

Letters to the *Fifth Estate*

Various Authors

1998

Letters Policy We welcome letters commenting on our articles, stating opinions, or giving reports of events in your area. We don't guarantee to print everything received, but all letters are read by our staff and considered for publication.

Typed letters or ones on disk are appreciated, but not required. Length should not exceed two double-spaced pages. If you are interested in writing longer responses, please contact us.

On Terrorism

Sisters & Brothers:

I received the Fall 1997 issue of the *Fifth Estate* and took note of what Abdul Olugbala Shakur had to say and thought you might want to critique the enclosure entitled, "Terrorism: Some Definitions."

Ojore N. Lutalo
Trenton NJ

FE Note: The imprisoned Shakur objected to the *FE's* use of the word "terrorism" to denote armed actions against the state. He wrote in part, "It is this type of language that gives credence to the KKKovernment's efforts to criminalize the legitimacy of our armed struggle in order to justify our illegal imprisonment..."

The unsigned leaflet sent to us by the also incarcerated Lutalo, quotes approvingly from Che Guevara and from a statement by Los Macheteros, a Puerto Rican nationalist armed action group. The latter says in part, "Terrorism is Terrorism, and one must combat White terrorism which is reactionary with Red Terrorism, which is revolutionary..."

From an ethical standpoint there seems to be little legitimacy for violence against any unarmed person; strategically, there appears to be little gained as well. Just more deaths in a bloody century.

Cover Misogynist?

FE Note: The following letter is a response to the objection posed by several women in the Trumbull Theatre Collective that our Summer 1997 cover, drawn by Richard Mock, was sexist or even worse, misogynist. Further discussion is welcome.

Dear Fifth Estate:

Your Mother Russia cover [by Richard Mock] (Summer 1997) deserves criticism more for being irrelevant to the subject matter of the articles, the stark struggle for survival of the people in the former Soviet Union, and the women in particular, than for being sexist per se. I found the history of women doing the physical labor with men

being idle supervisors particularly interesting. This content is indicated in no way by the cover art. The imagery leaves the bad taste of the regurgitation of undigested Cold War propaganda, so familiar from images of Russia in the mainstream media.

The characterization of “Mother Russia” as a grotesque and deformed beauty queen could have been an accurate characterization of the present glorification of capitalism by the newly rich and gangster elite, if the image was not so indebted to the genealogy of misogynist and anti-communist images of Russian women in the U.S. media since the Russian Revolution. As recently as 1990s Wendy’s TV hamburger ads, Russian women were depicted as gauche and garish, universally ugly—hairy and overly muscled, more suited to pulling plows than being the objects of desire we are all supposed to want to be. It perpetuates the Cold War hoop-la denigrating Eastern Bloc women athletes as androgenic monsters. The stereotypes about the people in the former Soviet Union so skillfully challenged in the articles is contradicted by the cover, undercutting the potential power of the FE issue’s focus.

How much does the image point at the grabbing at money in the newly capitalist world and how much does it rely on the mockery of the bodies of women hardened by physical labor? Is this something which should be the object of derision in an anarchist publication? How much more hypocritical this put-down has become with the current image of female beauty in the U.S. featuring the faux worker-body achieved by compulsive hours in the gym.

What is presented as unappealing and a sexual turn-off in one context becomes the epitome of sex appeal in its synthetic form.

Despite the particulars of the iconography within the confines of the U.S.-Soviet saga, the cover image, a grotesque one-eyed woman grabbing at money, perpetuates a misogynist archetype.

Susan Simensky Bietila

(and worth mentioning in the context, of Russian-Jewish ancestry, with a close relative, the former Miss Brighton Beach)

Milwaukee

Richard Mock replies: Somewhere a unicorn races towards a giant abyss filled with delights. Humanity passing through a moment in time is really dirty business.

When I was a kid and drew a lot, I thought in a totemistic way. As I made drawings, they became magic icons with the ability to affect changes in the world around me and beyond. All images I drew were metaphysical pictures by just coming into being. I still take advantage of that phenomenon whenever the opportunity presents itself.

I think of images as potent experiential, emotive and meaning machines. What the viewer brings to the image in terms of personal consciousness begins the visual mind exchange that creates meaning. The image fulfills the felt visual needs of the composition which is the real mechanics that allow for an emotion to occur between you and it.

Your interpretation of the cover image as grotesque and deformed is not the cover image. It’s your interpretation of it through the mind filters you carry around. We all carry them.

An image goes out multi-directional and multi-dimensional with layers of potential experiencing to the minds who view it. Your state of being affects the content you perceive.

My linocuts complete themselves in terms of design and beauty. Here are three stories:

A new editor at *The New York Times* used to check out my Op-Ed page illustrations with his secretary to see if they could find in the art I submitted any hidden sexual meanings before they okayed them for publication. Oh, yeah, he also thought modern art was a shame and Matisse couldn’t draw.

I started doing special feature and editorial drawings for the *New York Daily News*. I did an illustration for a piece that in part described the gunning down of a number of city police—sort of psychodrama narrative. I did a linocut of a human skull with guns coming out of its eyes, nose, mouth, etc. That was the last illustration I did for the *Daily News*. An associate editor told me that the president of the NRA called the paper and while not objecting to the article, he felt the illustration put guns in a bad light. That linocut print is now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

I did a lino art piece for *The Times* illustrating an article by an Air Force colonel who worked at the Pentagon describing how war games were conducted. The officer liked the drawing and a print of it is hanging in the Pentagon. It is very popular, I am told. The following year, at a Veterans parade in New York City, a group of Vietnam Veterans

Against the War marched with a banner announcing their name and using a blow-up of the same linocut image I did for *The Times* Op-Ed piece. Both groups saw the image as emblematic of their point of view and conveying completely opposite content.

I think part of the esthetic of the political cartoon is the ability to create a diversity of meanings that can relate to the vastness of our collective awareness.

As the Syrian cartoonist Ali Fazat said, "I leave it to the readers to decide what they see."

Sunfrog Kissing

5th Estate:

Either Sunfrog has been out in the sun too long or kissing those frogs that get you high. To lump television, war, drugs, money and work with 12-step programs is ill-informed, irresponsible and jejune. (See "The Culture is a Cult," FE, Summer 1997.)

What are you, Sunfrog, the untreated adult child of an anarchist? Cults have leaders. Twelve-step groups don't. They are probably the closest thing to anarchy since it died in Madrid.

White Boy

Santa Monica, Calif.

Save The Humans

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Although your very fine magazine is many things, it seems less about anarchism than it is about ecological concerns. While we love our dogs and all nature, we remain unreconstructed anthropocentrists. Our bumper sticker is: "Save the Humans".

We place equality among men as our highest value. One must focus and prioritize as one arranges one's personal agenda. Our sense of clarity requires us to place the redistribution of income, wealth and power among human beings as a higher priority than any and all ecological matters.

There is no scarcity on the planet that a modest redistribution of income wouldn't solve. A lady on Radio Netherlands suggests a tiny tax of one-tenth or one-hundredth of one percent of all daily oil and/or currency transactions to house, feed and educate all men and women on the planet so they live as well as any bourgeois burgher in Nieuwe Amsterdam (New York City) or Oude Amsterdam.

For a century or more, scarcity has been a myth; yet many modern ecologists continue to rely on the myth of scarcity to scare. Those in power seek to distract us by scaring us with a myth of no meaning. Distracting obscurantism is flack in any man's propaganda model. When compared to the genocide against men in all lands, the ecological concerns are those of the effete dilettante rather than the core concern of anarchists—equality and liberty through the elimination of hierarchical power in society.

The *Fifth Estate's* digression into ecology reflects the two-decade fashion of ecology as portrayed on the cultural screen (*Zeitgeist*). We believe, as did Herbert Marcuse, that all culture is propaganda.

To our minds, the *Fifth Estate* continues to inadvertently or intentionally promote the myth of scarcity in the midst of abundant and sufficient wealth.

Grace and Michael Hogan

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The Complexity, The Density

Dear Editor(s):

I sympathize with the views expressed by a wide range of writers in the copies of *Fifth Estate* I sampled. I'm not sure about the complexity, the density of the language typically used, though.

If you want to get the "ordinary people" on your side—a laudable enough aim—then they must be able to understand what you are saying.

Many of your articles are couched in "sociology-speak," as it were, practically inaccessible to the generality of readers. I admire writers such as Wendell Berry, Jerry Mander and Neil Postman because of their Orwellian abilities to convey difficult concepts in simple language (often beautifully simple language).

Peter Quince Faversham,
Kent, UK

Piecards Unite

Fellow Workers:

Your rather odd article on the AFL-CIO's memorial march for the Detroit newspaper strike was recently called to my attention. I suppose I should be flattered that you felt it necessary to work my name (even if mis-spelled) into a story to which I have only the most tenuous connection. But I am rather saddened by the fact that as you return your attention to the struggles of working people you evidently find it necessary to view the world through the blinkered eyes of the AFL-CIO piecards.

The *Industrial Worker* estimate that 25,000 people marched was based upon personal observation and discussions with several IWW members who saw the march from different vantage points, and is, if anything, rather generous. Labor Notes, for example, reported that only "thousands" marched.

No purpose is served by deceiving ourselves about the weakness of our movement or exaggerating our strength. Rather, we must see the world as it is if we are to have any hope of realizing our dreams of what it might be.

Jon Bekken,
Editor, *Industrial Worker*,
Cambridge, Mass.

FE replies: Bekken's ability to count marchers is questionable if he can't accurately read an article about the event. Our report said the official labor movement was incapable of leading struggles even within capital and called for independent action if workers had any chance to win strikes. The story ran with a large photo of marchers holding an IWW banner.

For those unfamiliar with Bekken's arcane 1920s labor lexicon, a piecard is a labor bureaucrat.

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #351, Summer 1998

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