

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1987

Lions 1

Comrades:

You have won a place in my heart forever. The lions' response to the letter, "Pretty Bad Taste" (FE Vol. 21 No. 1) was right on!

When I started reading the letter, I kind of slunk back, kind of anxiously awaiting the FE's response. Then, when I read the lions' response, a roar of laughter came out of me that took the roof off, strung my intestines out of my split gut, and kept me laughing my ass off two blocks down the street!

What a way to go! Tell the lions that the rich come next—dessert.

Bill Taylor

P.O. Box 215

San Lorenzo CA 94580

FE Note: At the above letter writer's suggestion, we will publish the box number or address of people who wish to receive correspondence from other readers. Please indicate if you do want your address listed or we will assume you do not. Personally, none of us would list our home address, but if you feel secure doing so, we will print it.

Thanks, Gary

To the FE:

While you fault Dan Todd for failing to make the distinction between friends and enemies (See Fall 1986 FE), I think the FE frames the matter incorrectly.

I agree with Todd—it is my taste that I prefer not to see some of the people and subjects (sanctuary movement, christians, anti-nuke movement) that the FE has been covering. Let the future Mother Jones devote its pages to such.

However, your project shows potential.

Gary Brown

Orlando, Florida

Drugs 1

Dear FE Folks:

Greetings to you from us in New Orleans, the place where “not everyone can live upstream.”

Lynne Clive’s article “Fashionable Feminism” (FE Fall 1986) brings to mind John Clark’s observation in *The Anarchist Moment* about the State’s response to demands for equality, offering to everyone “the right to consume and be consumed without discrimination.”

Your effort to bring your clean urine to Reagan (FE Fall 1986) was most commendable. Making note of the possible difficulties of bringing forth piss samples in front of hundreds of bussed-in elementary school children at a rally for Reagan in suburban New Orleans, Sept. 18, a group of us in “Bongs not Bombs” instead put out a flyer providing proof of George Washington’s farming and usage of pot.

Though folks were threatened with arrest (and briefly detained), we managed to pass out nearly 300 fliers and even made a paragraph in our daily mega-paper, much to the surprise and shock of the local left-liberals.

As a person whose political orientation has transcended far beyond left-liberalism toward anarchy, countering the boredom and despair with fun and satire is empowering. And, this action is becoming more crucial as most folks are retreating into homogenized, mindnumbing culture, which ultimately only re-enforces their “inevitable” need for work and consumption.

It’s good that I receive a bundle of FE’s to share. This last issue in particular will no doubt form the basis for several informal study groups. (“The Case Against Art” is already causing a stir among local avant gardists.) The FE fulfills a role few mediums even venture into, and its clear writing style and sense of humor and irony make it attractive to a wide spectrum of folks introduced to it and indispensable for us who look forward to it just as we note the change in the season.

Brad Ott,
Editor/Publisher
Dialogue
916 Euterpe
New Orleans LA 70130

Waiting

Dear John Zerzan:

The Association for Ontological Anarchy doesn’t disagree with a single one of your condemnatory remarks about art (See FE Fall 1986). it’s all true, all of it! But...don’t you get a bit BORED being so depressed & critical all the time?

Don’t you get tired of waiting for ALL OF HUMAN CULTURE to die so we can finally get “back” to being “playful” & “creative” (& how does one do THAT without ANY “symbolism” at all, we wonder?)? Don’t you ever wanna just git down & boogey?

We’re sick of waiting for the end of the world—so we decided IT ALREADY HAPPENED (possibly in 1914, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses say). ART IS DEAD. KULTUR IS DEAD. And we’re ready for a tarantella in the smoking ruins!

May we have this dance?
love, wa salaam,
HAKIM Bey
c/o A.O.A. AUTONOMEDIA
Box 568
Bklyn NY 11211

Violence 1

Dear Fifth Estate:

Firstly, I'd like to clear up an error in your review of Rebel Violence v. Hierarchical Violence. B.M. Combustion consists of one person—me. I have put together Rebel Violence (10% of which I took from a text by B.M. Blob) and Minor Conflicts, Major Contradictions, among other things. Although I take responsibility for distributing Like A Summer With A Thousand Julys, I had no part in its production. I distribute it simply because I think it's a useful contribution to the class struggle. The sole responsibility for its creation lies with the people at B.M. Blob. I do not distribute The End of Music. Nor does B.M. Blob. Some Clydeside (Scotland) libertarians are responsible for taking somebody's rough draft notes (which were not intended for publication) and publishing them with their comments. They stupidly and irresponsibly attributed the pamphlet to the guy who clearly intended it only for discussion among a small milieu.

I find your reviewer's "critique" of Rebel Violence up-in-the-air; it seems like some obligatory line—and is contradicted anyway, by his statement that "The general thrust of the text does go against a simply strategic instrumentalism." But then you assert the idea of a "radical morality"—as if anger and disgust at dehumanization—meanness, cynicism, hypocrisy, brutal behaviour, the dog-eat-dog ethic—needs to assert some external *raison d'être* ("Morality"). But honesty, the struggle for recognition, mutual dignity, the constant effort to contribute to the global community of struggle, are all questions of the practical truth—certainly not a question of dressing up one's revolutionariness as some pure Good Guy, which just comes over as some "more radical than thou" teacher role. The more one asserts "ethics" and the less one concretely analyses, the less one subverts anything precise. Both with and against our will, we all produce and consumed this shit world—shaking off the shit is not something you achieve by believing you live a pure life (the end result is some ascetic anarcho-vegan commune haranguing all meat eaters as murderers).

Purism—"radical" or otherwise—adds to separations as much as nihilism. Which is why Greenham Common—critically supported by your reviewer—is so separatist (and they too have illusions of a "new relationship with nature"—impossible while this society continues.)

That's also why it's ironic that you quote my criticism of the bricking up of the Health Centre in Skelmersdale—because since I wrote this I've discovered that often Health Centres act in concert with the cops and especially the social workers; they're very often responsible for taking kids away from their parents and families and putting them into state "care." Though I don't know what the motive was behind this attack, I know it's often far too easy to respond to situations with a ready-made critique rather than look deeper. People who think of themselves as revolutionaries are often no more conscious about innumerable aspects of this society than any other proletarians—a general consciousness of history and the totality is no guarantee of consistent lucidity or a persistent will to research and discovery. In fact, often the notion of oneself as a radical of some sort obscures basic details: one reflexively makes a pedantic point which judges only by one's own criteria—ignoring the motives and criteria of the people being criticized, or too easily dismissing them as "madmen."

All this might seem not very vital if it wasn't for the fact that your reviewer's moral argument has more than a whiff of humanism about it: "revolt in which the recognition of the humanity of the other of one's proletarian fellows, even perhaps of the cops (while not hesitating to use every available means to combat them) is the key to regaining our own humanity." (My emphasis) All these ifs and buts about the cops—sure, you can use the fact that the cops, too, are contradictory sometimes to your limited advantage, to avoid a beating or whatever. But "recognition"? Recognition begins by recognizing the margin of free choice individuals have in dealing with the horror that escapes their choice. And obviously cops have chosen to defend this horror. So, no liberal crap about even cops being victims (no, the reviewer didn't say it—but his misgivings certainly feel like it's there at the back of his mind).

So what contributions can revolutionaries make to the destruction of alienation? Well, it's no more than what all proletarians can consciously develop: at the centre of our struggle we must firstly understand what we ourselves do and observe, and not merely just talk of the leisure and work of others. This isn't some necessary evil—but the essential raw material of our revolt.

N.B.

B.M. Combustion
London WC1N 3XX
England

George Bradford responds: My “critique,” as you would have it, didn’t conjure-up the question of a radical “morality” (a word which I had written in quotations to reflect its ambiguity and to distance myself from liberal and religious connotations) out of thin air. Rather, it recognized the problem as raised, even if indirectly, by your essay.

Your pamphlet is filled with criticisms, denunciations and even tirades against senseless and indiscriminate violence; you stress the distinction between “subversive hooligan acts dangerous to this society and sick hooligan acts symptomatic of and in support of this society.” The example of the burning clinic is yours, not mine—having been on welfare and experienced the humiliations of such institutions, I wouldn’t necessarily have chosen it. But what was important to me was not specific cases; one is never, after all, completely aware of the motives behind any individual’s, even a madman’s, act of nihilism, and always ends up judging by some criteria. What was important was the distinction you identified, and why it must be made.

You don’t like ethical or moral considerations; for you, important human values such as honesty, recognition of the other, mutual dignity—in effect, everything contrary to the ruling “dog-eat-dog ethic” you cite—aren’t based on a moral or ethical perspective, but “practical truth.” Well, morality of some kind, the creation of a human world, is fundamentally a question of practical truth, which is why all peoples have developed a moral code of some kind, and why capital, so corrosive of moral traditions (both legitimate and illegitimate), is accompanied by the most virulent forms of nihilism.

If you choose to reduce this truth to a strategic, instrumental consideration of proletarian revolution, you are guilty of that “more radical than thou” position that you oppose; you are responding to events with a ready-made critique, sending out communiques from revolutionary consciousness headquarters. If your considerations are not purely instrumental, then you must concede that hurling a gasoline bomb indiscriminately into a crowded street is more than just a tactical stupidity (as if the person doing it is even considering your proletarian perspective at the time, as if rapists have any vision or desire other than the immediate expression of their own rage), but rather a monstrous act, an ethical capitulation.

You admit that much of your response to my review comes from a sense you have of it rather than from specific arguments made by me. I’ll give two examples of where this approach distorts my arguments: you make much of my very qualified observation that recognition of our common humanity implies a recognition of the humanity of even our enemies. For this I am accused of liberal humanism and the rest. Now I never said, mind you, that we should love our enemies. I was suggesting what is obvious to most people, that if we demonize them and dehumanize them, we risk doing violence to our own humanity, to our dream of a full and human life. Someone once said that if you stare too long at a monster you become one yourself—the experience of revolutionary movements has taught us time and again to be wary of dehumanizing our enemies (which leads to hostage-taking of innocents, indiscriminate terror and mass executions, as in Mexico, Russia and Spain) as we must be of those enemies themselves. This is not, as you propose, a self-righteous purism—I am not speaking as a vanguard theoretician or a morals cop, but from my heart as an individual, like you, with a vision of and desire for a different life.

Along the same lines you accuse me of critically supporting the Greenham Common actions, because I share the “illusion” with them of creating a new relationship with nature in the context of this society. Contrary to supporting actions about which I have little knowledge (and which in any case I certainly do not oppose!), I suggested that “it may be worth asking if there is any connection to be made between those who may be expressing if only partially a vision of a future society—perhaps among pacifists, or among those who gather at Stonehenge for pagan-influenced festivals—and those who are expressing the rage which is felt towards this world?” Both pacifism and riots are fragmentary, I added, unless

they “open the way for human communities to nurture into being new social relations and a new relationship with nature.” Notice that I said nothing about this occurring within this society—isn’t it belaboring the obvious to point out that such a possibility must emerge as a new society is forged and industrial capitalism destroyed?

Pacifism falls far short of that necessary leap, but so do riots and even anti-hierarchical violence. Let us fetishize neither.

I regret the confusion between the texts mentioned. Like *A Summer With A Thousand Julys* is available from BM Blob, London WC1 N3XX, England; *The End of Music* was reviewed in our “News & Reviews” column in the Spring 1983 FE. It was published by Autonomy Press in Glasgow, but I’m fairly sure that the p.o. box on it is no longer any good, since our correspondence to them was long ago returned as undeliverable.

Violence 2

Dear mythomaniacs:

I found your articles on violence in the U.K. of interest, but I was not convinced that the soccer hooliganism, or indeed, much of the violence in general, is anything but the lower depths of society ripping themselves to shreds—sort of decentralized gladiatorism. Capitalism could go on for a long time like this; one is reminded of the sinister science fiction fantasies of a completely brutalized future world in which the war of all against all has reached its logical culmination: a feeding frenzy in the rat holes of the major cities, while the rulers look on, sending in their minions occasionally to put down excessive outbursts—and to recruit.

Cop-beating, by the way, was popular way back in the 1950’s. And as for soccer hooliganism, it is hardly new: British soccer fans have engaged in violent brawls for decades. Other fatal bashings have taken place in Lima, Peru, in 1964, when some 300 were killed; 72 were killed in fights among fans in Buenos Aires in 1968; 48 were trampled to death in Cairo in 1974; in August, 1980, 16 died in Calcutta; 19 were killed in Piraeus, Greece, in 1981; and 20 died in 1982 after a soccer match in Moscow.

The only thing that is demonstrated by this sociology is that violence is now endemic, not that conscious class war is on the horizon. Where were all the proletarian rioters when Maggie went to war against Argentina? Where will they be when the next escapade is declared? While you revolutionaries faithfully pursue your millennium, perhaps there really is only chaos on the other side of the wall.

Enjoying the interregnum,
Lance Parrish
Philadelphia PA

Bhopal Appeal

Dear friends:

Since June 1986, the Bhopal Group for Information and Action has been collecting and documenting information on the gas disaster, and collaborating with various groups and individuals engaged in research and in relief in Bhopal. The fifth issue of our monthly newsletter, *Bhopal*, is currently in press. The need for publicizing issues in Bhopal is particularly great as the government as well as the news media have allowed the tragedy to recede from memory. Several important matters relating to Bhopal have been reported in our newsletter (distributed to about six hundred individuals and groups here and abroad) that have received scant attention elsewhere.

Recently, two activists, including a BGIA member, were arrested in Bhopal on trumped-up charges, beaten and jailed for several days. A massive crackdown by the police occurred, with the BGIA office raided, and so-called “incriminating” documents seized. With an orchestrated media cover-up, BGIA activists were declared as Carbide

spies acting against the interests of the gas victims. This is perhaps the first instance that the government has invoked the Official Secrets Act on a voluntary group, and its sinister implications are obvious. In the litigation in the Supreme Court that we have initiated we have taken the opportunity to demand not only 1. all voluntary workers in Bhopal should be allowed to work freely and without harassment; 2. the right to information and free expression guaranteed under the Constitution should be upheld; 3. the government should recognise non-governmental scientific and medical investigations and data collection as legitimate activities just as the so-called “normal” relief organisations such as women’s sewing centres for rehabilitation, etc., are.

In the first hearing on October 15, in the Supreme Court, a bench of three judges, headed by Chief Justice P.N. Bhagawati, has ordered the Union of India to appear as a co-respondent in the case.

The legal expenses we incurred have already indebted us considerably. To carry on with this important litigation, as well as to continue BGIA’s information and reporting activities, we need your help. Bail orders were obtained in Bhopal and anticipatory bail in Madras, and three lawyers are working on the Supreme Court case. The expenses of maintaining the documentation centre in Bhopal have to be met, the monthly newsletter has to be printed and mailed. We appeal to you to support this crucial work by sending a money order made out to the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, at Bhopal.

BGIA
D-42, Firdos Nagar
Bhopal 462016
India

Thanks, Dan

To the Fifth Estate:

I’m pleased that my noting your decline has to some extent succeeded in arresting it. [See “Critique of FE: Are We Losing It?” in the Fall 1986 FE.] With only one exception—the photo of the Haymarket herd—graphics in the most recent issue were striking, suggestive, eerie and attractive. The case against Art was very pretty indeed. The graphic for Bradford’s review of my critique was appropriately malicious. And perhaps the long-overdue admission that you edit letters was a response to my criticism in this regard.

The (Jamake) highwater mark of “Losing It?” was the section titled “Revolutionary Coherence as Ideology,” a fine statement of where FE has extended the situationist critique. Unfortunately, Bradford still has trouble finding his way past “Anarchist Ideology as Incoherence.”

Duplicity is almost always present where “community” and “solidarity” are taken as the highest values. Publicly, Bradford considers FE’s achievements “humble and haphazard.” Privately, in a phone conversation with me, he asked repeatedly, “Who’s more revolutionary than FE and AAA? Who’s more revolutionary than FE and AAA?”

This is the sort of public/private dichotomy which characterized one side of a feud in California FE can’t bring itself to name and which leads inevitably to the sort of solipsistic yuppie apathy Bradford attributes, falsely, to me.

My response to Bradford’s phone question was “Where do I begin?” Unlike him, I have no need of concealed vanguardist illusions since I am at home with what we both share: the megalomania induced by anti-messianic pretensions. Accordingly, I don’t need to invoke the sufferings of peasants and others in Central America to justify my rebelliousness. It was in large part my efforts “in solidarity” that gave me an understanding of how effective “solidarity” and “community” can be for manipulation by an activist cadre. I have enough desires to break out of this civilization without having to speak in the name of people whose sufferings I haven’t shared, which I consider obscene.

Electoralism receives the FE’s scorn when advocated, as might be expected, by the socialists of *Mother Jones*. Yet when the anarchists of *Kick It Over* advocate the same electoralism, Bradford can’t understand my scorn for the FE’s kindness toward them. MJ is in “solidarity” with the suffering in Central America, and conceivably can do more with its 150,000 subscribers to stop U.S. intervention there than the FE can with its 3,500 (FE note: that figure is our press run), so why trash these socialists for the electoralism they share with nominal anarchists? Only the ideology is different, yet this makes all the difference to Bradford.

He writes, "...There isn't any great distinction between the anguish, humiliation and dehumanization we suffer living in this social pyramid which crushes our dreams, and the anguish and rage we experience in the face of its horrible crimes against others."

Perhaps not, but the spectacle exploits our experience of anguish and rage by showing us horrible crimes against others so as to prevent us acting on our own violated and cramped humanity. It serves those who cannot confront their own society with an authentic revolutionary threat and so requires images of suffering from other societies to generate activism.

The FE's "primitivist longings" are burdened by an indulgence of moralism which prevents their realization. For example, the FE reprints a participant's report of a battle sustained over several days at Wackersdorf, West Germany (see last issue), between those assaulting a nuclear plant and its defenders. Though the attackers were determined and creative, they were ultimately repulsed by tear gas barrages and swarms of helicopters.

The FE has printed reports such as these for years, to its credit. But why not also devote space to practical techniques, instruments and weapons which can bring down helicopters and neutralize tear gas? To ask such a question is to "militarist chain rattle" for Bradford, but without this the FE panders to voyeurs of rebellion and perpetuates an aesthetic separation of words from weapons.

I use words as weapons, but also know they won't bring down helicopters or stop tanks. Here is where the Loompanics catalog (Box 1197, Pt. Washington WA 98368) is more valuable than the FE to people who are tired of defeats based largely on the overwhelming technical superiority of their enemies.

Far from opposing Power, pacifism merely represents the most decadent expression of the will to power—manipulation through morality. As Baudrillard, FE's current Most Quoted Authority, says,

"...Capital, which is immoral and unscrupulous, can only function behind a moral superstructure, and whoever regenerates this public morality (by indignation, denunciation, etc.) spontaneously furthers the order of capital."

FE amuses itself by throwing Christians to the lions, at least when it isn't "dialoging" with them. Both Sade and Nietzsche deplored this cruelty, which nourishes Christians more than lions. Why not show Christians—and their modern successors—real cruelty by ignoring them? Indifference is, after all, the sincerest form of contempt.

Dan Todd
Eugene OR

George Bradford responds: Dan Todd's letter only confirms my description of his perspective as solipsistic and chain rattling. Rather than respond to my analysis of the problems in his use of the situationist "decompression thesis," he takes credit for our choice of graphics (as if we haven't been doing this for ten years and more without his "help"), and then reprimands us for failing to print diagrams of homemade anti-helicopter weapons.

I think what is missing for a successful radical confrontation with Power is hardly the knowledge of bombs and weapons to fight the armed state—there are plenty of people around with those skills, and plenty of useful information in the public library—but rather the rapid extension of a genuine, intransigently libertarian community capable of envisioning and putting into practice a new way of life which can challenge the present state of affairs and affairs of the state. For that leap there is no "how-to manual" for sale. At any rate, Todd reverts to his earlier error—demanding that we print the material he so fervently desires when he is as capable as anyone of collecting and publishing it himself.

The FE, by the way, has never claimed "to speak in the name of" others whose sufferings we haven't shared. Our response to imperial war flows from our understanding that it dehumanizes us and maintains our immiseration. We see a link, and a human bond, between the victims and opponents of its genocide abroad and our own desires and possibilities for a free and unalienated life. That's why the truth about U.S. imperial slaughter and exploitation is suppressed in this country; if it weren't, people might begin to see that their own interests coincide with those of the people who have been so far portrayed as external enemies.

As for my phone call, I tried to talk out some differences with Todd and come to some mutual understanding; judging from his critique, he saw this as a sign of personal and theoretical weakness. His memory of it is unfortunately as flawed as his critique. Speaking only for myself (as I was during the phone call) my question was in response to his grandiose claim that there were innumerable activities going on everywhere that were far more radical than our paltry efforts. My question was along the lines of, “ok, like what?” Todd never has answered that question, neither then nor in his critique. His “theory of decline,” then, simply does not hold; all he is left with is his self-proclaimed megalomania.

Lions 2

Friends:

Here’s a check for a subscription renewal with a donation for a prison sub. This is despite the fact that I think your cruel, sneering reference to Elmer Fudd (who asked only to be left alone—and, in fact, didn’t even look like God) in the issue before last was a new journalistic low.

Weally!

Jim O’Brien

Boston

FE Note: See “Christians to the Lions” in our Summer 1986 issue.

From Narita

To the FE:

I’m writing from Narita Airport which is located at least two hours outside of Tokyo, maybe more. The land around it is farm land, beautiful, like around Rome.

When the airport was being built, farmers reacted violently to the invasion of the mechanical dragon (flying) and all its poisonous droppings and they attacked.

I guess they really attacked. In Japan, everything is “organized” so their attack was powerful. They have attacked intermittently now for the ten or so years since the airport was built.

Even today the airport is surrounded by busloads of samurai-like armed police (helmets like firemen’s, only black and covered with knobs, chest guards, heavy leggings, and a long stick). So there must still be engagements. Long live the farmers!

On the plane which brought me here I watched a film called “Gung Ho.” It’s about a redundant auto plant in the U.S. which is taken over by the Japanese. Efficient robot-like Japanese confront fun-loving, back-to-nature-like American workers who are naturally lazy and, in the eyes of the former, “children.” While the Japanese learn to “live life,” the American slobs learn or relearn the work ethic. The result is record high production levels.

A drop-out from the Last International

Narita Airport, Japan

FE note: For an article on the situation at Narita, see the “Bits of the World” section in this issue.

Spirituality

Fifth Estate:

I would like to counter the misconceptions raised in Martin Toew’s letter (last issue) regarding “native North American culture.” The hunting life-style of Native Americans is based on a subsistence level and not cruel profiteering (as in the factory farm/animal exploitation industry of Western civilization). Any variance from this is a result of Western imposed dependence on monetary economies.

As in the case of all native peoples, (whether in the African bush, tropical jungles or the Western Plains) these people do not acquire their meat and leather in plastic packages from supermarket/department store shelves. This necessitates a consciousness of both the suffering and fellowship of their “relations,” the animals.

They kill out of necessity and, basically, all of the corpse is utilized. They do not unconscionably plunder species or habitat, and do not manipulate sentient genetics (as in the animal mutilation for profit industries of the West).

The environmental organization Green-peace has interfered with the traditional killing and utilization of Arctic life by Eskimos. Are you (and Greenpeace) willing to further the ends of technological “progressives” who force acculturation by denying traditional peoples subsistence hunting and impose Western idealism (monetary dependency or vegetarianism)?

To label Indian rituals as religion is in itself absurd. It must be understood that translation results in approximate synonyms and not word-for-word conversion. In translation between cultures as divergent from one another as is ours and theirs, only a relative interpretation can be drawn. What we may comprehend as religion is what constitutes their ecologically sound way of life which views Earth as a living being and all life as relations. It is flagrantly erroneous to associate ceremonies and “prayers” with theism.

To criticize the last vestige of human harmony with the Earth is to not only support the ignorant, white Christian/Mormon ethic, but the technological destruction and pollution of the Earth as well. The only tangible conclusion to be drawn from Martin’s criticisms is that these people should not just be reservationized, but dumped into the mainstream of American society where they may become vegetarian atheists. Would that improve their way of life and its impact on the Earth and its creatures?

Correspondence Handler,
Indigenous Resistance Network
259 Termino Ave.
Long Beach CA 90803

Drugs 2

To the Fifth Estate:

Received the Fall 1986 *Fifth Estate* and generally liked it, but some things bothered me about the lead article on drugs (see “Kids—Say No to Government”). I’m enclosing a pamphlet I just produced on this topic (available from The Daily Battle, 2140 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley CA 94704).

My main complaint is that you are taking a common leftist line—drug testing and hysteria are horrible, but so are drugs, and after the revolution people won’t be doing drugs.

In fact, getting high has long been a basic aspect of human existence, as well as that of most animals. Pigs, cats, birds,...all like to get high. Humans, too. Many so-called primitive cultures show regular use of psychoactive substances, and not just for ceremonial purposes or medicine or shamanistic practices.

An example is the Amazon tribe made famous by the story of Raoni. Likewise, pygmy gatherer-hunters in Central Africa smoke pot regularly. I’m sure that drug abuse, as well as the use of uppers and downers (cocaine, heroin, reds) would definitely tumble if life was different.

I challenge anyone who asserts people get high strictly to escape unpleasant life conditions. The left shows definite strains of puritanical morality and Western Civilization’s bias against consciousness alteration. I hope you are free of this disease.

For a Free World,
Jack Straw

E.B. Maple responds: Space prevented a fuller (and perhaps necessary) discussion of the total range of intoxicant usage and, in advance of publication, we were concerned about creating the impression you describe.

I agree, in the main, with your letter, but the social fact of 27 million alcoholics, the consumption of one billion Valiums annually, the massive amounts of coffee ingested plus the relatively small amount

of abuse associated with illegal drugs, speaks more to our original contention: that the preponderance of intoxicant usage in this society serves to mask the pain of daily life. Other usage such as creating a festive or social mood, experimentation, sexual enhancement, a desire for spiritual or philosophical enlightenment, or just plain getting high for enjoyment or relaxation while needing no justification or defense whatsoever, can't be totally separated from the mind states created by our repressive culture.

How all of this would shake out after a revolution which frees our minds and bodies is worthy of speculation, but I do agree that the desire to get "out of our minds" will happily remain with us.

Captive Lines

FE note: If you've ever wondered about the effectiveness of that extra money you send for prisoner subscriptions, read the following letter.

Fraternal Anarchist Greetings!

As you know, I am presently confined within the bowels of the state's prison system; however, February 16 marks the day of my personal liberation!

At this time, I just want to write a short note in appreciation of the concern and support that I have received from you in the past. Throughout my travails, I have wholeheartedly enjoyed and appreciated the solicitude exhibited by a variety of new-found friends, including those at the Fifth Estate. I am sure that you are in agreement with me that people like ourselves can often help each other out in a variety of ways.

Certainly there are certain advantages to be derived from knowing others in whom you can trust (and in saying this, I am not unmindful of the very essential fact that trust in others must be earned). Be that as it may, I would like to believe that there may someday come a time when one, or both of us, may be able to assist the other; and in that respect, I look forward to continued contact with you and a synergetic relationship beneficial to each of us.

LFT

Norco, CA

Dear Fifth Estaters:

I took the opportunity this year to leave the Detroit winter. While spending some time touring and hiking in the Chiricuhua Mountains in Southeastern Arizona, I came into a place that made me think of you. The mountains themselves were named after the band of Apaches that gave the U.S. Cavalry the hardest time of all the tribes in the area...

Nearly adjacent to the main mountain chain is a smaller chain with a beautifully wooded little valley surrounded by excellent vantage points of the desert below.

It's now called Cochise Stronghold Memorial Park. The story is that for over a decade the small band of Indians, numbering only in the hundreds, was able to hold off the encroachment of civilization.

It was a special feeling for me to be in the area and think how, in terms of geological and historical time, it was just a few years ago that the area was inhabited by such a different people. Some of the old Arizona oaks are probably silent standing witnesses to the changing epochs.

Jerry Bishop

Tucson, AZ



Various Authors
Letters to the Fifth Estate
1987

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/325-spring-1987/letters-to-the-fifth-estate>
Fifth Estate #325, Spring, 1987

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net