

Letters

Our readers respond

Various Authors

2017

Send letters to fe@fifthestate.org or Fifth Estate, POB 201016, Ferndale MI 48220

All formats accepted including typescript & handwritten; letters may be edited for length.

Original Trauma?

I appreciate Chellis Glendinning's criticisms of modern, Western civilization, including modern agriculture, which has been highly detrimental to ecological and social balance in the world. (See "Linear Perspective, Fences & Nature's Glory," FE #396, Summer 2016.)

However, I am very uncomfortable with her blanket application of psychoanalytic categories to identify ancient roots of human alienation, by supposedly diagnosing the symptoms of trauma and post-traumatic stress in all civilized people.

I don't believe that her oversimplified analogies with medical conditions caused by personal life experiences and those of families and cultural communities can help either our understanding of the problems caused by civilization and domestication, or those resulting from horrible conflict situations.

If all modern peoples are diagnosed as suffering from original trauma, how do we understand and respect the specific sufferings of those who are experiencing symptoms of direct personal trauma and post-traumatic stress, caused by genocide, war, enslavement, racism, rape, childhood abuse, environmental catastrophes, and the like?

The article also leaves me with the question of what her analysis can teach us about how to work cooperatively together to transform society into the less alienated world we want.

Louisa Cabrera

St. Paul, Minn.

Chellis Glendinning replies

Dear Louisa: Thank you for your insight and clarification. You are right to question the application of a category like PTSD to every individual who has been touched by western civilization.

I never meant in the essay nor in *My Name Is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization*, the book from which it was taken, to suggest that all of us have post-traumatic stress. Rather, I hoped to make some sense of the culture/society at large and its institutionalized harming mechanisms.

Language is and always has been an inadequate means to reflect, describe, or define our experience of being alive. The best writers, I think, are the ones that come close, and most of those with any success are poets and bards, not psychiatrists and psychologists.

If you look at the history of language used to describe the vagaries of mental health, you find that the chosen words change as society, culture, and understanding changes, as in: possession-by-spirits morphs into hysteria, then to irritable heart, then to shell shock, and on to PTSD.

Twenty-two years ago, I gave it my best shot in the book in an attempt to penetrate to a deeper understanding of what the hell is wrong with us! And perhaps, if you follow through on your ideas of the origins/continuation of alienation and its attendant sufferings, you will find a more satisfying set of words and associations?

Meanwhile, as a psychologist specializing in recovery from PTSD, I am grateful for your distinction between the mental health problems of mass technological society and what one person needs to understand in order to heal.

From the Altiplano,
Chellis Glendinning
Chuquisaca, Bolivia

Bob's Last Letter

The Summer *Fifth Estate* features an article by Leila Al Shami on the Syrian Revolution, "Challenging the Nation State in Syria." This follows a piece in the Spring 2015 issue by Neither East Nor West-NYC/CounterVortex's Bill Weinberg, "Syria's Kurdish Revolution: The Anarchist Element & the Challenge of Solidarity," about developments in Rojava.

Al Shami is far more critical of the Rojava experiment. She says positive anarchistic things about Rojava, but then adds that "the PYD [Kurdish Democratic Union Party], which dominates the Self Administration, is an authoritarian party which has silenced, arrested, imprisoned, and assassinated other Kurdish opposition groups and members."

There is a civil war among Rojava watchers around the world, not only on the ground, where things can be cloudy. For a good, exactly researched source, check Bill's CounterVortex web-site. ww4reportcom/dailyreport.

Bob McGlynn,
Neither East Nor West
Brooklyn, N.Y.

FE note: Bob McGlynn passed away after we received this letter. See his last article and a remembrance of him elsewhere in this issue.

Letter: Unabomber Defense

In an introduction to a 1998 reprint in the Summer 2016 *FE*, "Unabomber Cops a Plea," by David Watson, the current staff condemned those who continue to support Ted Kaczynski, known as the Unabomber. The introduction says that the man's ideas were not new and resulted in the deaths and injury of up to 23 innocent people. Their arguments, however, are misguided. (See "Happy Birthday to the Unabomber?", *FE* number 396)

Kaczynski did, in fact, offer several new approaches to anti-civ ideas.

He popularized a rationalist, analytic approach to a body of ideas that was previously dominated by continental nonsense.

He weaved into anti-civ thought some relevant sociobiological ideas of human nature (although he did not call them that); he critiqued humanist values, which had previously been the basis of anarchist and primitivist critiques of civilization; and so on.

Perhaps most importantly, he got these ideas before the public in a far more effective manner than anyone previously. As recent media attention around him has shown, even now he and his ideas continue to draw an audience.

The staff's seemingly pacifistic argument against Kaczynski is just as mistaken. I do not deny a person's right to be a pacifist: their principles are inarguable anyway.

But if we agree with Kaczynski's premises, there is no way to maintain one's integrity and not admit that acting on these premises necessarily comes with some degree of violence.

I could go on, addressing, for instance, *FE*'s claim that Kaczynski's targets were "innocent," but I've written a thorough analysis of Kaczynski and his Freedom Club (FC) already.

I encourage those who are interested in a more nuanced overview of the man and his story to check it out at <http://dark-mountain.net/blog/ted-kaczynski-and-why-he-matters/>.

Live wild or die,

John Jacobi

Editor, *Hunter/Gatherer* wildism.org/hg

Fifth Estate replies: So, let's see. If we think someone is a psychopathic mass murderer, worthy only of disdain and disavowal because he set booby traps that killed and maimed a couple of dozen people loosely connected to the technological system we are all a part of, and who tried to bring down an airliner that any of us or people we love could have been on, we're pacifists. Interesting argument.

Some writers are solely intellectuals and judged by their words alone. Others, particularly revolutionary ones, are assessed by how they act on their ideas in the real world.

An example is German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, who wrote profoundly about loss in the modern world, but invalidated all that he penned by his support and cooperation with the Nazis.

Kaczynski has had his 15 minutes of fame because of his murderous rampage. Those who promote his writings or apologize for his bloody acts only serve to make critiques of technology and civilization seem that much more unpalatable to people.

Apologies Unneeded

I believe I'm the "anti-war candidate for a U.S. congressional district," endorsed in a 1966 *Fifth Estate* and referred to in "The Elections, Donald Trump, & Wilhelm Reich," Summer 2016 issue.

I have tried to live down my 1966 Democratic Party candidacy ever since. I hope to be forgiven as I was young and not yet aware of the damage one does running for office in the capitalist parties in the United States.

Some in the *Fifth Estate* at the time, as well as other friends and comrades in various socialist or communist parties, were correct when they urged me not to run as a Democrat. But at the time I was, at best, a progressive young lawyer just learning his way in the movement for true revolutionary change.

I had not yet learned that the only way to end the U.S. government's imperialist war in Vietnam was by mass action in the streets, including peaceful protests as well as civil disobedience actions.

Happily, my role in the movement against that war, together with other social justice struggles I've been involved in during the ensuing decades of my life, have enlightened me to the folly of my earlier belief that one could obtain meaningful social change in capitalist America through its corrupt electoral process.

Unhappily, people who should have learned that same lesson, like that good man Bernie Sanders, have not. So, while his young supporters are to be forgiven for believing we have a democracy in this country and that they can bring about the revolution they seek through the U.S. electoral system, Brother Sanders should know better by now.

By running in the capitalist Democratic Party primary he mis-educated masses of young women and men who should, instead, be looking to true socialists for answers, and who should be protesting in the streets on behalf of the revolutionary changes they want and the people of this country so desperately need.

Jim Lafferty

Executive Director Emeritus, National Lawyers Guild, Los Angeles

Peter Werbe replies: Jim Lafferty has contributed enormously to building movements opposing U.S. imperial wars from Vietnam to Iraq. His legal work for civil liberties and civil rights is also exemplary.

His anti-war organizing in Detroit and Los Angeles has always been independent of the Democratic Party.

However, there is no need for Jim or any of us active in the burgeoning antiwar movement half a century ago to ask to be “forgiven” for a strategic foray into the electoral process even into a party which was conducting the war.

In 1966, anti-war activity hadn’t taken on the mass proportions that it quickly did, and few Americans realized the enormity of the U.S. invasion of Vietnam and that it was based on a fabricated justification.

The Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam, which Lafferty headed, called for immediate withdrawal from Southeast Asia contrasted with more tepid calls for “Negotiations Now” from less radical peace groups.

The Detroit anti-war group fielded Jim as a candidate against an old line Democratic Party politician, U.S. Rep. Martha Griffith, who repeated the lies for the Vietnam invasion which we countered with anti-war literature and speeches.

The U.S. military had already begun committing war crimes against the civilian population, information which was brought to the select precincts we targeted since we hadn’t the resources to tackle the entire district.

Surprisingly, or maybe not so, Lafferty won the precincts we worked in going door to door with our anti-war message. And, what if by some miracle he had prevailed and been elected to Congress and exposed the lies and the carnage of that war. Certainly, the Vietnamese victims of the U.S. war machine would have been overjoyed.

Two years later, the Fifth Estate advocated mutinies in the U.S. military, victory for the Viet Cong, and supported Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver for President on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. Ten years later, the paper advocated the traditional anarchist position on voting of abstention.

We all grow and change.

Cancel Sub

My son is an inmate in South Carolina and would like you to remove his name and cancel any mailings to him. The prison is not letting them in and causing trouble for him.

Here is his information: Name withheld Columbia, S.C.

Fifth Estate reply: Prison mailrooms are notoriously arbitrary with rules governing incoming mail which can, and are often used to refuse almost anything. It usually depends on the politics of the prison employee and/or how the prisoner addressee is regarded by the administration.

Sometimes, it’s just plain stupid. A couple of years ago, a *Fifth Estate* article about Vietnam was illustrated by the iconic photo of a very young Vietnamese girl whose village had been struck by U.S. napalm and whose clothing had been burned off of her.

A prison rejected the entire issue stating the image represented “inappropriate sexually explicit material.” We cut out the offending page from the issue and mailed it back to the prisoner.

This same photo was flagged by Face-book in September for “violating standards regarding inappropriate posts,” and removed, but following protests the social network relented and allowed its display.

Congrats from Portugal

On the occasion of your 50th anniversary that makes your magazine the oldest anarchist publication in the United States and one of the oldest in the world, I would like to salute you remembering the importance that it has had and continues to have for me.

I first read the *Fifth Estate* magazine in Lisbon, Portugal, after the left military coup of 1974 that became the beginning of a social revolution.

I was a young member of a libertarian communist collective which had a small bookshop in the center of Lisbon where we sold similar publications from various countries.

In the context of the social unrest of that period, my first readings of the FE were not sufficiently aware, but some time later they began to be. And, it was a discovery.

The links that the FE established between contemporary radical thought, historical anarchism, the indigenous cultures of the Americas and of other regions of the world, as well as technology as a central element of power and tyranny, began to change the views that I had then. All this was a liberating stimulation that led me to open new mental windows.

For example, despite having lived in France in exile for five years (for refusing to fight in the colonial war in Angola that the Portuguese fascist regime waged there for twelve years), I was unaware of the essential work of Jacques Ellul which I got to know thanks to the FE.

Later, I had the great pleasure of meeting in Europe with two members of the FE, with whom I remain friends to this day. Through them, I got in touch with other stimulating creativity in the United States such as works by Fredy Perlman, some of which are being translated into Portuguese and published by a friend.

For all this, which represents a lot to me, I send to the Fifth Estate Collective a fraternal and grateful greeting of friendship.

Júlio Henriques
Portalegre, Portugal

Less Self-Congrats

More news, letters, current project updates/rundowns, under-told anarchist history; less analysis, criticism, self-congratulations would also be good.

Anyway, greetings from the one-time anarchist capital of the world.

Cooper Otte
Eugene, Ore.

Fifth Estate replies: News is tough to report in a publication which only appears three times a year since current events are so quickly dated.

We try to report on anarchist projects and there is usually one an issue. For the last 40 years of our existence, we have concentrated mostly on critiques of issues and ideas, which is what we think has sustained us. About the self-congratulations for our 50 years of publishing? No apologies!

Thanks for your continuing support and interest.

Soon Free

I am a federal prisoner who will be released in 2019.

I am more nervous to be leaving prison than ever before. I've never seen such blatant disrespect for the rule of law as demonstrated recently by the police. I don't know enough about my rights as an ex-felon to know what to do or say to make sure I am not harassed and taken advantage of.

Do you know of publications that I can write that have Cop Watches or education for ex-felons against the police?

Name Withheld Winton
N.C.

FE Reply: See information below.

Resources for Prisoners & Supporters

Prison Legal News, a publication that can put prisoners in touch with news and resources. P.O. Box 1151, 1013 Lucerne Ave., Lake Worth FL 33460.

StopPrisonProfiteers.Org

Challenges companies that rip-off prisoners and their families on basic services.

PrisonEcology.org

Exposes environmental violations in prisons.

HumanRightsDefenseCenter.org

Coordinates many of the sites above.

Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC)

Industrial Workers of the World IWW.org. IWOC was one of the forces behind the September 9 nation-wide prison work strike.

fifth Estate

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/397-winter-2017/letters>
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