

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1988

Yo!

I'm reading the latest (FE #328, Spring 1988) and finding it enjoyable as always, I would like to take issue, however, with your slam on the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL). [See "Even More Minneapolis Anarchy," FE #328, Spring, 1988.]

It appears to me that your anti-organizational ideology is blinding you to the real activity of real people.

I could understand your objections to the RSL's presence if you had real evidence of the calculated recruiting "entrism" you accuse them of. As an anarchist who has, since the Minneapolis Anarchist Gathering in June 1987, had friendly relations with a number of RSLers, I have yet to experience any recruitment efforts.

Rather I have had many interesting discussions quite unlike those I've had with other M-Ls. The RSLers I know are not arrogant about their leninist past or about their current positions. They acknowledge real mistakes and are critical of the role of ideology in those mistakes.

It seems to me that your own personal/ political grudges have blinded you so much that you confuse the pernicious role of ideology with the human ideologues themselves. Ideologies have a hold on people because that is how we are trained to relate our ideas to our daily lives not because ideologues are "bad" people.

The fight against ideology is so difficult because we constantly reproduce ideology even when we grasp the critique of ideology. We all have dirty ideological pasts. It seems to me that you'll only be satisfied if RSLers publicly flog themselves. (I've heard rumors that a "former trot" writes for the FE. How can you be sure this is not also a long term entrism campaign?)

What I suspect you really want is for the RSL to disband because of your objections to organizations per se. To my mind that would be counter-productive. As a small group (about 30 members nationally), the RSL is in practice a bunch of folks who like each other, share some common ideas and who are engaged in some common projects that are overwhelmingly anti-authoritarian. They are not unlike the FE, Back Room Anarchist Books or any number of other anti-authoritarian groups.

Your inability to see "free and autonomous individuals" in the RSL seems more a reflection of your own ideology than of the activity of the RSL in the anarchist milieu. Perhaps RSL members in Detroit are unrepentant knuckleheads. Certainly they haven't all mastered the intricacies of "anti-ideological" situ-speak. That seems to be a prerequisite for relating to some FE folx as "free and autonomous individuals." If the FE is at all serious about their rejection of mediated relations, let them show it in their acts, not just their newspaper.

Loosen Up,

Chris Gunderson

Back Room Anarchist Books

2 East 27th St. Mpls MN 55408

E.B. Maple replies: Doth the anarchist protest too much? I would put more stock in Chris' impassioned defense of this post-leninist organization if it were not for the fact that his newsletter, *RABL Rouser*, appears in the center-spread of the latest edition of *The Torch*, the RSL newspaper.

Is Chris ready to join these left-over trotskysts? One would hope not. The RSL is in a period of terminal collapse, perhaps the only good thing which can be said about it. But rather than taking this as a lesson to be learned as to the fate of organizations, Chris, instead, sees possibilities. The problem is that the RSL probably does as well. The RSL's attempted penetration of the anarchist milieu hasn't been to aggressively seek recruits, but rather to utilize a softer strategy which entails just being around for those who feel that an organizational form will create a coherence which the anarchist movement presently lacks.

Admittedly, anarchism remains at the margins of political activity in this country and life within the "scene" can be highly frustrating at times. The lure of structural solutions which will mobilize anti-authoritarians into a more disciplined and committed grouping must be tempting, but such a project has no more chance of success than when attempted by leftists.

Chris and his comrades in Minneapolis have been extremely active in the burgeoning anarchist movement in activities such as Back Room Books, the ongoing anti-authoritarian militancy in that city, and events such as the 1987 Anarchist Gathering. It would be a shame to have this locked within the prisonhouse of a socialist organization.

Anarchists, no less than leftists, will find their organization filled only with those personality types willing to submit to the stifling requirements of bureaucratic political life. The organization—people grouped programmatically—is the antithesis of the anarchist affinity group where it is close, personal commitment which is the connecting element. Organizations are a lightning rod for the obsessional compulsive personality which functions best through the mediation of a formal organization.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that even in Chris' letter he is not defending "free and autonomous individuals," but rather "RSLers"—the submerging of the individual totally within the organization. This must be clear even to Chris who still refers to a comrade of ours who quit the trotskyst movement 20 years ago as an ex-member; it's like the mark of Cain.

Organizations within capital—what Ca-matte calls gangs—usually have no potential other than to become the squabbling sects and cults that we see littering the leftist landscape. The rare gang which escapes this dismal fate is the one which attains the status of racket such as when a Communist Party comes to dominate a European trade union or actually conquers the power of the state apparatus. Either way, the history of the political gang is a sorry one and its future will be no brighter with an anarchist sheen to it.

The revolutionary organization or party will come along when the revolution does. It won't be a formal one which tries to bring all of the crap of this society into the future, but one which is defined by the sweep of events while unraveling state authority and capitalism. It won't even be seen as an organization in the traditional sense since it will involve most of society in creating a new world—it will be the process of revolution itself.

Until then, it seems to me that we, as anti-authoritarians should remain true to our credo of voluntary, decentralized, non-bureaucratic forms of association. We have a unique message which contrasts sharply with the false negativity of leftism, and the building of our communities of resistance should act as both the form of struggle and the model for a new society. Organizational forms affirm the bureaucratic administration of human affairs while placing us no closer to revolution; in fact, they probably inhibit the process.

P.S. I would be glad to send my article, "Anarchy & The Left," for a SASE, which appeared in FE #325, Spring 1987, where this issue is discussed in greater length.

Computers I

Dear FE Folks,

I find your discussion about whether or not to get a computer to help put out the FE fascinating (see Detroit Seen, FE #328, Spring, 1988). Personally, I have found the eagerness of many papers and groups to jump into the computer age disturbing (especially with my experience with various folks in Toronto).

I'm not afraid of computers (I use them at work at times), but I don't feel they have a place in our lives, as we try to maintain alternative lifestyles. We can function without them and they are just another trapping of our wonderful mechanistic civilization.



Fifth estate

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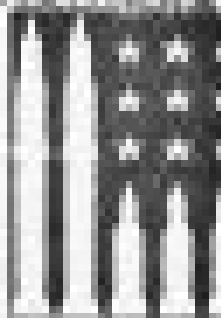
FIFTH ESTATE TOOL OF THE YEAR: THE SLEDGE- HAMMER

Below the sledgehammer image, there are two columns of text. The text is very small and difficult to read, but it appears to be an article or a list of items.

THE SLEDGE, TOOL OF THE YEAR, TOOL-LESS

Pentagon War Plans on Automatic

Two columns of text below the 'Pentagon War Plans on Automatic' headline. The text is very small and difficult to read, but it appears to be a news article.



A small example: I have always stuck to buying/acquiring manual typewriters because my own muscle power can make use of the machine perfectly well, instead of getting an electric machine, plugging it into the wall and sucking up more of Ontario Hydro's nuclear powered energy.

Well, I have no great ideas or solutions, but I am greatly encouraged and heartened to see that someone is actually thinking about the impact and significance of getting more sophisticated technology.

Take care,
Nicole
Urgl-Orp and Stuff
PO Box 2541, Stn. D
Ottawa, Ont.,
Canada K1P 5W6

FE Note: Urgl-Orp is an excellent anarchist zine concerned with anarchy and the environment.

Computers II

My Dearest Fifth Estate:

I note your typesetting equipment has been declared "obsolete" and you dread entering the "Computer Age." (See FE #328, Spring, 1988)

Frankly, I feel that an "anti-technology" argument has its limits. It reminds me of the novel *Erewhon*, where they debated which tools were legitimate after they abolished machines. Also, old MOVE literature that was handwritten (!) and then printed on newsprint.

From what I've seen of typesetting machines, they are computers. The difference is that a typesetting machine is more difficult to use, more difficult to make corrections and changes on, more expensive to maintain, has chemicals to deal with, and isn't much FUN!

Please explain to me the difference, from a values perspective, of using a computer from using a typesetting machine. They both are technology with keyboards and screens, for christ's sake! Also, how do you accept the printing press? Wouldn't handwritten notes to friends be more in keeping with your principles?

Obviously, I'm baiting you. I'm not a computer fanatic. I write notes like this by hand, yet, if we accept the premise that we need newspapers, computers are the only way to go. I hope the "computer question" doesn't break up your collective. Best of luck resolving this issue. Keep up the struggle against the state, capitalism and industrial waste.

Zvi Baranoff
Green Action
P.O. Box 2044
Cottonwood AZ 86326

FE Note: This is being typeset on an IBM Selectric Composer (stand-alone unit) circa 1965. It is entirely mechanical although extremely intricate and preceded the computer revolution—no screen, etc. I can't imagine typesetting being "fun" under any circumstances and every advantage you list for a computer, our typesetter has over a word processor and it does not use chemicals. What you describe is the "death of a 1,000 cuts"—why resist any of the modern world? It's all the same, after all.

If we can stay with the same convivial technology that has served us for two decades without the need for large cash outlays, service contracts and "trained" operators, so much the better. The tricks computers can do are certainly intriguing, but humans have done without them quite well for almost all of our history.

Fortunately, we just received a mailing from *The Printer's Devil*, which in turn, gave us a contact for a newsletter which deals with outdated composers. Maybe we can save this old baby from the scrapheap after all.

Computers III

FE Note: In the following letter the term “serif,” as it refers to the design of typefaces, means the little squiggles attached to the arms of each individual character or letter of the alphabet. “Sans serif” simply means “without” the squiggles and is a typeface like the one you are presently reading. Each age produces uniquely designed typefaces and, as our letter writer indicates, the particular design often meshes in with the tenor of the time.

We actually think the observations made are worth considering and may search for the Press Roman style type elements in which this paper was published prior to 1975.

Dear FE:

I am working my way through the issue of Spring 1983 FE you sent. The article on computers I have read and find interesting. [See “Fifth Estate Tool of the Year: The Sledge-Hammer,” FE #312, Spring, 1983]

When I say I am working my way through the issue I mean it literally. It is the motivation for my writing this letter. The sans serif typeface you use is pretty hard going. And it seems to me particularly inappropriate for FE as sans serif faces are the epitome of modernity (they were first introduced in the late 1950s).

One of their chief selling points is that they could be reproduced legibly (if not readably) using the offset-litho process during its early commercial days, when it was not capable of the definition of letterpress reproduction. Designers tend to characterize sans serif faces with words like “urgent,” “blunt,” “severe,” “utile,” “orderly,” and “new.” These may be (and do seem to be) messages you want your pages to convey but there are roman (serifed) faces which will convey the same character and which are more readable (Times Roman is the standby).

Just as a thought, since you only publish three times a year and you prefer to use equipment which is easily accessible to all who work on your projects, have you considered letterpress (and handset type)? The “Tool of the Year” article ends with the sentence, “We will have to create communities of resistance—but there must be resistance.”

For my own part, I tend to agree with this statement, though I rarely bother to take direct action against the State. Instead, I do what I can (with *The Printer’s Devil*, for instance) to encourage alternatives to what might be called, politely, mainstream society. It seems to me that the web-offset press is a manifestation of the state-of-mind you object to in the pages of FE. And my own feeling is that the state cannot be bested using its own weapons.

Joe M. Singer

P.O. Box 135

Harrison, Idaho 83833-0135

Not Usual Protest

Dear 5th Estate,

After reading “Give Chance a Piece” in FE #328, Spring, 1988, I had to write and relate some of my experiences at that protest.

Though the “usual crowd” was there (leafletters, RCP drones, loudmouths with megaphones, etc.) this was hardly a “usual” protest. The Navy attacking Brian Wilson like they did, mere days before, angered many people. There were entire families there, grandmothers, local Contra Costa county residents, and the feeling was decidedly different than most protests I’ve been to. The Nuremberg Action (NA) people did lots of work, organizing and publicizing, and I believe are mostly responsible for the 8000+ turnout on extremely short notice.

I wasn’t aware that ripping up the tracks was a planned event. I had erroneously assumed it was spontaneous. In any case, I was there when an NA spokesperson denounced the track destruction as a violent act, etc., which I like so many others thought was a crock of shit.

However, she (and later, others) voiced their opinions and reasoning, and so did the track-ripper-uppers, in a civilized manner, and then both went their own ways. In other words, two very different groups of people reached an agreement, and coexisted in a “real-life” environment. What more could be asked for? I don’t think it’s necessary, or even good, that all groups agree at all steps. There is no need to slag the NA people; if anything, they should be applauded for helping put together a successful event.

As far as destroying 100 feet of railroad tracks goes, it was a good thing (and fun!) but a more or less symbolic act. I talked to many people about it, and most realized that the tracks would be put back together as soon as they were really needed. I mean, seriously, railroad track technology is well over 100 years old, even if 10 cubic yards of gravel were removed it would hardly slow down repairs.

People were really angry, and this was something you could actually “do now”. Also, it seemed obvious at the time that the Bad Guys knew that fucking with the protesters could only do themselves harm. They had to just stand and watch, and that made everyone all the more gleeful. (Especially with those Star Wars type faceless Marine goons in the navy yard—black uniform, black helmet and face-shield, full auto weapons, standing shoulder to shoulder just far back enough so’s you can’t get too good a look, and they never moved once; great theatre on their part!)

The NA is too wimpy for me personally, but all in all, a perfect example of people working together, without all the usual hot air beforehand and lack of results after.

Tom Jennings
San Francisco

Needs Help

Dear Friends:

An Indian comrade, who has worked for the last three years in Bhopal, has asked for assistance in obtaining material and contacts on anarchist approaches to education, both theoretical and practical. Anyone who has material or experiences to share, please write to Satinath Sarangi, 39 Govind Gardens, Govindpura, Bhopal 462 023, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Torres Mac Sheoin
Dublin, Ireland

No RCP-Prop

Dear FE,

I would like to congratulate George Bradford on his well-done critique of the deep ecology movement (“How Deep is Deep Ecology?” FE# 327, Fall, 1987), your entire staff for deciding to take a long-needed break from your tiresome tabloid format, and Freddie Baer for her excellent graphics. I hope to see future experimentation in format and content (and please no more idiotic copies of RCP propaganda such as the picture of Oliver North which was altered to look like Hitler) (Summer 1987 FE).

Jim Passin
Chelmsford, MA

FE Note: The item below as provided to us from Tuli Kupferberg’s Vanity Press, 160 6th Ave., NY NY 10013 from what he asserts came from a recent *New York Times*. Tuli produces an immense volume of parodies, song lyrics and cartoons available from him for a trade or a couple of bucks.

Corrections

Because of an editing error, an article in some editions of *Business Day* yesterday about the new law firm of Myerson & Kohn incorrectly described the financial status of Booth, Marcus & Pierce, a law firm whose partners joined the new firm. Booth Marcus and Pierce specialized in bankruptcy law; it was not bankrupt.

An article in *The Living Section* yesterday about duck research misidentified a center that serves as a kind of “fat farm” for ducks. It is the Cornell University Duck Research Laboratory in Eastport, L.I.

The *New York Times* regrets that since the purchase of the paper in 1896 by Adolph S. Ochs its editors have presented a distorted view of American and world history due to the fact that they are part of the ideological superstructure of U.S. and world capitalism.

They would hope to do better after the social revolution and beg their readers’ indulgence until that time.

fifth Estate

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