

Letters

Our readers respond

Various Authors

2018

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On Self-Defense I

Taking part in protests is an act of defiance which may result in violent retaliation. “In Defense of Self Defense” by Paul Walker in the Fall 2017 *Fifth Estate* (#399) made this clear.

In it, the writer asserted that martial arts have a place in the anarchist movement. However, to attempt to understand the martial arts simply as means to defend against a violent attack is misguided. It will always be more revolutionary to return evil with good and hate with love.

Training can help a student of the martial arts to know what is safe and what is not. It can help them understand the nature of conflict. These non-violent means are the best way to make use of martial arts training within the anarchist movement.

Matti Salminen
Brattleboro, Vt.

FE note: Matti Salminen is Founder of the King Snake Tradition, an anarchist system of martial arts development.

On Self-Defense II

I read the article Paul Walker wrote in the Summer 2017 FE, “In Defense of Self-Defense.” I was the martial arts instructor he mentions as leading the more informal class in which he learned the skills he used in defending himself and others against an attack.

I am proud he wrote it, as it embodies my philosophy of defense. I’m both disturbed by the ultra-left and ultra right, and don’t want, as the article states, to feel glad that I smashed someone in the face with a club.

Though I practiced Tang Soo Do for thirty or more years, I never was in a fight. I admire the Samurai, but they were eager to fight and kill, some killing bound prisoners to test the sharpness of their swords. Their culture produced some of the most beautiful art and perfected Zen, rock gardens, flower arranging, etc., but during WWII, practiced atrocities beyond our belief.

Guns don’t kill; ideas kill. Believing one is superior to another allowed Japanese soldiers in China to have contests to see who could out behead the other, as reported in Japanese newspapers. I can’t believe how ordinary Germans could work in death camps unless they were convinced that Jews and others were not human.

The Heart Sutra of Buddhism implores one to put aside vain opinions because they lead to sorrow. Greed, anger, and ignorance lead to all the suffering in our world.

Sanjuro
Small Town, Michigan

How Can We Grow?

Congratulations on the 400th issue!

To the editors and readers: how can we grow this year as a community of anarchists in ways that display our positive program? Can FE contribute in tracking and giving readers an opportunity to network for these positive programs specifically?

Opposing prisons and white supremacists are very important, and so is feeding people, having them housed, building community committees, and having alternative infrastructure that people can reach out to when in need. We can destroy, but we can build also.

Shifting the collective consciousness to what is possible and beneficial, in terms of anarchism, would be easier with networks that are accessed without any prior connections (not talking organizing that requires strict security culture a la antifa) to the radical community and that display these positive programs that we have to offer.

Walter Sebring
Los Angeles

No More Guilty Pleas!

According to a 2014 report, the Missouri Public Defender system managed over 71,000 cases for the year. The criminal justice system cannot provide a jury trial for each of these cases.

Indeed, the system would collapse if it was forced to try even 1,000 of these cases. This is especially true for minor criminal offenses, such as drug possession, trespass, nonsupport, property damage, stealing, and traffic-related offenses, of which the majority of these 71,000 cases consist.

In every one of these cases, the accused has the right to a jury trial. The state would be compelled to dismiss the charges if every one of the accused made such a demand.

Other advantages would also emerge. First, the state would begin to decline to file charges in several categories of offenses. Second, this approach would reduce the number of probation violation cases, since the number of persons on probation would decrease in proportion to the number of cases being dismissed. And third, this might help to ameliorate the social injustice that results from making convicted felons out of people who commit nonviolent offenses.

The public defender must neither request nor consent to any continuance whatsoever in their cases. Continuances and delays spell the death-knell to our clients. In misdemeanor cases, an entry of appearance and request for discovery should be filed immediately.

The state will in response likely attempt retaliatory measures such as threatened revocation of a plea agreement, additional charges, heightened felony offender status, and threat of a maximum sentence. But since these threats become real only upon the conclusion of a jury trial, there is not much to be feared for minor criminal offenses, since those will likely never proceed to trial en masse anyway.

The public defender has tremendous power under our current system. It should be exercised immediately.

No more guilty pleas. Force the dismissal.
Matthew G. Mueller, Missouri Public Defender
Kansas City, Mo.

Wandering Mind

My mind is wandering after reading Summer 2017 *Fifth Estate* (#398) about the imprisoned Cleveland Four. (visit Cleveland4Solidarity.org)

I read *Prison: The Perpetual Money Machine* that helped me develop a Crime Creation theory of law enforcement and their tactic of entrapment.

In the real world, the police are a menace. But, they and the public watch television and see diabolical, sensational crimes being solved on real life shows like “Cops” and on dozens of fictional ones. They hypnotize us to the reality of police brutality, perjury, & militarization.

The fact is, however, the actual clearance rate (charges being brought) is as low as 15 percent in crimes such as larceny, car theft, and burglary which represent the highest number of offenses committed. Many are pinned on some easy target.

People on the margins of society—the mentally ill, many of them veterans, alcoholics, drug addicts, and homeless—can be manipulated by the police into becoming informants.

Name withheld

Wayne Scott Unit

Angleton, Texas

Hate the Powers That Be

I got shot your zine to read from a fellow comrade prisoner at another prison. I would like a regular subscription and any anarchist literature you are able to provide. Days are boring and lonely inside these walls.

It's good to know that I am not alone and there are like-minded people willing to reach out with support.

This business of being locked up for other people's profit started for me when I was two and seems to have no end in sight. I hate the powers that be since they keep me from a peace I long for but will likely never know.

Name withheld

California State Prison

Sacramento

Embrace of Empathy

Prior to the Fall 2017 issue, the last FE I read was from its late 1960s counterculture phase preceding its identity as an anarchist journal.

Nature's amoral dynamics have endowed us with a moral compass through our potential to feel an empathetic concern for others and that the identifiable neuro-circuitry which mediates this is the wellspring of the anarchist tenets of mutual aid, solidarity and the compassionate sense of shared mortality.

The evolutionary origins of caring for immediate family extend back into the deep time of our mammalian evolution when the emotions which first gave the earth scenes of poignant drama weren't yet articulately expressible through symbolic cognition as they would in our hominid phase.

Through conscious moral reasoning, the embrace of empathy can universalize to all sentient species. What arose anciently out of chance contingencies, namely the reproductive value of empathetic caring for nuclear family members and those in the small extended family groups we evolved in, had an inner logic from which the glimmerings of a moral intelligence new to the earth that would emerge and eventually inform humanity's most progressive ethical traditions.

Undeniably, our species also has another face in the fear-based hatred of the ethnic or tribal “other” which has brought untold horror and suffering into the world from our prehistory to the present moment.

This probably also has neuro-circuitry rooted in an evolutionary past of resource competition between tribes, but it needn't be ascendant and never is where compassion for mortality is present.

The universalization of empathy is the best bet our species has for a more humane world.

The lack of empathy shown by (mostly male) psychopaths is correlated with brain scans showing a diminishment of its processing circuitry in the brain, a finding which in all likelihood is true of hard core fascists given the empathy deficit evidenced by their bigotry and penchant for violence.

In view of the fact that genes do seem at play in their social aggression, against which the right of defense is unquestioned, an anarchist morality should be premised in a humanely scientific rather than punitive perspective.

Brent Collins

Small Town, Missouri

fifth Estate

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/400-spring-2018/letters>
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