

No Anarchy? No Money!

Fifth Estate Collective

2005

Endless philosophical or ideological battles have been fought for years attempting to define political identity. In the case of this publication, we have self-identified during the last 40 years as, progressive, socialist, ultra-left, council communist, nothing, anarchist, and anti-authoritarian. To many, it may be only an exercise in scholasticism, but sometimes much can depend on self-identity, as illustrated in the exchange of letters reprinted below.

In late 1978, a group of older Italian anarchists in America, many of them having been active since the 1920s, sent a contribution of \$75 to support our paper, part of the proceeds of their frequent fund-raising dinners, or cenas. Among that group was Marcus Graham, editor of the North American anarchist journal *Man!* in the 1930s.

While the following may seem merely a matter of semantics, it was obviously crucial both to our donors and to us at the time. Their spirit of generous support has been the model for the type of support we've received over the years and what has made this anniversary issue possible.

But as the careful reader may note, anti-authoritarian has replaced anarchist on our cover this time. While not necessarily marking a proclamation like the one contained below, we believe anti-authoritarian is perhaps the most consistent and inclusive adjective to describe our project over the last 40 years.

At the Picnic

In late 1978, a group of Italian anarchists raised funds for the libertarian press, including \$75 for *Fifth Estate*. In the same issue in which we gratefully announced the donation, *Fifth Estate* issued a staff editorial statement distancing itself from anarchism:

"The question of what constitutes revolutionary activity is raised again and again on these pages [...including in] a review of a book on anarchism in the US, in which Claudio Albertani explodes the mystification surrounding the militancy of the autonomous groups and the fetish of armed struggle held by organizations such as the Red Brigades. We have had his manuscript for several months, but had declined to print it due to a staff disagreement over his usage of the terms 'anarchist' and 'anarchism.'"

In a recent letter to Marcus [Graham], we stated that none of us on the staff consider ourselves 'anarchists' nor the *Fifth Estate* as an 'anarchist' newspaper, though obviously our ideas owe enormously to anarchists and anarchism...The mere idea of an 'ism' implies for us the subordination of the individual to a body of principles, to an ideology, and all ideologies are reductionist, even those which appear to be liberatory."

Graham responded, "There is, I think, an 'ism' in every sphere of thinking that the human mind encompasses," and although not convinced, we feel the review contains interesting and informative material. We have printed it as part of our on-going discussion about the definitions of our lives and activity. We invite you to join in.

Funding Revoked

Two issues later, in early 1979, the comrades informed us they would no longer support the FE financially with the funds raised at the anarchist dinners. What follows here are excerpts from their letter, our response, and another letter on the topic from Marcus Graham:

Dear Comrades at the Fifth Estate:

At the cena held Nov. 11, 1978, we decided not to continue support for the *Fifth Estate*. The purpose of our fundraising activities is to support explicitly anarchist propaganda efforts.

We profoundly disagree with your opinion that anarchism is a set of principles which subordinates any individuals.

One member present at our cena felt the last part of your paragraph in which you all disavowed anarchism was more anarchistic than we ourselves. But he was alone in his view.

Jim Bumpas

Mt. View CA

Staff note: We, of course, have never disguised our criticism of anarchism. However, we do feel that we share a commonality with those who call themselves anarchists as we also call for the destruction of capitalism, the abolition of the State, and the construction of a libertarian community. Apparently, this is not enough for the California group which demands an obeisance to official dogma.

Well, it's their money, and we guess they should spend it on those who don't challenge their comfortable, familiar theories of revolution.

To the Fifth Estate:

The California group's letter is the most unequivocal vindication of the correct position taken by the FE staff towards every kind of ism. Fortunately, those who have a keener understanding of anarchism hold forth that the individual's right to freedom of expression in every sphere of life could never take the dubious position that this group has. It is good to note, however, that at least one member of this group understands the real position of the *Fifth Estate*, who felt the FE was "more anarchistic than ourselves."

In a previous issue of the FE, I also expressed the opinion that the FE is the most consistent anarchist newspaper that the anarchist movement in this country has ever issued.

Marcus Graham

Los Gatos, Calif.

Text accompanying graphic showing FE May Day '75 supplement

In spring 1975, just months before the Eat the Rich Gang took control of the paper's editorial direction (see FE history, p.8), the group helped coordinate a special May Day section celebrating anarchism and denouncing technology. Although the more commercial paper was billing itself then as "Detroit's Alternative Weekly," the current staff eagerly helped prepare the centerfold which declared, "Let Anarchy Reign!" Four years later, the paper lost its funding for describing anarchism as ideology.

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