

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

In the Streets

Dear Folks,

Re: Toronto Anarchist Gathering coverage (FE #329, Summer 1988): I am trying to scrape together a 'zine to write about, among other things, The Gathering. Time is running on and it's almost old news now but I still think it's important that there be an ongoing discussion about the events surrounding the July 4 Day of Action.

The Toronto crew did a good job under heavy heat and they deserve a lot of credit for a tough job well done.

The workshop, meeting, cultural part of the gathering was a huge success.

It's time for all participants to take a moment and really think about what constitutes an effective demo. I think a lot of times people get caught up in some kind of romantic whirlwind and this leads them to pursue actions that are very symbolic but highly impractical.

I am willing to do what I feel is necessary to bring about social change but I don't think it's useful to have myself thrown in jail or beat up by cops unless I can see some real effect.

Revolution in the streets—sure I'm all for it, but suicide demos don't yield anything but dead bodies and lawyers' fees.

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Go Beyond Image

Dear Fifth Estaters,

I found the fact that "anarchists" listen respectfully to a Native American and interrupted a veteran of the Spanish Revolution not surprising (See "Anarchy in Toronto", FE #329 Summer 1988). People usually deal with images instead of reality. The comrade was white, male and elderly, which are usually the same image as our enemies. We ("radicals") have learned to reject the negative image of "Indians" presented by pro-Western ideology.

It will be a revolution (which is a process not an event) when we can stop replacing images. Oppression and exploitation are relationships and they are not always determined by biology. Age, race and sex are biological and it is true that the ruling class has traditionally been biological determinists. There have been some changes however so that even the Reagan Administration had some women, black and young supporters and members. They must of course be loyal to Capital and its state and they are there for image.

Anarchists will hopefully go beyond image and learn some tolerance of others' looks. We can then deal with the reality of oppression and exploitation. I include myself because I have to constantly fight my prejudice of calling people yuppies because of the way they dress. Yuppies are a negative image for me.

For Life Beyond Images!
Lisa
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Israeli Prisoner

Dear Friends:

At the beginning of July, I came out of the Israeli army's prison, where I spent three months for writing upon 117 tanks: "Soldiers! Refuse to be oppressors and occupiers—refuse to serve in the occupied territories!" (I also lost my rank of reserve corporal and was demoted to private. (See Summer 1988 FE)

The military prison is not an easy place to be. The combination of military discipline and prison conditions makes for a rather exhausting "way of life." It was, however, also a period of rich in human warmth and understanding shared with my fellow prisoners.

I was in the company of several hundreds imprisoned soldiers. A few of them were, like myself, imprisoned for acts of protest against the repression in the occupied territories; the majority were there for "non-political" infractions of army discipline.

We were a diverse group; young and old, conscripts and reservists (most of whom were picked up from their homes and charged with "desertion"—i.e., not showing up in time for reserve duty). There were people from different social classes and ethnic origins—with an overrepresentation of Oriental Jews from slum neighborhoods.

By no means all of the prisoners were in agreement with my views, but there was a willingness to listen, there was respect, and—above all—there was the feeling of solidarity. We were all prisoners together, suffering the same harsh treatment and, at least for the time being, all on the same side.

I have come out of the prison with a stronger belief that peace and justice are in the interest of everybody; that the struggle, so often frustrating, is not in vain.

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P.S.: Thank you for the attention given to our publication, *The Other Israel*, I must admit, however, that I am not entirely satisfied with your article (See "Palestine: Legacy of Conquest," FE #328, Spring 1988). I feel that it had too much of a tendency to present Israel as one monolithic mass, in which everybody participates in oppressing the Palestinians.

The peace demonstrations and protests were mentioned, if at all, only in passing. A reader of the article would find it difficult to grasp how deeply divided and polarized Israeli society has become.

Lynn Clive responds: I agree that it is very important for people to realize the extent and diversity of opposition to Zionist policies within the state of Israel, but that was not the focus of my article.

There was mention made of demonstrations and protests, and the FE has frequently covered activities and publications of Yesh Gvul, The Other Israel, and individual critics of the Israeli government.

Articles written during the Vietnam war which condemned the U.S. government for its genocidal campaign against the Vietnamese people did not have to mention the widespread peace effort that was simultaneously taking place in this country. Similarly, exposes on U.S. intervention in Central America need not always mention the efforts of people (like myself) who are involved in ongoing activities to oppose official policy.

The readers of this newspaper do not equate the actions of repressive governments with the diverse political philosophies and sentiments of individuals that live under those systems or of peace and human rights movements that exist to oppose them.

There has been so much misinformation put out in the mainstream media about the policies of both the U.S. and Israeli governments that it seems imperative to expose them when and wherever possible. This is not at all to say that the efforts of people like yourself are not greatly admired and appreciated.

Simple Language

Dear FE:

Boo, hiss! I hope that I'm not the only one who is disappointed at the lack of criticism regarding Hakim Bey's letter on language (FE #328, Spring 1988).

The problem with Bey's letter reflects an overall problem with language; he speaks of commonplace language, how it "can convey only 'common' ideas," how it is "impoverished," and so on, but never expounds on what he considers commonplace language.

Is commonplace language some variety of substandard English? Is it the manifestation (written or oral) of everyday, noncritical sentiment? Or is commonplace language just a lexically limited use of communication?

None of this is made clear, although it seems apparent that whatever Hakim means by the phrase, it is seen by him as something less than whatever he considers beautiful language. We all know that there are words that express very complex ideas, and I'm not against using them providing that you are admittedly writing to an audience who will understand you, or at least be willing to consult a dictionary.

We all know that some people use pompous, lexically inaccessible language as a form of academic one-upmanship. The problem does not lie in Hakim's "beautiful" use of language, but rather his attitudes towards people who (supposedly) choose to use the commonplace.

Some people can convey very complex ideas in simple language. Others have never mastered the art of communication and cannot convey whatever complex ideas they may have. Others try to convey their ideas in either simple or complex language, but find their ideas misunderstood anyway. Sometimes, no matter how well you think you've expressed something, you find that your words translate into a different expression in somebody else's mind. Such is the realm of semantics.

I'm sure that few people consciously "choose downward mobility of the mind." First of all, there exists both emotional and physiological learning disabilities also speech dysfunctions that make it difficult for some to aspire to a level of language ability up to intelligentsia standards.

We also have to take into consideration the state of language acquisition. On behalf of all the non-native speakers, of those who've acquired Brooklyn accents from their parents, of those who never had a book in their home, of those who speak like their peers. In short, on behalf of all those who for some reason speak or write in a manner that is looked down upon, or isn't as good as can be, I say go suck nickels!

Laure Akai-Ngurundere
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fifth Estate

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/330-winter-1988-89/letters-to-the-fifth-estate>
Fifth Estate #330, Winter, 1988-89

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