

# Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1992

## Our Firm Convictions

Dear Fifth Estate:

I enjoy your publication and find it very thought provoking. As far as criticism of the existing social order is concerned, it is perhaps the most consistently inclusive I have run across. It is obvious to me that our current world is rife with injustice on a previously unimaginable magnitude, and is rapidly self-destructing.

Despite this I am often frustrated after reading your magazine. Because as much as I agree with it, when I put it down I still have to get in my car and commute to a job in a software factory here in Silicon Valley. This is reality for many of us, not liking much about our new world order, but not seeing much of a way off the hamster wheel of our existence.

These are, as you correctly point out, huge megalithic constructions that are requiring our participation as surely as a steamroller requires ants to become pavement. We can try to scurry out of the way, but such a limited personal salvation does as much to prop up the system as to change it.

We can protest. Personally, I find confrontational street politics to be the opposite of liberating experiences. A few friends recently spent a day and a half in jail for watching the Rodney King street actions a little too closely. Life experiences have led me to a place where I will do almost anything to avoid incarceration.

I would certainly never voluntarily submit to being arrested. I try to change things as best I can. I read, I write, I talk to people who are borderline on buying into the whole megamachine propaganda to give them a second opinion.

What I'd like to see is maybe impossible for you or anyone to deliver, but we can begin to discuss it I hope. How do we move from our firm convictions that the megamachine is killing us to new lives that reflect our beliefs and support those beliefs? How do we feed ourselves, our kids, and the hungry around us in the process? Can we move from a reactive mode of fighting against what is wrong to a more creative one of building what is right? Perhaps the FE is not the place for this?

Perhaps it's for this reason that I like your Detroit Seen column though I haven't been in Detroit, the city of my birth, for many years. It resonates with the happy sounds of people living out a more useful philosophy than building cars and computers for the ever expanding enrichment of the suits everywhere.

We can only hope that perhaps the openings glimpsed in the Soviet collapse portend opportunities for the other bloc as well. One down, one to go.

Richard Wozniak  
Boulder Creek, CA

*FE Response:* Your questions are the same ones which haunt all of us, but suddenly there seem to be more people than in a long time trying to come up with answers.

## The Hard Things

Dear Fifth Estate:

I find your perspective on things governmental very close to my own, and over the last year I've enjoyed the FE very much. I never really liked being the most radical person I know.

I like the FE because I get the sense that you are not afraid to face the hard things that will have to be done if life without government is to work. That is, doing things for ourselves, doing it all, without "networks" or "parties" or any other of the masks the next generation of hopeful hierarchs may adopt.

I thought you might be interested to hear news of the political scene in the Kingdom of Nepal, where I was from Feb. through mid-May. Nepal now has, in addition to the world's tallest mountain, the world's fastest growing Communist Party. As usual, we toss our leavings to the 3<sup>rd</sup> World, and Nepal is no exception.

Nepal was closed to the rest of the world until very recently. A few families chose the king from among their own sons, and brought in cars, electricity, plumbing, schools—all for themselves. In 1950, India and Britain conspired to overthrow the ruling elite and install the heir of an earlier dynasty as the new King.

He, of course, set up a more "democratic" government and trade relations very favorable to India. About two years ago, when the nations of Eastern Europe were having their "revolutions," the people of Nepal (loyal TV watchers, all who can afford to be) had their own "revolution," which Nepalis described to me as people chanting in the streets, "We Want Democracy" in English. Soldiers shooting a bit and then, presto!, an even more democratic government, i.e., even more identical to the U.S. system.

A local Communist official I often argued with best summed up the prevailing attitude: "It is government's job to provide us with food and jobs, and if the current government isn't doing that, then we ought to revolt against it and elect one that can." That, I am afraid, is as revolutionary as it gets in Nepal. Much like Americans, Nepalis want everything done for them, and the only controversy is whether capitalism or communism will do it better, with little thought of how much they impoverish themselves thereby.

I don't doubt it's a lesson all humanity will have to learn, or perish. Anyway, thanks for the inspiring words from Detroit and keep on with the better way.

Patrick  
New Castle, PA

## New Print Project

Dear Friends:

A newly formed press, in cooperation with the Libertarian Book Club, is embarking on a project of printing and reprinting literature pertaining to anarchist thought.

As our first pamphlet, we have decided to reprint Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man*. Written in 1946 and widely circulated in the 1960s during the heat of the international student movements, this essay has since been out of print.

Despite the demise of Marxism as it was materialized in the Soviet state, Macdonald's critique of Marxism remains pertinent. Macdonald challenges the ideological foundations of Left-wing thought as they have existed for almost two centuries. He was one of the first to reveal the increasingly indiscernible dividing line between Right and Left with the rise of Nazism and Stalinism.

He shows the central political dichotomy to no longer be between Right and Left, but between Progressive and Radical. Progressives, according to Macdonald, are those who still hold the basic tenets of historical materialism and who invest in the power of scientific knowledge their hopes for a better future. Radicals, in contrast, reject historical materialism and the notion of Progress in favor of political ethics and values that are personal and timeless; they weigh the benefits of human mastery over nature against the dehumanizing effects of this mastery.

The pertinence of Macdonald's argument lies both in its critique of the dehumanizing aspects of technology (which have only escalated since the time of the essay) and in the anarchist alternative he proposes to traditional Leftist ideology. Furthermore, his critique of Progressivism strikes a remarkably contemporary note in light of the

current ecological crisis—a direct result of a political ideology based on scientific progress and the notion of human domination over nature.

Macdonald never substantively addresses how Radical action will manifest itself; “It is still too soon to be definitive.” He does, however, emphasize that it must “encourage attitudes of disrespect, skepticism and ridicule toward the State and all authority.” In publishing this essay, we hope to restore MacDonald’s insight to contemporary political debate and to encourage its synthesis with action.

This project can only be realized with your help. We would greatly appreciate any contribution you can afford. Other essays are planned for publication and we welcome any suggestions.

Intransigent Press Collective, P.O. Box 718, NY, NY 10009

## Long Held Dogmas

Dear Fifth Estate:

I began to read the FE during the tail end of your long debate over deep ecology, and I was hooked from the beginning. Although I have always thought of myself as an anti-authoritarian, I realize now that my early rebellions were not as radical as I’d imagined.

I have to thank you for your role in my rejection of many long-held dogmas, for showing me the intrinsic danger and corruption of technology and civilization and the possibilities of the primitive. Best of all, you’ve provided me with an excellent reading list that never fails to broaden horizons.

Fight the Power!

LDG Deck

Montreal, Quebec

*FE Note:* Although the debate surrounding deep ecology and Earth First! as it was then constituted occurred several years ago, the essays involved still provide a lively look at the issues at stake in radical environmental discourse. Earth First! has changed tremendously, having shed much of what and who we found objectionable, but the debate still has a defining quality for those interested in the key ideas of this publication. May we suggest reading *How Deep is Deep Ecology?* by George Bradford, Times Change Press, \$5 [see also FE #327, Fall, 1987]; Spring and Summer 1988 FEs, \$2 each, and the special issue, “Return of the Son of Deep Ecology,” by George Bradford [FE #331, Spring 1989] free for postage (\$1 minimum) and we will send multiple copies of this issue to the amount sent for postage. 10 copies can be sent for \$1.50 for example.

## Sleep with the Land

Dear Folks at Fifth Estate:

I am homeless and the enclosed poem explains some of the feelings I have round the land on which I live.

**[title] His fence, my land**

i sleep with the land

there is a man somewhere

that thinks the land is his

that he owns the land

.

he is wrong

he owns the fence

which strangles the land

with sharp wire

.

his land is a piece of paper

a money figure on an LED screen

a chore  
.  
my land is the sun  
it heats my face in the morning  
it is the lunar light which guides me  
it is the tall grass within which is my sanctuary  
.  
his land is created by the state  
my land is the gift of the unknown  
.  
what he calls land  
is a real estate rape fantasy  
.  
for myself,  
the land is a cradle  
as i drift into a dream  
without boundaries  
Anders Corr  
P.O. Box 7691  
Santa Cruz, CA 95061

## Lessers of Evil

To the Fifth Estate:

While I agree that Pres. Kennedy was an establishment figure (who else would be elected President?), I disagree with your statement that his death “changed nothing” (see “JFK: Cold Warrior: Debunking Oliver Stone’s Mythology” by Jack Straw (FE #339, Spring, 1992).

During the Cuban missile fiasco the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted to launch a nuclear war, which Kennedy reportedly blocked. Kennedy did want to eliminate the gangster outfit known as the CIA, which most likely led to his demise. When, since Kennedy’s death, were the CIA and their compadres in the Mafia ever challenged again?

The fact that the system destroyed some of its own renegade members (John and Robert Kennedy) only proves how truly intolerant it is of any departure from its agenda. How can you follow in the FBI’s footsteps and ignore the overwhelming evidence that proves both assigned “assassins” (Sirhan and Oswald) were mere patsies?

It does make a difference to what length the powers are willing to go, and have gone, to insure that nothing blocks their agenda. The fact that even an establishment figure like JFK must be eliminated, and that they are able to carry it out, should deeply disturb everyone. Since you are not doing away with the evils of government, and we can only hope for the lessers of evil, I hope you can detect the difference between a Ted Kennedy and his voting record on behalf of the poor and the environment and that of a Jesse Helms, for instance.

I.B. Pines  
Farmington MI

*Jack Straw replies:* Here we see the same unsubstantiated rumors: Kennedy blocked a proposed invasion, Kennedy wanted to eliminate the CIA...Tactics are being confused with overall strategy. Kennedy’s desires for the CIA were to centralize intelligence gathering under White House control.

I think my article says more than enough to debunk the notion of Kennedy as renegade. Oswald’s role may not be clear, but Sirhan did shoot Bobby because of the latter’s unflinching support for Zionism, something conspiracy buffs (and apparently you) prefer to ignore.

The ruling elite is willing to go to any length to preserve their power. That is why Kennedy helped to establish Death Squads in Latin America and took similar steps elsewhere. I hope you can detect the difference between Ted Kennedy’s rhetoric of “justice” and his acts on behalf of the S&Ls, airlines, and the establishment of a police state.

Maybe the best you can hope for is the “lesser” of two evils. The historical record shows that to be poor judgment at best. But more than that, I refuse to stay on my knees and celebrate powerlessness. Let others allow themselves to be degraded by choosing their masters, after already being humiliated by being ruled. We (well, maybe not you, I.B.) wanna be free.

## Liberalism Strangled

Dear FE:

You have to agree with the basic thrust of Jack Straw’s, “JFK: Cold Warrior.” Kennedy certainly was a son of a bitch. No one who considers themselves to be in any way an anti-imperialist ought to praise the man. His policies of “great societies at home and grand designs abroad” (Walter Heller quoted by Noam Chomsky, *Culture of Terrorism* were borne out by Johnson and Nixon.

But to conclude therefore that the Kennedys’ murders are politically meaningless doesn’t make sense. It’s just the reverse of concluding that because JFK was murdered by the ruling class, he must have been an emerging pacifist. This argument suggests that since JFK was an imperialist, he could not have been killed by other imperialists. However, that is precisely what the historical record, so far as it can be reconstructed, seems to show.

The work done by researchers Livingstone, Prouty, and others, if it can be removed from its ideological biases, stands: JFK was ambushed by plotters high up in business, the military, and intelligence. As far as the Robert Kennedy assassination is concerned, RFK was shot at by Sirhan Sirhan who was standing well in front of him, but the fatal shot was a bullet fired into the back of Kennedy’s head from a weapon nearly in physical contact with him. The fact that RFK was on the staff of the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, plotted to kill Castro, etc., doesn’t erase the fact that he was murdered by people using techniques devised by the U.S. government (see Kaiser’s *RFK Must Die* and Marks’ *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate*).

The Kennedy brothers were exterminated physically and politically, and the ideology they embodied—Cold War Liberalism—was slowly strangled. One can see the final stage of this strangulation now in the Clinton presidency campaign. Business, media, and a large sector of the voting classes are moving to support the Southern and hi-tech interests who have driven the Kennedyite neoliberal from control of the Democratic Party. If Clinton wins, the ruling class hopes to consign liberalism to the coffin where it has already encased populism, socialism and other ideologies opposed by significant segments of it. This doesn’t mean that liberalism was not an ideology designed to serve that class. It was the more rational, stable and practical means to rationalize the U.S. empire, as the Kennedys well knew.

Maybe we can explain this contradiction by placing it in the framework provided by Daniel Guerin in his *Fascism and Big Business*:

“When a state changes its outward features, when one political regime yields to another, the first thought that comes to mind is: what is going on behind the scenes. But when a number of unequivocal signs indicate that it is the same class in the saddle, the question becomes: what interests of the ruling class are served by this upheaval?” (p. 21)

The same question presents itself with the ‘60s assassinations and the shift they helped to cause. Did the ruling class turn against liberalism? Why? Was a permanent Bureau of Political Murder created, possibly under the Kennedys themselves? If so, whom may it be targeting today? Are these questions relevant to anarchists? To this I would say, Know Your Enemy.

Kevin Lindgren  
Afton, Minnesota

## Not The Dustbin

Dear Fifth Estate:

Enclosed is a sign that is begging to see circulation—an APE sign; check it out. Maybe you could see that it finds its way where it's supposed to go...preferably not the dustbin.

Anarchy, peace, ecology—none can exist without the other! It would be nice if it could go further than just a coupla kooks scrawling it here and there, like if lotsa kooks could scrawl it everywhere!! GO APE!!

Skyotl  
P.O. Box 1191  
Flagstaff, AZ 86002

## **New anarchist group**

To The Fifth Estate:

A few Madison area anarchists have gotten together and formed a group. We are trying to start an anarchist resource center (library) and we probably will have a radio program.

We can be reached at:

Some Madison Anarchists (SMA), P.O. Box 173, Madison, WI 53701-0173

## **Folks Who Cared**

FE Note: The following exemplifies why this newspaper offers free subscriptions to prisoners, and why we urge readers to contribute to the fund which finances them.

Greetings Folks at Fifth Estate:

It's been over 20 years since I first contacted you generous people at the FE, and I want you to know I really appreciated all the reading material you sent me during my long years in solitary confinement.

It helped me in many ways—passing some monotonous days, gaining knowledge and cheered up my spirits by knowing that there were folks out there who cared enough to send reading material to prisoners.

Enclosed is my picture which I would appreciate you putting in the FE sometime so people I lost contact with over the years might get a hold of my new address. Enclosed is a few bucks for prisoner subs.

J.J. Szulczewski  
301 Troy Dr.  
Madison, WI 53704

## **Cinema of Propaganda**

Dear FE:

I understand George Bradford's argument, in his essay, "The Triumph of Capital," (FE #339, Spring 1992), to be that the Bolsheviks and their subsequent empire played a revolutionary role for capital by developing what was previously a "backward" country into a world empire.



J.J. Szulczewski

In this light, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States can be seen as thesis and anti-thesis, with the result being a synthesis of which we can barely yet speculate, though I had hoped the article would have. Let me add a few sidenotes to Bradford's essay which give further evidence to the nature and depth of his claim.

Lenin declared, "The Cinema is for us the most important of the arts." And, so, the revolution for Capital was fought here too, by filmmakers and theoreticians, (who were often both), with the development of a revolutionary aesthetic whose main contribution, Eisenstein's theory of montage (editing), would soon be appropriated by Hollywood to become an important element (some would argue the most important element) in the dominant style of Cinema today.

That this avant-garde aesthetic was appropriated is no accident. "Starting in 1918, these AGITKI (newsreels edited for the purpose of agitation and propaganda) toured Russia on specially equipped trains and steamers designed to export the Revolution from the urban centers to the provinces... [T]hus, at its birth, the Soviet Cinema was a Cinema of propaganda." (see chapter on Soviet Revolutionary Cinema in David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*).

Cinema's contribution to war efforts is well documented. Mussolini, a former Marxist, was impressed by the Soviet achievements in blending politics and film, and reorganized the Italian film industry along Soviet lines, doubling the rate of production within a year. He referred to Cinema as "l'arma piu forte"—"the strongest weapon" of the age. It is no wonder then, as far as business goes in the United States, that Hollywood ranks only second to the defense industry.

Now, my question to you and your readers is this: With the demise of the left, where shall we look for the forces that play capitalism's avant-garde and foster its continued (r)evolution. Perhaps, this process is no longer the exclusive property of an elite, but has now been "democratized" like the Soviet Union itself.

Beware of revolutionaries!

JM

Montreal P.Q.

## What True Journey?

Dear Fifth Estate:

I would like to congratulate George Bradford on his insightful and extremely well researched article on "The Triumph of Capital." However, I have been re-reading the last couple of columns, trying to understand what it is exactly that George is advising.

George states, "Maintaining decency in the face of whatever comes, affirming a kind of moral and ethical coherence, preserving memory, defending human person-hood and all the interconnectedness of the phenomenal world—these thin reeds are all we have." I'm afraid these reeds are so thin I am unable to comprehend them. Whose morality and ethics are we to affirm?

In the last paragraph, George says, "We are living an aberration, a nightmarish turn from our true journey." Here again, I am having trouble. What is our true journey? Who decided what our true journey is to be and where it is taking us?

Thanks for clearing this up for me.

Diane

Olympia, WA

*George Bradford responds:* I said they were thin reeds and I meant it, but they were suggested in the following lines that spoke of "questioning the grid, the state and the world they require." While I have no pat answers, I think our values must find some synthesis of primal wisdom and the respect for individual personhood that characterizes radical post-Enlightenment thinking. It may not be adequate but it is where we find ourselves.

Your question about “who” decided for us what a “true journey” was strikes me as disingenuous. It was capital that decided where we’re going, all of us—into monoculture and eventual extinction. The (perhaps inadequate) idea of a true journey is a suggestion of a world in which many diverse journeys might remain possible, a culture or web of cultures connected to the world rather than struggling to conquer it, respecting Being rather than mining it, living with and attentive to natural cycles rather than working against them, sharing rather than accumulating, singing instead of counting. All starting points, leading to a continuing process of questioning and communication, not definitive answers.

My idea of ethical response was partly for myself—the consideration of how I might respond in a deteriorating situation. After all, when the whole world is becoming a Yugoslavia with nukes as my article argues (with a few Somalias thrown in for good measure), then who “we” are is as problematic as everything else. How do you think we can find our way out of the labyrinth?





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