nature resembles hell more than heaven.

Considering all this, and as repugnant as the wholesale slaughter is, I believe our primary concern should be the betterment of the human condition. Then, eventually evolved to a higher state of consciousness, humankind would almost certainly become a vegetarian species.

True Radical (and not above an occasional burger)

Al Medwin

Farmington, NJ

Fifth Estate reply: Whatever editorial worth may be found in *Hustler* (and we'll take your word that it exists) seems to us to be entirely negated by its viciously sexist depiction of women and even children as submissive objects. Regarding your view of nature as an unrelenting horror: Although what you describe certainly exists, why not give a look at Kropotkin's Mutual Aid for a more balanced view of the harmonizing aspects of nature?

Wants Photos

Dear Fifth Estate:

How come there is nothing in the summer issue about the "leaderless, nameless collective of several hundred anarcho-punks" who demonstrated in San Francisco during the Democratic convention? Maybe at least a couple photos next time?

A reader,

Washington, DC

Dear "A Reader": Sorry for the lack of coverage, but our wire service was broken during that period: our radio fell off the table. If you would like a lively account of the Convention, send a SASE to The Last Intentional, 2000 Center St., No. 1314, Berkeley CA 94704.

Visual Prejudice

Dear Fifth Estate:

"Drab"? "Upstart"? Your put-down of the *Discussion Bulletin* ["News & Reviews," FE #316, Spring, 1984] both bummed me out and angered me. My first impulse was to respond in kind with a few remarks about the arrogance of superannuated grad school anarchists and the elitism of Leninists-in-reverse who want to lead us stupid, TV-watching, beer swilling, technology-mesmerized zeks out of the fleshpots of industrial America and back into the Garden of Eden of "natural" man.

But I held off, analyzed the situation, and came to a more understanding and charitable view of your hostility toward the *Discussion Bulletin*.

First, the "drabness." This characterization, I think, stems from your visual prejudices. Your eyes prefer the crisp, clear printed impression that rapid advances in printing technology—especially offset methods—have accustomed us to.

I enjoy the *Fifth Estate's* use of this technology. Certainly, no one can call its sharp typeface, color technology, and clear graphics drab: but the *Discussion Bulletin* is a shoestring operation. We lack the financial resources to buy that sort of thing and must get along with a cheap mimeograph process that makes graphics impossible and the print a bit blurred.

The label "upstart" can be dismissed as the reaction of a person who holds such an elevated opinion of his views that no one else's are worth considering. It's the sort of thing that exists in all political and religious sects; nothing is worth discussing—except the true faith.

In this case, there may be another cause: one analogous to the antipathy one often finds in religious opponents of "evil" toward those who would destroy the "evil" through revolutionary means. One finds it in the churches today. They thunder out against injustice, poverty, racism, etc. But at the same time they are implacable opponents of any movement that would change the economic equation to eliminate the evil.

The *Fifth Estate's* idealistic primitivism strikes a responsive chord in me and, I believe, many other readers who see a technological apocalypse on the horizon. But many of us also know that idealism isn't enough.

Our best hope of changing the direction of social development is for humankind to gain control of it, to take it out of the hands of the ruling classes—soviet and capitalist—which see the rape of the earth as their natural destiny and the only assurance of their continuation in power.

True, revolution in itself won't stop unrestrained technological development, but it can create a social system which can end the high intensity consumerism of industrial societies and make the *Fifth Estate's* ideas relevant in that they will be directed toward people who are in control of their society.

The *Discussion Bulletin* exists to promote discussion and understanding among broad "political" strata of anarchists and anti-statist socialists who reject the new slavery being prepared for us by the social democrats and the various Leninist denominations. I hope that this letter will give a better understanding of the *Discussion Bulletin* than your News and Review's verbal trashing, and that interested readers will write for a free sample copy to Discussion Bulletin, Box 1564, Grand Rapids MI 49501.

Yours for the Revolution,
Frank Girard

Bob B. responds: To begin, I must apologize for using the word "upstart." Actually, the first of several dictionary definitions of the word corresponds to what I meant to say—to spring up suddenly—but the word often carries an insulting connotation, one that I did not mean to convey.

As for the word "drab," I was speaking not so much of the visual appearance of the *Discussion Bulletin* as of its ideas and the quality of its discussion. I'm sorry if it offends you, but I do not believe it desirable that workers should organize into "one great industrial union" to seize control of industry and make "the industrial technology we built under capitalism serve our needs" (quotes from the *Discussion Bulletin*).

In my opinion, those who advocate such a course of action simply do not understand the origins of alienation or the nature of power in the modern world. You are, I am afraid, unwittingly proposing the imposition on humanity of modernized—self-managed—forms of oppression; not freedom.

Of course, none of this was explicitly argued in the limited space allocated for Bookstore Notes. I meant my comments not to be a "review" of your project but merely my personal reaction, set down in an obscure corner of the paper. Still, I can understand why you felt unfairly and arrogantly attacked, and for that I'm sorry. Nonetheless, being aware of the content of the FE, it should come as no surprise to you that we are less than enthusiastic about your project.

I'm gratified that our so-called "primitive idealism" strikes a chord in you, but I reject the implication that these ideas are presently irrelevant. (One wonders about the "relevance" of the "socialist industrial unionism" advocated in your pages when one of its proponents must exhort his comrades to update their literature on industrial unionism to reflect the existence of computers and industrial robots. Welcome to the latter half of the twentieth century!)

It is apparent to us that the effort to "gain control of society" is synonymous with the creative dismantling of the industrial system—a notion of no small relevance to a world on the brink of an ecological apocalypse.

Language Effective

Dear Fifth Estate:

John Zerzan's essays show that language can be very alienating (See "Language: Origin and Meaning," FE #315 Winter 1984 and earlier articles on time). But personally I find language to be an effective way of sharing thoughts and ideas, and this is the first step in overcoming alienation and isolation.

Zerzan's romanticized visions of being a hunter-gatherer disturb me. The primitive person's constant struggle for survival was/is no improvement over this wage-worker's constant sacrifices.

A return to hunter-gatherer life is neither possible nor desirable with 5 billion people on the earth. I, for one, simply want to throw off the yoke of authority and jump off the treadmill of wage labor; I don't want to devolve back to a mute caveman. I'd like to live in a community where communication, spontaneity and sharing are possible; a community where real freedom is created by an abundant supply of the necessities of life produced by co-operative labor.

At times you at FE preach against fragmentation of society into isolated individuals, then you allow Zerzan to do his pseudo-intellectual rambling which I think reveals a deeply hateful and antisocial desire on his part to reduce us all to helpless primitives. (Zerzan would be doing us all a favor if he'd practice what he preaches and stop using

language.) To paraphrase Bob Black, is Zerzan an individual, or just an individualist? Please don't let Zerzan drag your fine paper down to his level.

Yours in agitation,
Rick Freeman
Orlando FL

Ana Coluthon replies: We always appreciate compliments, but I wonder whether you have been reading our paper thoroughly? We have gone to considerable effort over the last few years to refute the modernist myth of the harshness of primitive life yet you repeat it as though it never had been mentioned in our pages. You have it backwards: It isn't the primitives who were "helpless," it is those of us in the modern world who are dependent upon technology, the state, the commodity, wage work and a million other things external to us, all of which threaten to collapse on us at any moment.

The view of primitive life as a "constant struggle for survival" is absolutely inconsistent with the best anthropological evidence and has long been discredited as existing only to provide a rationalization—for the travails of the modern world. Neither John nor the Fifth Estate advocates a "return" to anything—this is just an idiocy constantly raised by our critics who refuse to come to grips with what we are actually saying.

John has been submitting articles almost since we began the FE as a libertarian project and is considered a friend and comrade by all of us although you must realize that rarely does one of his articles appear that we do not pen a criticism of. Still, his dreams are of the same stuff as ours although perhaps he visualizes a utopia which is even grander. In it harmony is so wondrous the spoken word is superfluous—there is instant communication and understanding, perfect unity and the immediate realization of desire. I don't think any of us would deny someone with dreams like that.

More on TV

Dear Fifth Estate:

Pertaining to the debate on TV viewing ["Turn It Off!," FE #316, Spring, 1984], I'm a bit miffed that a valid part necessary to make my point was edited. The author, E. B. Maple, to whose article I was responding, therefore addressed only some minor viewpoints in his/her reply. These points, taken out of context, undermined my case (see Letters, FE #317, Summer, 1984).

My reference to food, for instance, was not as Maple suggests, proof that I deem TV viewing as essential as taking sustenance. Merely that we don't give up a lot of things just because someone ruined the quality of them. Believing something as pervasive as TV viewing could be abandoned is unrealistic. Over 200 million people don't give up a habit because a few people say they should. Therefore, it seems logical for those of us who have disdain for the rotten programming and its effect on the general public to want to have some positive input about what goes over the public airwaves. After all, we can't escape the folly of society by sticking our head in the sand.

My point about TV broadcasts being better in Germany, for example, was never addressed. Nor the fact that Germans seem to have plenty of time to enjoy nature, books, music, travel, gardening, and the art of conversation. They are not tied to their TV sets as Americans seem to be, even though their programming is far better in terms of content, fairness, and delivery. Fine selections of documentaries and clever entertainment sans laugh tracks, as well as other cultural and educational programs are always available. Also, the programming is not, as it is here, interrupted by an endless array of mindless commercials.

What I object to mostly is the self-righteous assertion that I must be in the clutches of TV technology unless I sell my set immediately.

I guess I object to the passivity "dropping out" suggests. Like it or not, we are captive subjects in a whole lot of situations we don't like. My inclination is to try to challenge them—ignoring them does not make them go away. Perhaps if anarchists had access to programming, more people could fairly evaluate that alternative. I am certainly not advocating a one-sided, homogenized view. People could be encouraged to gather information from a variety of sources permitting them to become more autonomous, not less.

What really needs to be addressed from childhood on is our collective value system. What comes out of “the box” is merely a reflection of this. People’s attitudes are to blame: the mindset that allows people to crowd into cigarette-polluted, fluorescent-lighted casinos leaving beautiful resort beaches deserted, perfectly illustrates my point. Parents who would rather watch a ball being batted around than to relate to their children further underlines the meaning of what I am saying.

Mindless TV programs are merely a symptom of a greater disease. Still, there are a few valid programs being offered even now, mostly on “public TV”, that make owning a set worthwhile to me. Why couldn’t that programming be expanded for public benefit?

If anything should be eradicated in America, certainly it should be deadly nationalism and religion which has gotten us into countless wars and the prevalent ethnocentricity which breeds hatred and division.

Irene Brown
Farmington, MI

He/She responds: While we don’t have any set policy on the length of letters, space considerations do often force us to edit longer letters. I don’t feel, however that the editing diminished or undermined your position. I don’t have much more to say on the subject, but do read George Bradford’s piece in this issue for further exploration of the media.

Not the Pope

Hello Detroit’s Primitives (smile),

This letter is in response to George Bradford’s *Nature, Flesh, Spirit: Against Christianity in Anarchy & Christianity: An Exchange*, FE #317, Summer, 1984. I have a few comments I would like to add in support of it.

What I want to add is that Christianity taught us that we were, at root, basically bad. We are born into a state of sin because the first two people disobeyed an order from that god. (Of course the main blame is put upon the woman; the theological consequences of that we can see around us today. That half of the human race is despised, ridiculed, and oppressed. See *When God Was a Woman* by Merlin Stone.) For that first sin we fell and are not whole.

Also because of it we continue to sin, according to christian belief. The cards were stacked against those two people before they were created. If the christian god knows all things (as they claim), he knew the outcome of the order of not eating from the tree of knowledge, but created them anyways, knowing they would not listen to the demand (good for them!). So the evil one seems to be the god who put them in a no-win situation.

If we are basically bad as the christians say, why do people stop when others are having car trouble, give directions when lost, save when drowning or from fires, or just basically respond to any call for help or need? What about the spirit of mutual aid we all have? Isn’t that our basic humanity?

I can see free will being used as the answer to the above criticism, but it is the joke in christian theology. It’s their scapegoat for placing the blame of sin on humans. How can free will be used if an all-knowing god knows the outcome of our choices?

Lastly, if we make the wrong choices and not bend our knees to the christian god, he for his love of us (as an all-loving god), will send us to eternal pain and damnation.

The only christian sin is its god!
Love and Anarchy,
Harry Schnurr
Lexington, VA



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<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/318-fall-1984/letters-to-the-fifth-estate>
Fifth Estate #318, Fall, 1984

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