

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

2002

Fifth Estate Letters Policy

We welcome letters commenting on our articles, ones stating opinions, or reports from your area. We can't print every letter we receive, but each is read by our staff and considered for publication.

Letters via email or on disk are appreciated, but type- or handwritten ones are acceptable. Length should not exceed two double spaced pages. If you are interested in writing a longer response, please contact us.

Send to POB 6, Liberty TN 37095, or via electronic mail to fifthestatenewspaper@yahoo.com.

FE Note

It looks like our last issue hit raw nerves not only in people we criticized, but even with those whom one of our authors defended and praised.

The following letters and responses include reactions to Pono Bonobo's statements about the nature of violence ["Instead of a Primer: on isms, schisms, & anarchisms," FE #358, Fall, 2002], Ellen Carryout's critical review of *Green Anarchy* ["How green is *Green Anarchy*?", FE #358, Fall, 2002], and Sunfrog's supportive review of CrimethInc's work and the refusal of Philadelphia's Wooden Shoe Books to carry one of their titles, *Evasion* ["The Punk Rock Candy Mountain," FE #358, Fall, 2002].

Jump on for the ride on these and other issues and send in your opinion.

A Letter to the editors of Fifth Estate, courtesy of the CrimethInc.

Anti-Squabbling Squad

Instead of an Angry Debate Between Entrenched Anarchists by someone with more interesting things to do than participate in another one!

"Just for the sake of argument—" I've just returned from the supermarket dumpster down the street, backpack full and graffiti pen empty, to a house from which CrimethInc. propaganda is distributed.

My friends look up from the piles of pamphlets and papers and posters they've been stuffing into boxes since morning, and cringe. "You know it's not going to be good," says the one with the beard, "when someone wants to talk 'for the sake of argument.'"

"Yeah," I allow, "that could have been an alternate title for that piece in the last Harbinger 'Infighting the Good Fight.' All the same—I've been reading this piece in the new *Fifth Estate*, in which one Pono Bonobo endeavors to rescue pacifist anarchism as well as CrimethInc—whatever the term means in that context—from those indignant

class war anarchists, and I've been wondering: in point of literal fact, can't one actually use the master's tools to dismantle his house?"

"Well, yes, you can," he rejoins—"but you can't use the master's tools to dismantle his tools."

"Fair enough—what are you supposed to dismantle his house with instead, I wonder?"

"We've all been trying to figure that one out," laughs the one with the pigtails, folding a poster around a book. "I guess it's OK for everyone to try different things, so long as the house ends up dismantled and the tools in the ground."

"Yeah." I'm unloading perfectly good bananas and mangos, as two of them seal up a huge package to Puerto Rico. "Bonobo and this 'Ashen Ruins' person on the internet have been hashing it out over which approach, violent direct action or nonviolent stuff like naked marching, is more appealing to the masses and so on, but I don't personally see why we can't have a movement with a place for both, in which they complement each other."

"I've found both rewarding and effective, at different times," offers my pigtailed friend, as she reaches for the tape.

"Some people are going to gravitate to one, and some the other, anyway—why not accept that and focus on how to integrate the two?" Beneath the bananas are big bags of salad greens. "And that brings me to my other question: I appreciate the editor's gesture of solidarity in rebuking anarchists who attack our projects, but I'm not sure if I think it's a good thing. I mean, it feels good for my ego, but that's usually a sign that something's dangerous."

"If we're being defended on the same grounds as we're being attacked, it's not so good," suggests a fourth voice. "Contrary to some charges, I don't see us as being 'lifestylist' at all—I've never seen anything with the Crimethlnc. name on it urging people to 'drop out until the system collapses.' We've published stuff about some ways people from the more privileged classes can survive without working, but I always thought the idea was to use that liberated space to wage war for everyone's liberation. Revolution has to happen, somehow, and to have time to work on it, some of us will have to get our lives out of the work economy." She goes back to answering a letter.

"What's this 'we,' white man?" jokes back at her the smiling woman at the computer, deleting the orders for free papers that have been packaged this evening.

"The way I see it," the bearded one begins again, hefting a bundle of tabloids, "the last thing we need is to be defended from our critics in the anarchist community. First off, if we're serious about focusing our energies outwards, to those who could be involved in this struggle but aren't yet"—he takes a marker and begins addressing a box to a kid in Texas—"rather than inwards, for more struggling of anarchist against anarchist, then it just perpetuates the internal conflicts for other parties to take sides.

"Clarifications of misunderstandings, apologies for mistakes, those things we need; more bad energy, more battles between egos, we don't. Second, I wonder if it's occurred to the people at *Fifth Estate* that we might not mind these attacks—maybe it's our role to say and be things that are unpopular. Maybe for some, we can be most helpful as an enemy, something to rebel or react against."

The woman looks up from the computer again, more serious. "It seems to me that we actually have a symbiotic relationship with the class war anarchists. Their diatribes can serve to bring the same things we're talking about down to earth—I've learned things from them before. And, especially if someone does misunderstand our efforts as lifestylist, that critique needs to be there to clarify what our literature did not.

"Our tactics don't and shouldn't work for everyone, and the Class Warriors are there to provide an alternative—viciously attacking us in print is just their way to let the world know it, and responding with insults of our own wouldn't improve anything. It's not like they interfere with our activities in practice."

"Yeah, the last place *Evasion* needs to be is the Wooden Shoe bookstore," agrees the pigtailed one. "Everyone shopping there already has points of entry for other approaches to radical organizing and living."

"I'm finally unloading the potatoes at the bottom of my pack: the class warriors are right, we can only hope, that we scavengers will have to find other sources of food once the revolution comes; but for the time being it's sad and absurd that they aren't here to help us share this vast bounty with hungry families around town.

"If anything, I'm annoyed by the way our anarchist critics all seem to read the texts so carelessly—like in that piece on the internet: 'Flipping through their first book speaks volumes,' or the other guy who brags that all he has to do is judge our book by its cover. I'll quote that Zapatista letter to *Green Anarchy*—I rummage through the 'zine rack and find the issue—'here it is: 'If these "critiques" had included a detailed discussion on our tactics with

reference to our history and current positions in the world, it wouldn't have been a big deal, nothing that we don't do constantly within our own organizations.' Without that, it just seems like they're looking to make enemies."

"But that's just my point," replies my bearded companion. "As long as we are getting that kind of constructive critique from some, we don't need every anarchist to read our work thoroughly, let alone praise it. We have to keep our eyes on the prize, as it were—keep focused on getting useful resources out to people not already involved in any anarchist community. That's the project we've taken on in this house, at least, right?"

He gets a can of spray paint out to test a new stencil. "Anyway, that's why I wish our comrades at Fifth Estate, being well-versed in our materials and what has worked in our tactics to date, would focus on pointing out ways we can improve. We don't need defenders—or advertisers, at this point. We need insightful, creative critics."

"The would-be revolutionary seeks criticism, above all—she relies upon this to hone her strategies, to learn from others' perspectives, to maintain her humility. She knows that evaluations of her efforts are of the utmost value to everyone involved in the revolutionary project, and so she is the first to insist that these efforts are far from perfect.

"The most effective way to undermine her work is with unconstructive criticism. Harried by idle faultfinding, name-calling, petty attacks and personal vendettas, she eventually becomes deaf to all feedback—and thus frozen, neutralized.

"Trust that your comrades are sincere about changing the world, whatever your differences, and approach them with input as gently and supportively as you can. We're going to win this revolution, sooner or later, so there's no sense in taking out our frustrations on each other—but we're only going to win it together. Save the offensive for your true enemies—the ones with whom discussion can solve nothing."

—Text from the poster, POINT YOUR GUNS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, available at www.crimethinc.com or from CrimethInc. Anti-Sectarian Sect, P.O. Box 1963, Olympia, WA 98507, U.S.A.

Out to Lunch

To the Fifth Estate:

To the question of the supposedly inherent authoritarianism of violence, I am lost trying to follow the logic of such a statement.

Would Bonobo call a slave revolting against her condition by killing her master "inherently authoritarian?" What about a villager killing soldiers massacring his family? Crazy Horse vs. General Custer? You get the picture.

It seems that a violent act against one who holds power over you simply rights the balance, if even momentarily. This method may not elevate us to any moral high ground, but in the context of fighting an oppressive force, it is always an act of self-defense.

The horrific use of violence by the state reflects its use in that context only. Unlike industrial technology, violence is neutral. I challenge the assumption that violence is "inherently" anything but a fact of life, and an indispensable force in nature.

The incomprehensible rationale behind the claim, "the way of the wolf is not the way of the hunter," makes me wonder if Ellen Carryout was out to lunch during her elementary school science classes. Not only do all wild animals (and wild humans) often utilize violent actions to defend themselves and their loved ones, but they also use intimidation, and "posturing" in their strategy for self-defense. These postures, or "chain rattling," as Carryout labeled the anarchist equivalent, always precede any real defensive attack, and they are often enough to pre-empt one.

To live by the principle of nonviolence as an outgrowth of anarchist beliefs (and try to convince anarchists that violence is inherently authoritarian), is in my opinion a limited (and yes, privileged) interpretation of anarchist philosophy. This perspective is based on a denial of what I see as a useful, natural instinct that can in many instances help us secure our future survival.

In defense of "chain rattling,"

Terra,

Ashville, N. Carolina

Moral Imperative

Dear Fifth Estate:

I'm pretty sick of reading the Audre Lorde quote Pono Bonobo put forth to support his beliefs about violence. He quotes her as saying, "You cannot use the master's tools to destroy the master's house." Who would dare criticize an "African-American, radical, lesbian poet?" Such a boor might even dare to criticize Julia "Butterfly" Hill or Gandhi, for that matter.

But I want to know who made the non-anarchist, Audre Lorde, the Lord of the Anarchists? So, Lorde didn't have the desire to try to use violence to end violence. So, what? Did she have any successes (small or large) destroying the master's house, with or without his tools? If not, we have no reason to believe that her pithy line is true.

Many anarchists historically have been drawn toward non-violence as a moral imperative, while many others have not. Since there haven't been any large-scale anarchist experiments that have been attempted without the use of violence, it can't be determined whether or not this Lordly maxim is accurate.

In my *Anarchy* magazine essay/primer that "Pono Bonobo" quotes, I thought I made it very clear that I am agnostic about the use of violence (however described—I deliberately left a definition of violence out of the primer). I left things a little ambiguous, I admit, about if—or when—individual anarchists should decide to fight back with force. But all anarchists—except for the most fanatical moralists—have been clear about the need to reserve the ability to fight in self-defense (and there are perhaps as many different ideas of what "self-defense" is as there are about what "violence" is).

Regardless, "Pono" explicitly agrees with me, even if he missed it. He says, "...our responses should be contextual," while I said, "Depending on the situation, we decide..." What's the difference?

It comes down to "Pono's" assertion: "To say that nonviolence is a [sic] not an anti-authoritarian principle is indefensible." Aside from the extraneous indefinite article, this sentence contains too many negative convolutions to make real sense. Clearly, he disagrees with me when I declare that non-violence is a tactic, not a principle. But he hasn't challenged my opinion; he has only attempted to dismiss it. So, my response, along the exact same lines is: Oh, yeah?

As I said in my primer: "principles...are perspectives and practices that are not negotiable; they are the foundational definitions that make [anarchist] philosophy distinct from others." What I was attempting in my primer was to outline anarchist principles that all anarchists—regardless of their particular views on economics, organizational forms, etc.—could agree on.

I do not deny that the issue of violence is thorny, but like the question of collectivism versus communism or federations versus networks, it is one that is open for discussion. Only the most ridiculously dogmatic sectarians think that their own perspective is the only true authentic one.

I explained my understanding of what positive anarchist principles are based on my study of anarchist history and my own 20-plus years of involvement: direct action, mutual aid, and voluntary cooperation. All anarchists have agreed that these are non-negotiable.

The Anarchist FAQ "Pono" quotes from the internet, while remarkable for its lack of sectarianism, certainly can't be used as the final arbiter of what all anarchists can or should agree on. Further, their Malatesta quote is pretty misleading.

In 1921 the Italian anarchist wrote, "For two people to live in peace, both must want peace; if one of them insists on using force to oblige the other to work for him and serve him, then the other, if he wishes to retain his dignity as a [hu]man and not be reduced to abject slavery, will be obliged, in spite of his love of peace, to resist force with adequate means."

That the quotation from the FAQ is misleading is due to them not printing the entire paragraph: "We are on principle opposed to violence and for this reason wish that the social struggle should be conducted as humanely as possible [end of the FAQ quote]. But this does not mean that we would wish it to be less determined, less thoroughgoing; indeed we are of the opinion that in the long run half-measures only indefinitely prolong the struggle, neutralizing it as well as encouraging more of the kind of violence which one wishes to avoid. Neither does it mean that we limit the right of self-defense to resistance against actual and imminent attack. For us the oppressed are always in a state of legitimate defense and are fully justified in rising without waiting to be actually fired on; and

we are fully aware of the fact that attack is often the best means of defense...” (from *Malatesta: Life & Ideas*, translated and edited by Vernon Richards).

My primer was not a call for [Ward] Churchillian street fighting—indeed it’s quite the opposite. Professor Churchill’s hopelessly flawed *Pacifism as Pathology* is merely a long-winded apologia for the good old days of Weathermanesque urban guerrillaism, a tactic that I find self-defeating and self-destructive.

“Pono” uses a neat—but transparent—trick: he makes all of his non-pacifist opponents into supporters of Churchill. Some may be, but how can he conclude from my primer—or anything else I’ve written—that I am? Churchill is certainly no anarchist, but neither was Lorde, and even if they were, I see no reason to abide by the slogans or ideologies of one or the other.

For anarchy,
Lawrence Jarach
P.O. Box 508
Berkeley CA 94701-0508

FE: Tamed Version

To the Fifth Estate:

There’s an irony when the ideology of one’s opponent can be so easily exposed while one’s own isn’t copped to. Three times, Ellen Carryout’s hostile review of *Green Anarchy* labels GA ideological, as if the current pacifist party line of *Fifth Estate* is somehow exempt from such a category. [See Fall FE, “How Green is *Green Anarchy*?”]

In the 1980s, FE opened up new horizons of critical thought exploring the depth of civilization, technology, and the nature of a totalizing crisis taking shape at all levels. The most stimulating anti-authoritarian discussions in English took place in its pages, in my opinion. But after about 15 years of slippage, what remains is a thin, bohemian effort that is utterly lacking in radical depth.

One might think that the rapid degeneration globally underway, including the self-destructive nature of mass society and its technology and the ecocidal descent of the biosphere itself, would be a spur to deepening approaches to resistance. Sadly, the reverse is so in the case of FE.

The zine boasts an open, libratory style, but to me it mainly comes across as that of sanctimonious hippies with just about zero interest in fighting the cancer of technology and capital that is devouring life everywhere.

Any and all forms of “violence” are condemned. I wonder if this applies, however, to folks everywhere—people defending their indigenous cultures, for example? Fifth Estate is now so weak as to avoid even defending property damage as a tactic.

I have a vivid memory of the first major anti-Viet Nam war protest that may be pertinent here. It was 1965 Berkeley and thousands thronged Telegraph Avenue in a huge and dramatic evening march. Our plan was to proceed to the Oakland army base, and disrupt its functioning as a main depot for supplies to SE Asia.

As the march proceeded, we could see massed ranks of riot police at the Berkeley/Oakland boundary. In short, we were deterred by this barrier and the protest ended. The next day, various commentators applauded our “good sense,” and observed that because violence was avoided, “wiser heads prevailed.”

But within six months, the U.S. government had decided upon total war in Viet Nam. They apparently saw that protests would remain peaceful and symbolic, that there would be no real opposition. Ten years later, about three million Asians had been killed. It is at least possible that the masters of war would have thought twice if we’d been stronger that evening in Berkeley?

We at *Green Anarchy* in no way make a fetish of any kind of violence. We do see the blizzard of violence in every sphere, and attempt in theory and practice to be part of what it will take to put an end to a monstrous set-up that generates the violence.

Meanwhile, FE seems to have become part of the liberal chorus that denounces anyone who has the courage to fight. I frankly never thought that even several years of decline could produce such a sorry, tamed vision of what was once so vibrant.

John Zerzan

Eugene, Ore.

David Watson responds: According to JZ, after a period in the 1980s when this paper produced “the most stimulating anti-authoritarian discussions in English” (that is, when JZ was printed regularly in it), it has declined for about fifteen years.

In fact, in 1981 he was saying the same things about the FE he is now. For example, in a letter in the November 1981 issue, he chastised the FE for its “defeated spirit.” The paper was “academic...a banality,” giving a sense of “a profound indictment minus any everyday applications.” Even the call in the previous edition for “a defense of every little community,” he insisted, was “merely reformist.”

There’s no pleasing this guy. In any event, he now apparently approves of the defense of little communities—as long as their means of defense are neither symbolic nor non-violent. I am sure they’ll appreciate hearing it.

Zerzan accuses the FE of having a pacifist party line because a couple of writers in these pages criticized hyper-militancy and the glamorization of violence. Unlike JZ, the writer of the review in question gave some examples—the prominent adulation in *Green Anarchist* of the hapless Kaczynski’s anomic violence, and the printing of Ward Churchill’s repugnant cheerleading for the massacre at the Trade Towers, in which self-appointed executioners, carrying out the fatwah of a fascist cult, blithely dispatched some three thousand people to the other world. Instead of responding, Zerzan insists that “we at GA” do not fetishize violence (ironic how he accuses the FE of a “party line” while himself employing the royal we). But he suggests by his silence that Kaczynski and Al Qaeda represent such “deepening approaches to resistance.”

In fact, as anyone who has read the paper well knows, the FE has a long tradition, stretching back to the late 1970s, of critiquing the foibles of hyper-militancy and the cult of violence, alongside a deep skepticism about reflexive and dogmatic pacifist strategies.

That said, I will put in my two cents here about the non/violence discussion. I think that Pono Bonobo’s article was thoughtful and worthy of discussion, even if I did not agree with everything in it. I hope it generates real discussion and not this kind of one-dimensional posturing. There is an admirable pacifist current in and alongside anarchism that needs to be acknowledged. None of us has the keys to the kingdom. Broadly speaking, neither violence nor non-violence has turned back the megamachine. I am not a pacifist, but I have seen plenty of creative, powerful pacifist activism—including from the folks in Tennessee now running the FE—that not only keeps me from passing judgment, but that inspires me. Kaczynski’s self-justifying “hitting where it hurts” is, in contrast, pathetic, its reasoning brutish.

As for me, I support mass civil and uncivil resistance, including creative non-violence, and I think most other anarchists do, too. I agree with Pono’s quite sensible assertion that violence and hyper-militancy “can often be counterproductive, alienating people and giving the state an excuse to repress both the anarchist movement and popular movements for social change,” and I urge GA and others to take this reality seriously.

Furthermore, I consider non-violence a central principle in the anarchist ethos and vision of the free and cooperative society we propose, and I practice it both in my activism and in my personal relations in daily life. It is a principle, but not a dogma. Beyond that, I believe that all of us have not merely the right but the obligation to defend ourselves by (almost) any means necessary.

What do I mean by modifying this famous line? In the last issue Lawrence Jarach is quoted as saying that non-violence is not a principle but merely “a tactic.” According to Jarach, “Depending on the situation, we decide when it’s convenient—or not—to adhere to non-violent guidelines...Morality plays no part in deciding what tactics to use in a given situation; it only matters what is compatible with our strategy and principles.”

I agree in part with what Jarach is saying, I think context matters, and I think it imperative to judge differently the violence of the oppressor and the violence of the oppressed. Nevertheless, this formulation is dangerous unless it includes a recognition of the intimate relationship between means and ends. Without some clear statement of one’s moral or ethical criteria, it is a classic nihilist position (and I mean classic in the sense of the kinds of nineteenth century nihilists described in Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed*, which radicals would do well to read.)

Turning questions of morals, of life and death, ends and means into mere expediencies, it borders, in its ambiguity, on becoming an apology for almost anything—including such acts as the Japanese Aum cult’s poisoning of subways, the Oklahoma City bombing, and Ted K’s cheerful planting of bombs on airliners, acts which were

extolled by GA's comrades in England as something like, if I may borrow from Zerzan, "deepening approaches to resistance." Al Qaeda has constructed an entire theology around this notion.

Ethically, the idea that everything is permissible to the oppressed is symmetrical to the violence of the state, even if its adherents have not had the means available to the state to carry out their "tactics." Nonviolence is more than a tactic. It is an ethical value. Otherwise, if "we" decide that taking hostages, killing innocents, or wiping out whole populations is "convenient," what is to keep us from doing so? It becomes a free-for-all.

Finally, Zerzan's comment on the Vietnam War demonstrates painfully his lack of any sense of causality or proportion. It is a perfect example of hyper-militantism: the folly that upping the ante is automatically and always the answer, regardless of what revolutionaries used to call the relationship of forces.

According to him, if student protesters in 1965 had attacked a thick line of hundreds of riot-gear-clad cops (and, presumably, gotten the shit kicked out of them) the U.S. government might not have escalated its war against the Vietnamese. The idea that the U.S. government was going to be forestalled by a student riot is simply preposterous. It would take much more suffering and blood, and the near collapse of the U.S. armed forces, before they turned back.

Zerzan should read Sun Tzu on the art of war. The reality is that the Berkeley march was a signal event early in the anti-war movement that inspired people all over the country, sparking a dramatic expansion of anti-war activism.

It did so at least in part because it confronted authority to the extent possible without being suicidal. Thus Zerzan, characteristically, turns a triumph into a defeat.

Who Is A Jew?

To the Fifth Estate:

Some of the issues raised in your last edition's two articles about the current situation in Israel/Palestine and the introduction trouble me. There are plenty of myths surrounding the conflict, and the creation and perpetuation of counter-myths don't help to clarify things. [See "The Mythology of Israel," FE #358, Fall, 2002, and "An Anti-statist Outlook: A New (Jewish) Fascism and its Opposition," FE #358, Fall, 2002.]

Counter-myth #1: Israel is "an invader/ settler nation."

There has been a continual and documented Jewish presence in Judea/Palestine since well before the Roman invasion, up through the time of the Zionist enterprise. Indeed, for almost all of the nineteenth century, Jerusalem had a majority Jewish population. The attempt to write these Jews out of history as numerically or politically insignificant is as racist as the Zionist attempt to deny the continual presence and distinct cultural and political aspirations of non-Jewish Palestinians.

Counter-myth #2: Criticisms of Israel coming from "Jewish Americans" (because they are Jewish) have more credibility.

The corollary to this is the idea that not only will someone who identifies as Jewish not be prone to anti-Semitism, but also that they will be exemplary as Jews. What I want to know is this: Do these "Jewish Americans" identify themselves as Jews in a context where their criticisms of Jews are absent?

Should anarchist Jews allow the Rabbinate to determine who is a Jew? To the majority of Rabbinical authorities, a Jew is someone born to a Jewish mother or one who has converted according to prescribed rituals. To the Rabbis, the issue is mostly biological.

For anti-Semites, it's all biological: anyone with a Jewish ancestor is Jewish—the equivalent of the "single drop of blood" rule for determining who is Black in the United States. As an anarchist and a Jew, I'm not interested in allowing the racists and the Rabbis the exclusive ability to determine who is or isn't a Jew.

To me, it's much more relevant to determine "who is a Jew?" the way we determine "who is an anarchist?" Does the person act like an anarchist, attempting to live according to anarchist principles?

Similarly, does the person act like a Jew, attempting to live according to self-defined principles like honoring learning, having ethical standards, having some kind of engaged relationship with Jewish traditions, history, and culture?

When was the last time [*Fifth Estate* writers] ronni k. or Unrulee celebrated a Jewish holiday? Do either of them keep kosher? When was the last time one of them studied some Jewish history or went to their local Jewish community center or a synagogue? If they have not done anything to make themselves known as fellow Jews in their local Jewish communities, I would say that they are hardly the ones to hold up as credible Jewish (rather than American) critics of the state of Israel.

In ronni's rush to lay all blame for the plight of the Palestinian refugees on the doorstep of the State of Israel the colonial domination of Gaza by Egypt and the annexation of the West Bank by Jordan starting in 1949 are (typically) ignored. At least the Jordanians offered Jordanian citizenship to thousands of refugees, unlike any other country in the region.

The existence of refugee camps is as much the fault of the governments of Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria (and the United Nations) as it is of Israel. The Israeli government must take the blame for the expulsion and dispossession of the hundreds of thousands of refugees between '47 and '49, but they were not the only state responsible for the lack of interest in the situation of the Palestinians between '48 and '67. They inherited that problem when they conquered the West Bank and Gaza.

Ronni is right that the issue is power and land. Unfortunately, all too often the anti-imperialist impulse devolves into anti-Semitism. Anti-imperialists, like the former leader of Fatah, Abu Iyad (whom ronni quotes approvingly), pay lip service to being ready to defend oppressed Jews, but they bristle at the thought of Jewish sovereignty. Jews in control of their own state, the army? That goes against the history of Jews as second-and-third-class citizens—when they were allowed to be citizens at all. Anti-Semites and anti-imperialists like their Jews weak and powerless.

That there are Israeli projects of active dissent and refusal (B'Tselem, Ta'ayush, and Gush Shalom for example) is a healthy sign pointing to a shift away from a blanket acceptance of the expansionism, colonialism, and brutality that has come to characterize not just the occupation, but all of Israeli society. It's too bad that we hear so few Palestinian voices refusing the cult of the shahid ("martyr"), refusing the anti-Semitic suicide bombings, refusing the obscurantism and nascent clerical fascism of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

In Solidarity,

Charles Boles

E.B. Maple responds: I have no idea whether the FE authors he mentions keep kosher (I doubt it), but their ethnic heritage certainly would have been enough to get them exterminated in Europe 60 years ago.

As to the question, "who is a Jew?" who cares other than anti-Semites and those Jews who see the world through a prism of ethnicity, something I would think is incompatible with the internationalism of anarchism. Are there anarchists asking, "Who is an Italian or a Scot?"

According to a Boles, people can be defined as Jews by their "attempting to live according to self-defined Jewish principles like...having ethical standards" and, apparently by keeping kosher. So, seemingly, on the first count, this would exclude Ariel Sharon, Meyer Lansky, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and Son of Sam, but if they observe the Judaic dietary laws, where does this leave them?

On the other hand, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Eugene V. Debs meet the first criterion, but fail on the second. What Boles is suggesting is pure ethnic, religio-nationalism, unworthy of anyone calling himself or herself an anarchist.

I think a better question would be why someone who identifies with the anarchist tradition takes the time to author a convoluted defense of a nasty little nation state. Regarding the introduction, which I wrote, the operative word in the phrase Boles objects to is "nation."

This doesn't refer to the relatively small number of Jews who lived in Palestine prior to the 1948 establishment of a religiously-based, exclusivist state established by European invaders that gained its territory by ethnically cleansing the land of its prior inhabitants in the identical manner which occurred in North America, Australia and South Africa.

Israel has little or nothing to recommend it over a world of other nation states. Given the nature of its origins, its theocratic government and laws, the role it plays as cat's paw for U.S. imperialism, and its current murderous stance toward its remaining victims, it is astounding that an anarchist would find any place for sympathetic attachment to it.

That bordering Arab states have manipulated the issue of Palestinian refugees is mostly true, but Boles's statements beg the question of why there are refugees in the first place. Bristle at Jewish sovereignty, a Jewish army, a Jewish state? Try substituting white or Christian and see how that rings. No anarchist admires an army or state of any sort, let alone one with a religious definition.

"It's too bad," he says, that there isn't a more acceptable (to him) response from a sector of the Palestinians who employ assaults on civilians as a tactic. Well, gee, oppressed, desperate people do the darndest things, don't they?

When the consequences and intent of the European invasion on this continent became clear to North American Indians, some of them massacred unarmed men, women and children, burned their settlements, and attacked their wagon trains. They were reviled then as "savages" for their brutality and their wanton assaults, but as it turns out, everything they feared which led them to their acts, came true.

Palestinian civilian deaths at the hands of Israel state terror, including 300 children (oh, I know, they were throwing stones at tanks), is triple that which the Israelis have experienced. "It's too bad" that so few Israeli citizens refuse to cease acting out the logic of their country's origins, which have put Jews in as much peril as they were before the Holocaust.

Expose the Nature

Dear FE Collective:

Just getting to the Fall issue of the FE. I like the new format, and this may be the best issue I've seen.

I can't agree with the criticism of the *Alternative Press Review* publishing Milosevic's rants. [see "Milosevic 'Crucified': Counter-Spin as Useful Idiocy," FE #358, Fall, 2002] The words and themes speak for themselves, and expose the nature of the writer.

I'm all for allowing a soapbox for our enemies to speak from—showing clearly the content of their hearts and minds. These revelations can highlight the chinks in their armor. I certainly don't fear that the words of tyrants will convert people to their cause unless they were predisposed to those ideas anyhow.

Garry Erwin

Attica, N.Y.

David Watson responds: I am not in principle opposed to printing the words of mass murderers, fascists and tyrants if they do in fact enlighten us about the nature of mass murder, fascism and tyranny. But that is not what *The Alternative Press Review* did; they printed Slobodan Milosevic's ravings along with a leftist diatribe with the explicit claim that the mass murderer's legalistic denials and the appalling leftist drivel would illuminate the machinations of the Western powers.

That is patently fallacious, and confusing to people who are already quite confused about the issue of the Balkans. Sadly, the themes do not speak for themselves, and that is why there is so much utter confusion on the left and even among anarchists about the Yugoslav wars of dissolution and the Western intervention.

Not only have the APR editors so far refused even to respond to the issue of misinformation in their coverage, at least one of them, Tom Wheeler, continues to disseminate this material, and what are little more than apologetics for the genocide, on his email list. Perhaps they think that if they simply repeat them enough times, their fables will come true.

A friend, the editor of a decent left magazine I shall not mention by name, wrote to me that he thought my article was good, but that one could spend one's life responding to the idiocies of the left—implying that such endeavors are not the best way to spend one's energy. He has a point; but by not addressing these idiocies explicitly, which I think has largely been the case with his magazine, and too many others, one plays a role, indirect perhaps, but nevertheless significant, in perpetuating lies and genocide denial.

One tends to feel more or less strongly about this issue depending on how much one knows about the Balkan wars, and on how much one happens to care about Bosnia and the other victims of Milosevic's ethno-fascist vortex. I happen to care quite a lot, and so I don't want to condone lies. APR's inhumane, bungling "counter-spin" was shameful.

fifth Estate

Various Authors
Letters to the Fifth Estate
2002

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/359-winter-2002-2003/letters-to-the-fifth-estate>
Fifth Estate #359, Winter, 2002-2003

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net