

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

Filled with debates and discussions, challenges and responses, clarification and indignation, a lively letters section is a crucial component in an anarchist journal. At times in our past, a huge portion of any given edition would be filled with long letters and responses to them.

Recently, however, the tradition has changed. The kind of debate once found on this letters' page has not disappeared from the radical press, but it has relocated. Today, the more heated exchanges often take place on interactive websites and bulletin boards. Notably, the anarchist website Infoshop is known for its lively threads. Local indymedia sites are also places where debate takes place.

In future issues, we hope you will help us revive this letters section. Send your comments to PO Box 6, Liberty, TN 37095 or fifthestate — at — pumpkinhollow — dot — net

Retired Bank Robber

Dear Nice People:

Please continue sending your fine magazine. You are magnificent; a voice for the oppressed.

I'm a retired (albeit, forcibly) bank robber twelve years in on a 17-year sentence for unarmed bank robbery. Problem is, it was my fourth conviction on similar charges. I'm a senior, 71, who misses my welfare rights organizing day, and will be 74 when I get out.

Prison is exceedingly boring; not Club Med, at all. I miss hugs and kisses. Pass me on; I'm easy.

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Dissing Anarchists

To the Fifth Estate:

I read the article in the Winter 2004–5 *Fifth Estate*, *Falling Off the Wagon: Chicago Memorializes Haymarket*, and wondered where the examples for the argumentation were for the dissing of Chicago anarchists.

I spoke at the ceremony for the dedication of the Haymarket commemoration statue, yet the points I made and the other literature I distributed were never even mentioned. Other people had intelligent things to say, and flyers on the positions of Chicago anarchists were distributed but never even hinted at in your article. This was an excellent opportunity to review these arguments and critique them, but there was none of that here.

The city put out a video of this event and also edited out my remarks and the input of other anarchists, but I didn't expect a supposedly "anarchist" magazine to do this type of censoring, too! More curious was the praising of

the non-anarchistic Chicago Historical Society and the old Stalinist hacks who collaborated with the city, the police and other non-anarchist groups to plan all of this, while deliberately excluding the input of Chicago anarchists.

This is really a come-down from the excellent piece printed in *Fifth Estate* in 1996, following the brouhaha about the plaque at the Haymarket gravesite. It seems to me to be a case of personal animosity and shoddy reporting. Chicago anarchists know what Haymarket means. They were murdered because they were successful anarchists! They were revolutionaries, not reformers.

I can understand a critique of modern day Chicago anarchists being quite warranted, just like everywhere else in this pitiful country. But this vague piece pretty much says nothing.

Anthony Rayson
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Walker Lane responds: Not being at an event always leaves far-away editors depending on accurate reporting from their correspondents. However, the article states that no anarchists were involved in the design of the monument to those anarchist comrades executed following the Chicago police riot in 1886; it is critical of the labor hacks who spoke, and does indeed mention that “A small anarchist contingent was present and vocal...”; although it then offers a criticism without naming those involved.

The only obvious contradiction is that our correspondents reported that all anarchists were excluded, but you say you spoke. It may be that our other Chicago friends simply didn’t see your brief talk which is reprinted on the next page.

One disagreement I have with our article is its contention that no “substantial marker had ever been erected where the incident occurred,” at least to commemorate the Haymarket Martyrs who were accused of throwing a bomb which left eight cops and four others dead during a rally protesting police attacks on strikers. In fact, through public subscription, a monument was erected shortly after, but in memory of the dead cops!

According to Wikipedia, “The statue was long a subject of debate and scorn. A year after it was set up the first attempt to blow it up occurred, so it was moved. On May 4, 1927 (oddly enough, the anniversary of the Riot) a street car jumped its tracks and crashed into the monument, and it was moved again. After being moved from its original location, it was blown up at least twice more, in October 1969 and again a year later, reportedly by the Weather Underground. Mayor Richard Daley, Sr. then placed a 24 hour police guard around the statue for the ensuing two years, before being moved to the lobby of police headquarters in 1972.”

The base, with an inscription dedicated to the police, remained, but during the centenary gathering to honor our fallen comrades in 1986, was the target of graffiti. It was the injustice of the executions that gave rise to the internationally celebrated May Day as a working class holiday.

Haymarket Observations

Remarks by Anthony Rayson at the September 2004 dedication ceremony of the Haymarket commemorative statue

1. Haymarket is internationally important history, involving the suppression of a powerful labor movement centered in Chicago and spearheaded by serious anarchists. It was never about “free speech!” Their voices were choked by legal lynching, and the criminals responsible were never brought to any kind of justice.

Those lynched will forever be known as “freedom fighters” by those who genuinely struggle for social justice as exemplary, revolutionary anarchists! That is what “Haymarket” will always mean, and that can’t be taken away from Anarchists or from those who sympathize with anarchist ideals.

2. It is not about “free speech” now, either! This place is now a magnet for Big Brother surveillance cameras and not a place of refuge or solace. What happened here in 1886 and what it has meant since, transcends any attempt at trying to revise its meaning and turn it into a tourist trap and a gateway to the gentrification.

3. The money used to do all of this was extorted from Illinois taxpayers. It came by way of Illinois First Bank money, which is the same pile of corrupt Illinois ex-Gov. George Ryan pork money being used to force citizens out of Eastern Will County in the Peotone area for an unwanted, unneeded airport. It could have been a grassroots

effort with voluntary contributions, but wasn't! "Haymarket" will always mean what it truly means—Anarchist love of humanity!

4. Anarchists were never considered for participation in the planning of this project and only got involved once we found out about it and approached the people involved, which was after all of the main decisions had been made.

5. The conditions for which the Haymarket Martyrs so bravely gave their lives fighting against—wage slavery, destitution, police brutality, prison slavery, imperialist wars, authoritarian domination of all aspects of our lives, judicial murdering of innocents, etc.—not only still exist today, but now threaten every single person on Earth, and all other life forms! These threats to life herself are being launched from this country into our world!

6. The "Chicago Idea" School of Anarchism, which these murdered people were just beginning to articulate, is now more important, useful, and inspiring than ever!

7. One last point. As for "terrorism"—the US government has the market cornered! State crime—be it capturing, incarcerating, shooting, forcing human beings into a miserable job, sometimes ordering young people to murder mostly other young—even infant—people here and abroad—or assault them etc., lying incessantly about day-by-day reality—is a never-ending, constant, global crime against the very soul of Humanity! Thus, the need for our serious efforts to deal with these urgent, cataclysmic threats.

Hurrah for Anarchy!

Erasers to History

To the FE:

The recent Haymarket memorial ceremony was a farce. Government officials, reformist trade unionists, and even the police converged on Haymarket Square September 14 in Chicago, again applying their erasers to history.

The free speech of the Haymarket anarchists continues to be stifled. They cry out from their graves in indignation. Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, and August Spies climbed the scaffold to their deaths, boldly accepting their martyrdom, secure that they were dying for their cause of anarchism, for the triumph of freedom and socialism over capitalism and the state. What mockery then that their commemorators today are the progeny of the Schaaks, the Bonfields, the Grinnells, and the Fields.

Or are they the mantle-bearers of the "labor movement"? This movement included the Knights of Labor who in their Chicago organ of May 8, 1886 proclaimed: "We are sure we voice the sentiment of the entire organization when we say we hope that Parsons, Spies, Most, Fielden, and the whole gang of [anarchist] outlaws will be blotted from the surface of the earth."

It has been said that the Haymarket Affair has shaped the organized labor movement. Alas, it seems this is so. The purging of the anarchists, the revolutionary unionists from the labor movement, left it in the state it is in today: spineless, a jelly-filled mass of apologists for capitalism. The president of the Fraternal Order of Police in Chicago has said, "Law enforcement is now a part of organized labor." This honors Louis Lingg? Lingg, upon being sentenced, proclaimed, "I despise your order, your laws, your force-propped authority. Hang me for it!"

Capitalism and the state ultimately triumphed at Haymarket. Inspector Bonfield's raid was a success. The subsequent raids and indictments targeted anarchists, as they were the elements most feared by the capitalists. Cut the revolutionaries from the movement and it is left powerless, an obedient lap dog. The fat cats stayed fat, and the lapdog begged for scraps. The size and shape of the scrap pile varies, but real control over work and wealth remains in the hands of the rich and powerful.

While the ribbon-cutters celebrated their mystical rewrite of Haymarket, a rewrite that sweeps the central characters out the side door, we must all shout out against the trivializing of the Haymarket anarchists and their heartfelt ideals of freedom and justice. We must shout out against the dual yokes of capitalism and the state—the same enemies in 2005 as in 1886.

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Chicago



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