

Letters

Our readers respond.

Various Authors

2015

Send letters via email to [fe@fifthestate.org](mailto:fifthestate@fifthestate.org) or Fifth Estate, P.O. Box 201016, Ferndale MI 48220. All formats accepted including typescript & handwritten. Letters may be edited for length.

Pieing God 1

I had just thought about Pat Halley yesterday. (See "FE Staffer Puts a Pie in God's Face," FE Spring 2015)

I find myself thinking about people in my life that I've lost. Being part of the Detroit tribe was a meaningful time in my life. My brother and I were part of the conspiracy to pie the Maharaji that Pat carried out in 1973. I was only 20 years old at the time.

I remember meeting an owner of a chain of nursing homes that was upset at Pat for writing articles about poor conditions for the elderly. Pat was the first champion for the frail elderly I ever encountered. He shaped my attitude about them and gave me an awareness about the tyranny of society towards the poor. To this day, I endeavor to empower both the young and the old.

Ever since we went from living as tribes to Civilization, we have sanitized death, illness, and aging. Our food is killed and processed in factories. Our sick, elderly, and dying are squirreled away in hospitals and nursing homes. People don't talk about it. I learned to speak out. To take action. To live a meaningful life.

Thank you for remembering Pat. For me, remembering him is the sweetest pain.

Al Schafer

San Diego

Pieing God 2

A friend of mine gave me your Spring 2015 issue, which I loved. You guys rock.

I was interested, though, in the piece about your late homie, Pat Halley, having hit the Indian kid in the face with a pie 40 years ago.

I guess the optics of it, given the racial and historical context, were just something I didn't vibe on.

This kid was a Hindu, like a billion other people in his country. His people and land were colonized by Whites for however long. He comes over here, where there's some marginal number of Whites who are receptive to whatever his get down was, and in the process, this harmless, symbolic gesture of a "key to Detroit" is offered to him, and some White guy pulls up and disrespects him in front of his people and everyone else.

You describe the fact of the Indian kid's supporters retaliating against your friend for this as "authority bearing down" him, but that seems like a strained construction of a pretty generic human instance of action and reaction.

At that moment, there were still numerous outposts of White colonial authority throughout the Global South, and the fact that your late homie was intellectually opposed to them doesn't mitigate the fact that he was still a beneficiary of exactly that kind of White authority here in the US.

Unlike Pat's Anglo-Saxon cousin in Raj India, White America in 1973 was still in possession of the land and resources that it stole from the indigenous inhabitants of this continent, and was still oppressing, humiliating, and murdering Black and Brown people from sea to shining sea like it always has.

Love & respect,
Leo Oladimu
Coleman, Fla.

Ida Herodotus replies: I think that it is accurate to say that the pie incident was not an attack on spirituality or on the ethnic origins of anyone.

Rather, it was a response to the fact that the guru was a representative of those who make a profitable business of requiring people to give up their self-determination, self-respect, and individual choice-making capacities, and follow the authority of others in subservient ways.

The incident took place at a time when many people on the left in North America were disappointed by the end of the anti-war, civil rights and student movements, and along with a great many people in the general population, were looking for new ways to find meaning for their lives. Many of them became followers of various religions, including some that were traditional and some that were definitely new ones tailored to attract such people.

Many of the leaders of those new religious organizations became very rich. The guru who was pried generally preached celibacy and frugal living while indulging his own desires lavishly, acquiring several very expensive cars, planes, houses, and other items, and accumulating millions of dollars for himself and his top people and his family, and flaunting it all very publicly.

He was doing the opposite of what he told his followers to do, while preaching that they had to learn to accept the differences between those at the top of the hierarchy and those lower down and to resist evaluating his or anyone else's actions.

Moreover, the guru and his devotees actively craved and sought out recognition from the political establishment and all sorts of media stars. This is why one of his admirers got the Detroit city council to give him the key to the city.

The guru also actually sanctioned and encouraged the murderous attack on Pat, even though he publicly denied it.

I found a website that has three letters from Pat Halley and other writings from people who went through the guru's organization and came out critical of it because of its exploitation of them and others.

In his letters, Pat made it clear that he had a lot of respect for inner personal spirituality. And, apparently, the person who was the guru later distanced himself from his earlier claims to be the highest spirit in the universe.

The letters and the other writings are at ex-premie.org/best/pathalley3.htm

Doing FE Distro

It has been a real pleasure to distribute the last two issues of the *Fifth Estate* in Pittsburgh. They sit comfortably on the literature table, "in case you have a burning steak of anarchy." Sometimes when there are no words, it helps me to point to the Fifth Estate. I hope you are getting some subscriptions from Pittsburgh and that you won't have to send copies and not charge much longer.

This month I distributed the *Fifth Estate* at the April \$15 unfair labor practice strike, the Thomas Merton Center Festival Reception at the Sheridan hotel, and the IWW's May Day Eve event in Homestead. I'd like nothing more than to distribute the Fifth Estate at the 100th Annual Pennsylvania Farm Show in January 2016.

Kenneth Miller
Pittsburgh

FE replies: Thanks, Kenneth, for your help in doing free distribution. You and others have done this vigorously for the last few years and it has helped us gain many subscribers. Probably the percentage of return against distribution is not as high as we'd like, but enough to make it worthwhile.

Asiatic Mode of Production

The review of Ron Tabor's book by Kevin O'Toole was pretty good (See "Throwing Marx Out with the Bathwater?," FE, Spring 2015). He was weak, though, on Tabor repeatedly blaming Marx and Engels so much for the emergence of State Communism.

History isn't that simple, especially the authoritarian Russian Empire that has dictatorship in its blood going back to the time of the Mongol invasion in the 1200s. Tabor agrees that the Bolsheviks inherited the Czarist overbearing bureaucracy including its secret police. The weight of this past is overwhelming and defined what the USSR became.

Tabor mentions a bit about Marx's concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP). The AMP (also known as Oriental despotism) were ancient state collectivist systems (China, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, Russia, the Incas, and others) that Soviet academics debated circa 1925 until 1931 and finally decided it "didn't exist."

Good for their sake since AMP class societies looked too much like what Soviet communism was becoming and the gulag was just around the corner. Tabor doesn't take the AMP to its conclusion and like most Western anarchists and many Marxists and left-Trotskyists, believe Soviet-type states were/are state-capitalist. His heart is in the right place, as many other state capitalist thinkers are, but they're making a grave, unthinking and West-centric mistake.

All Easterners I've spoken with agree that the "semi-Asiatic" nature of Russia (Lenin and plenty of Russian Marxists back then used the term) and the fully AMP of China's past led them to be analogous to modern AMPs which spread in various ways to other Communist countries or some (N. Korea/Vietnam) had them in their history and was stamped on them.

Bob McGlynn
Brooklyn

Pulling Out the Rug

I am a bit perplexed by Kevin O'Toole's assertion that anarcho-communists and syndicalists will have "the theoretical rug" pulled from under our feet by Ron Tabor's critique of Marxism.

Anarchists have a long line of economic theory and practice that is in no way dependent upon Marxism, either theoretically or in terms of practical program. Indeed, much of Marx's work was developed in the course of his many battles with anarchists, who were developing an anti-capitalist economics while Marx was still busy trying to nurture bourgeois revolutions.

Unlike the anarchists, Marx never developed a fully formed economic analysis, instead limiting his published work to critiques of capitalism and of its various challengers. One would search Marx's collected works in vain for anything resembling Peter Kropotkin's constructive writings on the subject.

If Tabor believes that Marx provided "a vision of a just society and a strategy and a set of tactics to achieve it" he is mistaken. But Marx's failures do not in any way undermine the syndicalist approach or the anarcho-communist vision of a free society.

Jon Bekken
Philadelphia

Disappointed

There was a lot of good material in the Anti-Marx issue (FE, Spring 2015), although I was slightly disappointed about what was left out. Namely, a critique of the contemporary influence of Marxism, particularly on anarchist

and radical currents. Insurrectionary models have become very important in the last few years and much of this is entangled with Marxist discourse.

This doesn't automatically invalidate it, but does mean we need to examine it to make sure that the theory isn't allowing an avenue for authoritarian practices to invade our currents.

Contrary to Peter Werbe's assertion in his article, "Marxism," the ideology is not just "the most interesting sector of sociology," though his point seems accurate in academic settings. Marxism often takes on other labels now. For instance, many ideological Marxists call themselves anarchists. This is important to combat.

Many people who call themselves anarcho-communists adopt a model of rigid organization and planning that strikes me as being closer to the more authoritarian end of council communism.

Many even denounce individualism while co-opting heroic figures such as Emma Goldman. To her infinite credit, Goldman considered anarchists to be individualists by nature, and quoted Nietzsche to describe them as aristocrats of spirit, but not by "purse or by birth."

A similar tendency is in place among many syndicalist IWW members, most who seem to have rejected the surrealist spirit of *The Rebel Worker* and the slogan of, "I won't work!"

I would love to see people creating imaginal insurrections. Groups like the IWW have strong historical ties to insurrection, surrealism, and anti-work, and it would be good to see some return to this.

Jason Rodgers
Albany, N.Y.

Peter Werbe responds: Yes, I realize that Marxism, now not seemingly connected with the police states it engendered (well, except for China, N. Korea, Vietnam, and Cuba), has become appealing again to some looking for an all encompassing theory of revolution—even to anarchists, which is why I wrote the article.

Anarchy in Scotland

Many anarchists refuse to support any separatist/secessionist movements on the grounds that they are nationalist. I'm glad that Alexander avoided that absolutist position, even though he fell short of full support for Scottish independence. (See Spring 2015 FE, "Autarchy in Scotland.") But I'm worried by a few of his remarks that seem based on error or misapprehension.

"Scotland" can scarcely be called a "fiction." It was an independent country till the 18th century, and it had (and has) languages of its own (Gaelic and Scots). If some people admire Robert Burns (a Scottish "nationalist" rebel) and eat haggis, this is no cause to imply that the tradition is mere "fake-lore." A tradition that's recent (like the tartan system) can be a real tradition. Is anarchism itself much older than the 19th century?

Alexander mentions that the "NO" vote won 45% of the referendum. Is this a typo for 55%?

He also says that "everyone" is astonished that "an energy of refusal and remaking of politics" has gathered "under the independence banner." Surely, the poets and rebels who founded the Scottish National Party (SNP) would be astonished to hear that no one had ever noticed their "energy of refusal!"

After the Jacobite uprising of 1745, Alexander says, "Scotland became the full junior partner in Great Britain's imperial expansion, and took a share of the spoils." I presume he's not referring to the Clearances and enclosures that drove generations of ruined Scottish crofters to emigrate so that a few Whig lords could enjoy deer hunting on the vacated land? (See T. Winogrend's article, also in FE Spring 2015.)

What evidence does Alexander have to show that "the bloodiest border in the history of the island" is that separating the Highlands from a "bourgeois" Lowlands? I always thought the bloodiest border was that between Scotland and England, where for centuries the "Border Reivers" (call them land-pirates) rustled cattle and carried on violent feuding.

Plenty of Scottish leftists supported Independence, and since the vote, SNP membership rolls have grown at Labour's expense. The Celtic League and other radical groups have charged election fraud. The movement is not dead.

Should anarchists support separation and secession? The 19th century American individualist anarchist Lysander Spooner said, yes, everyone should secede, down to the level of the family! If we withhold our support

from separatists out of some kind of anarchist-fundamentalist purist position, we may abdicate our respect for the desire for freedom.

Let rebel lands be liberated: Catalonia, N. Ireland, Basqueland, the Western Sahara, the Berbers, the autonomous Kurds and other leftist secessionist entities, and then we can work for “anarchy in Scotland”—and the world.

Peter Lamborn Wilson
Woodstock, N.Y.

FE Note: At one mention of the vote totals there was an error in the text. Fifty-five percent of Scots voted to remain within the United Kingdom.

fifth Estate

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