

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1991

Critique of Totality

Dear FE folks,

Congratulations on the 25th anniversary.

I found the four-person exchange ["Environmentalism and Revolution: A Challenge to the Fifth Estate and Responses," FE #335, Winter, 1991] a good one, and I'd like to see more of that. Although at this time I don't have anything to add that hasn't been said. These issues are what I had in mind for a "rethinking anarchy."

I find myself going around and around on these issues—wanting my local recycling efforts in our town to initiate a critique of capital and yet when I try to put my critique of the totality into practice, I get stuck. I feel my farming work here is in that second category, but I get caught up in the work so I sometimes lose track.

As I go around and around here, to me this discussion is important.

Patti Stanko

Winchendon, MA

Free Sub. Policy

Dear Fifth Estate,

I would like to congratulate you on your excellent publication. I found it extremely well written and thoughtful.

I am writing to send in a donation to help cover some prisoner subscriptions. Although I doubt the sincerity of some of the prisoners, I am impressed by your policy of providing prisoners and GIs with free subscriptions.

If you need the funds in another area use my donation any way you want.

In Peace,

Mike Smith

Ft. Lauderdale, FL

"Correct" Line?

Dear Fifth Estate comrades,

Enclosed, a check for \$35 in renewal of subscription (with the balance as contribution).

I'm happy that the Fifth Estate has kicked the habit of publishing pamphlets in the columns of the paper. I'm not uninterested in philosophy but the "correct" philosophical line certainly isn't what's important in these times.

For spreading anarchist ideas among the “uninitiated” the article “Detroit: Demolished by Design” (Winter FE, 1991) is infinitely more valuable. It’s high quality journalism. The painful honesty of the ending actually validates the article.

David Wieck
Troy, N.Y.

Bit of Exam

Hi FE folk,

I’ve observed some things over the past few years that I think need a bit of examination.

Why is it that anarchists who have a strong anti-nationalist critique do not apply that critique to native peoples who use nationalist language to express their struggles? To say that they don’t mean the same thing as the European invaders of their land is highly questionable, since the language of nationalism and property rights is something they learned from the Europeans, and if they meant something different, they would use different language.

Could there not be a way of expressing support for their resistance to “development” without blinding ourselves to that in their activity which mirrors what they are fighting? It seems too many anarchists suffer from liberal guilt and so fear to criticize what is oppressive in the movements of groups that have been victims of the most obvious forms of oppression.

Feral
Eugene, OR

Death Row Prisoner

To the FE:

I am a Deathrow prisoner and deeply appreciate the *Fifth Estate*. While I am without funds for a paid subscription, I have encouraged several on the outside to subscribe. My appeal should take several more years.

Carl E. Napier
Huntsville, TX

War Resisters

To the Fifth Estate:

Information about arrests or jailing of war resisters in the United States and Canada is being collected for publication in *The Nuclear Resister*. For ten years we have chronicled anti-nuclear civil disobedience and encouraged support for imprisoned anti-nuclear resisters.

Given the implicit threat of the U.S. to use any of its 500 nuclear weapons it has in the Persian Gulf region we are broadening our focus to include war resistance arrests.

Please give us, by mail or phone, the following information: date, city, site and number of arrests, charges filed, name and jail (or support group) address of anyone in jail for an anti-war action, their legal status and trial or release date, and a contact name, address, and phone number for more information and publication.

Also helpful are news clippings, photos, graphics, statements and announcements of future actions.

We will send bundles of 30 to 200 to contacts who can guarantee distribution in cities where arrests have occurred. Let us know how many you can use and please send a donation to help cover costs. Sample copies also available.

Felice and Jack Cohen-Joppa
The Nuclear Resister
P.O. Box 43383
Tucson AZ 85733

Get Out Now

Dear FE Friends:

I have just read your Winter 1990–91 issue and am astonished at the tone and content of all but two of its articles. What inertia, what misplaced loyalties bind you to such a prime killing ground of the New Holocaust. Could it be that even the FE does not understand what the New World Order is? I do not mean “will be”—but is.

Clive, Bradford: surely you must know, in some dark and horrifying corner of your consciousness, that THEY will do ANYTHING—and that they have, or shortly will have, the POWER to do anything. The Age of the Prototype is drawing to a close. Capital’s Final Solution to the Homo Sapien Problem draws near. Do not stake your lives and the lives of your comrades on a vain attempt to stand in the direct path of the death-ride of the Megamachine.

You cannot turn the mass of robot whores and feral pinheads from the path of annihilation: Neither can you save the aged and infirm shards of human community from the entrails of the Beast. Throw away all the old debates, all the strategies and slogans of the past. Those things are done with—they are over. Capital has eaten up the past. When you look there you will only find images, the shadows of what was—of memories.

You must look to the Future and ready yourselves for the gathering-in of the remnants. Prepare for the final struggle—the war between the human beings and the mutant legions of a post-human Mega-machine.

Carry our pitiful little bit of “Western” knowledge to the places where the wisdom of the elders of the Old Ways and the dreams of the poets will be. As Gore Vidal said in a recent speech, only a global “change of mind” (of such profundity as has not been seen since the times of Jesus and the Buddha) can matter now. Or, as Mumford said in a speech 35 years ago, only a “miracle” can save humanity from destruction.

Come out West, or go to Vermont, but in any event, get out of Detroit. GET OUT NOW! For, truly, the Time of Atonement is at hand.

fare well,
J. McCoy
Seattle

Down to Earth

Dear FE:

Thanks for the article by Lynne Clive on Detroit violence and race problems in the last issue (see “Detroit: Demolished by Design,” FE #335, Winter, 1990–91). It is rare for an anarchist journal to address such issues. I hope it encourages more work in this area.

To me and to only a few of my political friends, such articles serve to bring anarchist thinking down to earth. Actually, more to earth than the lengthy environmental focus of recent years which have led, in a sense, to unusable polemics against civilization or to the preachy self-righteous incoherence of a Feral Faun. Not that the anti-civilization writing is without merit as a critique or an interest, but it leaves the reader flat with nowhere to go.

It seems most anarchists have no relationship to the unbelievable things going on around our feet. How we live is determined to a large extent by the dynamics explained in Clive’s article, so why are we not more involved? First, the situation often appears so utterly desperate and a second reason is one of class.

Class issues are rarely discussed in anarchist circles since most anarchists are of middle-class or even loftier genealogy. The struggles faced by poor people are so different from middle-class struggles. They have much more to do with survival on various levels.

My companion and I have always been poor and we live the life of the poor. We walk to where we’re going or take the bus and train and because it’s Jersey City and NYC, we are always in step with people of color. As a result, we have had to learn a lot.

I work with homeless people with HIV infection in Jersey City. I think I am witnessing a calamity rivaling that of the middle passage itself in its potential for destruction. The social fabric of black communities—traditionally matrilineal with extended families—has been shredded. As Clive said, the white communities consume by far the larger portion of drugs, but the devastation doesn't compare.

Being of poor stock, I can recognize one great, painful phenomenon in my clients and colleagues who are black and hispanic: the ease of hopelessness. Repression works. Poor people do not valorize themselves as much as people with means.

In working with AIDS, the chief enemy is the attitudes within the communities: denial, embarrassment and a sense of deserved punishment. I open my anarchist mouth at work often and we have great engagements, but God is still everywhere here, and so is sin.

Yet I don't feel hopeless. We have Act-Up and Queer Nation doing unprecedented work to fight back for gays and lesbians. I have heard rumors of similar grass roots responses in the communities of color.

Still, the scale is weighted in favor of the destructive. Where are the Black Panthers and the Young Lords? Today, they're getting high or crawling to Jesus or Farrakhan.

Like Clive wrote, the establishment and conservatives are increasingly concerned about the violence, etc., but obviously not for our reasons.

Anarchism has much to offer this crisis. I wish we were confronting it more.

Michael

Jersey City NJ

No Ass-Kissing

To the FE:

I am a 25-year-old prisoner in the Virginia penal system serving a whopping 18 year sentence for drug possession. Since the onset of my incarceration I have repeatedly opted for integrity over ass-kissing and have refused to profess my guilt.

I have endeavored to explain that I am neither evil, nor an "addict," but a free moral agent with every right to do with his mind and body what he sees fit including selling or giving others anything they may wish to buy. To them, this is rebellion or even worse—"denial"—and deserves the most severe punishment that can be doled out.

The form this punishment has taken so far is assignment, seemingly permanent, to the most restrictive prison in the state. As institutional psychology and drug abuseology are both diametrically opposed to truth, the more adamant I am in my opinions, the "sicker" I am perceived to be.

I can always "get well" by selling my soul, but, to be honest, I kind of like being the kind of "sick" they've branded me as.

LZ

Craigsville VA

Poetic License

Greetings!

Thanks for reviewing my swamp rat pamphlet. (See "Swamp Rats and Urban Rats, Unite!" FE #335, Winter, 1990-91) George Bradford makes some good criticisms of the text. I meant to use quotation marks on "citizenship" and was using it in conjunction with my line "the Great Dismal City of Refuge." I claim poetic license in my use of "wilderness." The term "Buffalo soldiers" did originate with Plains Indians but its use did become somewhat more widespread in referring generically to black soldiers. Finally, I should have said "real" or "true" instead of "original rainbow coalition." I certainly did not mean to suggest an identity between the two groupings.

Anyway, I thought you might like a little file of samples of my collages as possible graphics for future articles...I'll be in touch.

James Koehnline
Skokie IL

FE Note: More of James Koehnline's fabulous collages adorn the present issue.

Fuck authority

Dear FE Friends:

I found JB's letter interesting as well as the responses (See "Environmentalism and Revolution," FE #335, Winter, 1990-91) because, simply put, I wonder what the hell to do myself.

I try to develop my ideas, fuck authority at every turn in daily life, go to protests on every conceivable issue (to avoid single-issue-ism), develop a community of resistance and mutual aid and wait for the revolution to "pop up." At times, I've committed myself to more organized resistance ("symbolic resistance?"), other times become more cynical and while feeling uncompromised and "wise" by avoiding the left and green alternative mental pollutions, it becomes disengagement on many levels.

I understand JB's critique of militancy though it seems like a mixture of lucidity and burnout. I also appreciate strongly things like Redwood Summer as an important battleground that 1) "win" or not, slows the rape of the planet, 2) reintroduces the "non-political" appeal and effect of direct action in a country so battered by the farce of democracy, and 3) in the fight, solidarity and radicalization happen naturally as opposed to hierarchical, sterile, liberal pressure groups, or radical circles that only theorize.

So, to be liberal myself, I'll say I get a lot out of everyone's contribution. By the way, through your mention of the Berkeley/anarchist/Poland connection, hope to send them some shortwave radios and cameras.

Peter Kalberer
San Francisco

Brave New World Order

Dear FE:

Responding to your question in the last issue, I like the idea of more frequent FE's. I'd especially like to see reprints (given the shortage of back issues) of material on Vietnam, the 60's, and technology. As a (Brave) New World Order has been declared, I think an antiauthoritarian critique of Vietnam and the framework of which such conflicts are an integral part is very much needed by persons such as myself who were too young to understand the events of the time.

Also, I found the "Challenge to the FE" in the last issue quite helpful. Indeed, I've asked myself some of the same questions. Although not addressed in the section, an acute problem here in NY is the presence of the RCP (remote-controlled parasites) and other groups (Workers World Party, etc.) of caricatured, leftist militants who are just wonderful at keeping supporters from demonstrations. Any suggestions?

Take care,
Ted Sorgo

Attention mail order book buyers: we have an order from a "J.D.A" but have lost your address. Please contact us.

A letter from Bhopal

Dear Friends:

December 3, 1990 marked the sixth anniversary of the Bhopal gas disaster. However, the most critical medical, rehabilitation and legal issues remain to be addressed. Death, disease and despair continue to stalk the shanties of Bhopal.

The "valiant victims" continue their battle on the streets for rehabilitation and for punishment of the guilty officials of the Union Carbide, the corporation responsible for the genocide.

The courageous women of the Bhopal Gas Affected Women Workers Organization, the largest group of gas victims, have been harassed, beaten and arrested by the police. The organization has huge debts and the press ignores them, but they continue to struggle and sometimes win.

The provision of interim monetary relief to residents of the 36 gas affected municipal wards is one such victory. The gas victims are eating better, are not forced to do hard physical work and are paying back debts they incurred in the last few years. The pace of disbursement continues slowly and half the gas affected population has yet to receive relief.

Medical treatment of gas victims continues to be largely symptomatic as it was in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Union Carbide has impeded proper treatment through its refusal to provide information on the composition of the escaped gases. A 1989 long-term epidemiological study has indicated death rates double that of a control area.

Assessment of injuries suffered by gas victims of Union Carbide is another area neglected by the government. If compensation by the corporation is based on figures furnished by the Indian Directorate of Claims, over 90% of victims will receive minimal compensation or none at all. Over 10,000 gas victims, a majority of them children, have yet to register.

The high morbidity rate among gas affected people and the damage done to their immune systems calls for healthy living conditions. Most gas victims live in damp, poorly ventilated shanties which lack clean drinking water. In 1990, the Citizen's Environmental Laboratory analyzed water and soil samples from the vicinity of Union Carbide's closed plant. The reports show wells in the communities are contaminated with di- and tri-chlorobenzenes, chemicals that damage the liver, kidneys and respiratory system. Soil samples contained known carcinogens. Despite calls for an investigation and clean-up, the government has yet to initiate either.

Meanwhile, the case against Union Carbide has yet to go further than the preliminary stages of litigation. The case for compensation and criminal prosecution of Union Carbide officials can only proceed in the Indian courts after the settlement is invalidated. The gas affected petitioners are determined to carry on with the litigation until adequate compensation is extracted and company officials are criminally convicted. By all accounts, the struggle for justice in Bhopal will be a long one.

The solidarity expressed by individuals and organizations from India and the rest of the world has strengthened the resolve of the victims. Bhopal also needs to be remembered so we are more aware of the "silent Bhopals" happening around us and to pre-empt future such occurrences.

May we suggest the following solidarity actions to make Union Carbide accountable for its crimes and to overturn the Feb. 1989 settlement between the Indian government and one company:

- 1) Organize demonstrations, die-ins, etc. at Union Carbide facilities;
- 2) Organize press conferences around the demands of Bhopal gas victims;
- 3) Organize letter campaigns of support and send to Prime Minister of India, North Block, New Delhi, India and Robert Kennedy, Chairman of Union Carbide, 39 Old Ridgebury Rd., Danbury CT 06017.

If you send us reports of your actions, or messages of solidarity, we will publish them in our newsletter which is distributed to gas affected people.

Satinath Sarangi
Bhopal Group for Information and Action
c/o E-1/208 Arera Colony
Bhopal 462016 India

FE Note: This letter was edited for space purposes; the full text can be obtained by writing to the Bhopal Group for Information and Action. For the FE reaction to the Bhopal gas leak, see "We All Live in Bhopal," in the Winter 1985 FE, also published in the anthology *Questioning Technology*, edited by A. Carnes and J. Zerzan, available from FE books for \$10.

Real Struggle

To the FE Collective:

I received my first issue of the *Fifth Estate* and I am most impressed with it. I have read many anti-authoritarian and anarchist publications, but yours is by far the most informative.

I would like to remain on your mailing list and look forward to future editions. I also want the other women here at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women to be able to understand what the real struggle is all about.

Prisoner

Goochland VA

fifth Estate

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