

Letters

Our readers respond

Various Authors

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The *Fifth Estate* welcomes letters at PO Box 201016, Ferndale MI 48220, or fe-AT-fifthestate-DOT-org

NEVER DREAMED I'D DEFEND THE FCC

I am no fan of the United States Government, nor of any of its agencies, including the FCC. As far as I can tell, we have government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich, and only a revolution in the human psyche will change that. Nevertheless, I found much to disagree with in Ron Sakolsky's article "No More Safety Valves" (#372, Spring, 2006).

One of the few things we can do to promote that much-needed revolution is to communicate, a two-way process that involves listening/hearing as well as speaking. Thus, local community FM radio has always appealed to me because of its interactive nature. Whether such stations are legally recognized or functioning under the radar is not nearly so important as that they exist.

That said, there is a great deal to be said for existing in some kind of legal framework rather than outside the law, as long as we've got laws. A station that has a recognized right to exist is obviously more stable and freer to publicize itself and its services than a station that lives outside the law.

It's kind of like the "war on drugs." The fact that certain substances cannot be legally produced, owned, or shared vastly complicates the business of using them for their proper, creative purposes. As anarchists, do we just let this go on, figuring it will all get better with the collapse of the state vector, or do we work to change the legal framework around these substances so that innocent people aren't persecuted for private behavior?

As long as we've got laws, and until we have a revolution, the FCC is the only bulwark between us and the complete domination of the airwaves by big business. If there were no FCC, there would be no way to keep the radio bands from being completely saturated with consumerism. As it is, at least we can save about half of one percent for genuine popular use.

Mr. Sakolsky is also disdainful of the "community groups" that run LPFM stations, saying, "While there are some progressive stations which may harbor anarchist-oriented programmers in the LPFM mix, these would-be pirates are only allowed to blow off a little steam within a highly circumscribed government safety-valve program that offers the trappings of free radio without the substance."

It seems to be that there is a bit of a contradiction when an anarchist demands uniformity of thought, or criticizes diversity, as Mr. Sakolsky seems to be doing here. Communities are by nature diverse, with a broad spectrum of political view and depths of commitment.

For a radio station, this means that people will want to hear different things. An all-anarchist, all-the-time radio station will be listened to only by the choir who already agree with it. Anarchist messages presented as part

of a mix are much more likely to be heard by people who wouldn't tune into a station that was rigidly doctrinaire. (doctrinaire anarchists-isn't that an oxymoron?)

I broadcast on WRFN, a low-power station in the Nashville, Tennessee suburbs. The show before me is a children's music show; the show after mine is a Native American community show, with native music and announcements about local powwows. Neither of these shows would have a home on a strictly "anarchist" station, but I think we're all enriched by being on the air together.

I think that two other articles in the Spring 2006 issue shed light on this question. The first is the article on Venezuela, which describes the disconnect between the Chavezistas and the country people whom they want to help. Lesson: you have to listen to people and give them what they want before they will accept what you think they really need.

The second was the article on Spain seventy years after, (FE #372, Spring, 2006) which pointed out the truly popular, wide base of support enjoyed by the various anarchist movements there. There is simply nothing comparable to that in this country today, but it is still a possibility, I believe, because the mindset of anarchism is a kind of yogurt starter that will create a saner culture wherever it is introduced; but first it has to be introduced into environments where it is not already prevalent. We cannot do that by being narrow-minded and doctrinaire.

Martin Holsinger

Nashville, Tennessee

Ron Sakolsky replies: Your involvement in a Low Power FM (LPFM) station does not require you to be a "fan of the FCC" as you put it. All it requires is that you accept the FCC's authority over the airwaves. I refuse to do so, but it seems that you do, even going so far down the road of liberal reformism as to call the FCC a "bulwark between us and the complete domination of the airwaves by business." Yet, from the start, the FCC was captured by the very business interests that it claimed to regulate. In fact, like all federal regulatory agencies, the FCC is designed to manage the excesses of the capitalist system in the interests of rationalizing it not eliminating it. Because your analysis ignores the symbiotic relationship between the FCC and the radio industry, your critique of the domination of the airwaves neglects to include the State and misses the way in which LPFM continues to be used by the FCC as a mechanism for co-opting the free radio movement.

My critique of LPFM as a safety-valve is not meant to imply that there are not some interesting LPFM stations or individual radical programs on LPFM. Nor do I claim, as you seem to suggest, that only a "doctrinaire" 24-7/in-your-face/anarchist radio station can be anti-authoritarian. On the free radio station with which I am involved, there are a variety of programs, some of which are more or less anarchist than others and some not anarchist at all. Yet, because of our station's existence, the sphere of autonomy from the corporate state that is experienced by all programmers and listeners has been expanded beyond what was previously imagined. Some of us dream of other autonomous zones awaiting to be manifested. Not surprisingly, these dreams of anarchy engendered by free radio seem to be very different than your LPFM-generated dream of defending the FCC.

Dear Fifth Estate:

I'm a university student at Michigan State, and grew up in metro Detroit, yet I was just recently introduced to your publication. I picked it up at an independent bookshop on the eastside of Lansing.

I really appreciate your motives for creating this 'zine, and I think it's awesome that you'll send it free of charge to prisoners and soldiers. I'm sure they either appreciate or need to read some discussion on anti-authoritarianism.

I truly enjoyed your article, "A Revolution Without Enemies," (See FE #373, Fall 2006) and was happy to hear more of Ginsberg's radical thoughts. I'm curious if you send the *Fifth Estate* to shops in San Francisco? I wonder this because if not, I must send this issue to my poetic uncle in California.

I can't tell you enough how pleased I am to see the existence of a "cooperative, non-profit, anti-authoritarian project" with a PO box in the state of Michigan. Thanks for the thoughts you've brought to my mind.

Katie

East Lansing, Mich.

Dear Fifth Estate:

I am a foster kid from Round Rock, Texas and I was wondering if you could help me understand something. You see, I am not suppose to talk about anarchy around my foster parents because they say its “devil worship,” and any time I try to state an idea they tell me to stop talking! I feel like my freedom is being forgotten, and living someplace where you can’t state your ideas really pisses me off.

What I’m getting to is, why? I know that anarchy has gotten a bad rap from bombings and stuff, but, people want to be free to say and do what they will and will do almost anything to get that freedom.

People come to America and say “I’m free!” but we still are not free! How are we free when a foster kid can’t state his ideas? Help me understand the anarchy devil worship thing; it really bugs me.

Alphonso
Red Rock, Texas

To the Fifth Estate:

I disagree with Walker Lane’s claim that the Soviet Union never represented a military threat to the US (see “All Wars are Lies!” FE #372, Spring 2006). There’s plenty of good info to suggest otherwise. The USSR’s threat was certainly overstated for propaganda purposes, much like current “terrorist” ones, but shouldn’t be dismissed out-of-hand.

David
London, England

Walker Lane responds: I don’t think “good info” exists, particularly since the opening of the Soviet files demonstrates the opposite. Obviously, the entire Cold War was more nuanced than what can be written in a single sentence intended to be provocative by challenging long-held myths about a Soviet threat, ones that Americans accept as a matter of fact without a shred of evidence.

We now know that the USSR never had a single plan for “conquering” Eastern Europe and certainly none for an attack on the US. This country, on the other hand, had extensive plans for the invasion and occupation of Russia and its satellite nations.

The Russians had defensive contingencies, including massive retaliatory nuclear strikes against this country, but only if attacked which they believed was imminent given the West’s historic antipathy to the Russian revolution and its hysterical anti-communism.

The Kremlin bureaucrats believed the leaders of America were quite mad (true), and had fostered the Cold War where no conflict existed for its own internal purposes (a permanent war economy, repression of labor and dissent, and to bring Eastern European and colonial countries back into the capitalist orbit; again, all true).

Post-World War II history is very complex, but Truman and Churchill, both vile politicians and mass-murdering war criminals, should have been in the dock with the Nazis at Nuremberg. It was they, particularly, who created the context for what occurred after the second inter-imperial slaughter was formally ended, and launched the world into an era of massive military expenditures, and the creation of a world of fear based on anxiety about nuclear war.

Dear FE:

Walker Lane (see “All Wars are Lies!” FE #372, Spring 2006) repeats the old refrain that the Iraq war is a war over oil. This may be a comforting thought to some on the left, but unfortunately it is now being exposed as a falsehood on par with the excuse “a war on terror.”

It is becoming clear that the Iraq war was motivated in large part by the need to protect Israel. Consequently, the push for war was driven by the massively influential pro-Israel lobby.

The recent uproar over the paper “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy,” by Mearsheimer and Walt (online at www.lrb.co.uk) makes public what many have been saying for years—that the Israel Lobby wields huge, disproportionate, and corrupting power over US government policy.

Mearsheimer and Walt write, “Pressure from Israel and the Lobby was not the only factor behind the US decision to attack Iraq, but it was a critical element. Some believe that this was a ‘war for oil’, but there is hardly any direct evidence to support this claim. Instead, the war was motivated in good part by a desire to make Israel more secure... There is little doubt that Israel and the Lobby were key factors in the decision to go to war.”

The authors quickly note that the push for war was not attributable to “Jewish influence,” because, first, the pro-war faction is only the 1/3 of all American Jews who are right-wing militant Zionists, and second, there are many other non-Jews, including Christian fundamentalists, who support the efforts of the Lobby.

But the power and influence of this one particular lobby is almost beyond belief. The authors point out that the Lobby and related Jewish sources supply roughly 50 percent of Republican Party funding. And as if that weren’t enough, the liberal 2/3 of American Jews supply 60 percent of Democratic funds. So, the real ‘Jewish influence’ in our government is remarkable—and this from a group that is less than two percent of the US population!

This story is important for anarchist thinking for several reasons: (1) it should put an end to the fallacy of a “war for oil,” (2) it demonstrates once again the toxic outcome of mixing right-wing capitalists with an all-powerful state, (3) when the push comes for war against Iran and Syria, we will understand the motivating factor, and (4) by highlighting one specific form of corruption, it sheds light on the overall dysfunctional nature of the economic-political system, and thus may suggest ways of undermining it. Powerful lobbies are defenders of the system, and must be taken into account in any efforts to end it.

War is inevitable in a large capitalist economy, but the last thing we need is a disproportionately powerful lobby pushing us headlong into an unending series of deadly conflicts.

Tom,

Northville, Michigan

Walker Lane responds: Given the enormity of Israel’s war crimes in Lebanon and Gaza, and its devastation of the environment and the civilian infrastructure of both, nothing could please me more than to add another count to the indictment that should bring all of Tel Aviv’s officials to the World Court.

Unfortunately, your single causation explanation, even buttressed with M&W (as it is often referred to), is weak and based on an unsustainable premise. It says essentially, an ethnic group contributes heavily to the political process; if it’s the Jews, they are not real Americans, who have, at best, divided loyalties and are manipulating hapless, otherwise well-meaning, gentile politicians who can’t resist the relentless scheming of the Jews and are beholden to their filthy lucre, and, hence, carry out policies not in the interests of the U.S. This is where this line of thinking goes, but it only serves to obscure what really drives American foreign policy: the protection of corporate looting abroad.

There is truth in your contention only in that all U.S. lobby groups that can deliver votes and cash play a disproportionate role in determining foreign, as well as domestic policy, and it is rarely in the interests of the American people. Think banking, pharmaceuticals, utilities, credit, and, most importantly, oil, when you think about who has power over what this country does and for whose interest.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and other pro-Israel groups wield a lot of influence in Washington given their ability to mobilize votes and money for politicians, but their influence and dollars pale beside that of corporate money and influence. Also, if what they wanted was contrary to U.S. imperial needs, they wouldn’t get much of a hearing.

Which scenario makes more sense, that AIPAC pushed the Bush cabal into a war to defend Israel, or that the invasion and occupation of Iraq was a long planned expedition, enunciated most blatantly by the neo-conservative Project for a New American Century (PNAC), to ensure U.S. imperial hegemony in the Middle East and its oil in the coming years?

PNAC documents, whose signatories include Cheney and Rumsfeld, make it abundantly clear the survival of the American empire depends on controlling the Middle East for its resources and its proximity to Russia and South Asia. A 1997 policy statement proposes a “benevolent global hegemony” projected “as far into the future as

possible.” Israel may have a special place in the hearts of some of the neo-conservatives signing onto the statement, but ultimately, it’s just another pawn in the game.

These imperialists (in the 19th century sense of the word) see such dominance as being key as other competitors such as China arise needing the same increasingly scarce oil supplies. The ability to extend U.S. military power to accomplish this is what the war in Iraq is all about. The U.S. isn’t building the world’s largest embassy in Baghdad, nor constructing over a dozen permanent military bases there to help Israel, which previous to the Iraq war never uttered a peep about feeling threatened by Saddam Hussein.

Israel didn’t need defending. Saddam had an army of dust and no weapons of mass destruction; why would Israel want the U.S. to initiate a war that would contribute to roiling the area in the manner that the invasion has?

Do American Jews provide the level of financing for the two parties Tom ascribes to the M&W document? I doubt it. Think corporate funding, and the idea that a small ethnic group could provide as much or more for their own devious purposes is absurd. I wrote the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks electoral funding about this claim.

Massie Ritsch, the group’s communications director, wrote back: “Since donors are not required to state their religions when they give money to federal candidates, there’s no way to prove/ disprove the statements [about percentage of donations from Jews]. We do track spending related to Israel policy-chiefly pro-Israel contributions.” The breakdown by party is at opensecrets.org.

The Israel-Behind-It-All argument is being repeated in many places (it gets some of its cachet from being somewhat naughty to blame the Jews if you’re a leftist), but ultimately winds up in right-wing anti-Semitism. If you Google the question of Jewish contributions, you come up with nothing but a few links to overtly anti-Semitic sites; nothing approaching anything scholarly or official. After all, hasn’t it been the right wing which, since the 19th century, has recognized and fought against the pernicious influence of the Jews-those “rootless cosmopolitans?”

In any event, much of the donations made by individual American Jews go to those who they perceive as progressive Democrats, not aggressive Zionists.

The answer lies in political economy, my friend; not ethnicity.

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