

Letters

Various Authors

2022

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.

CHOMSKYIAN

Your editorial on the Ukraine war in FE #411, Spring 2022 starts out promising, calling for the defeat of Putin by the Ukrainian resistance, and the overthrow of his dictatorship in Russia.

But it rapidly deteriorates into the usual Chomskyian conditioned response of changing the subject to the crimes of US imperialism, and equating each instance with Putin's current destruction of Ukraine—even when no such equivalency exists (e.g., Tripoli).

The term “war criminal” is put in scare quotes, as if Putin weren't one. And, we are again told that his aggression is really the fault of the West for expanding NATO into the former East.

What is left out of all this is the Ukrainians. We are even given the old line about how NATO is willing to “fight to the last Ukrainian”—as if the Ukrainians were mere NATO puppets, and not fighting for their very national and physical survival.

We are given no context as to why Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic states sought NATO membership—no mention of Putin's bombardment of Chechnya in 1999, military aggression against Georgia in 2008, illegal annexation of pieces of Ukraine's national territory in 2014, and savage bombardment of Syria starting in 2015 and continuing today.

I was hoping for some words of support for the armed anarchist units fighting the Russian occupation in Ukraine, proud inheritors of the legacy of Makhno.

Or, the Russian anti-war protesters, thousands of whom now fill Putin's prisons, facing lengthy terms merely for demonstrating their dissent.

Finally, the mood in the US now is less like that before World War I than before the Civil War. The nation is bitterly divided, and the internal threat we face in Trumpism is fundamentally allied with Putinism. It is time to call for the defeat of both, without equivocation.

Bill Weinberg **CounterVortex.org** New York City

FE Note: Bill Weinberg is a frequent contributor to the Fifth Estate.

FE Reply: We stand by what we wrote. Putin is, indeed, a war criminal, but his criminality has allowed a diversion of that description from those of other countries' leaders including, and perhaps especially, the U.S.

Everyone has been repeatedly reminded about Russia's aggressions. What is conveniently ignored are those of the U.S.

The Pentagon militarists are quite gleeful about this splendid little war. It affirms and expands NATO, degrades the Russian military, justifies the American war machine's global presence, and creates the illusion of the West as a bloc that desires peace.

In the last three paragraphs we expressed hope because of the non-hierarchical grassroots resistance through collective action, solidarity and mutual aid projects in many parts of the world, including Ukraine and Russia. Lack of space prevented us from presenting this resistance in detail.

But, luckily they have been shared and continue to be shared online and in print in other publications.

One editing oversight: the term war criminal shouldn't have been in quotes as we routinely delete them from our writers' texts including yours.

HOLD OUT HOPE

I agree with Eric Laursen in his review of *The Dawn of Everything* by David Graeber and David Wenegrow [FE #411, Spring, 2022] that the destruction of great alluvial urban centers like the "Mississippian" Cahokia 1,000 years ago or Talianky in central Ukraine 6,000 years ago, raises a terrible question.

If these cultures were really so great, complex, non-hierarchical and institutionally flexible, why did they disappear so completely that we don't even know who built them, only to be unearthed by archaeologists like Wenegrow?

The Davids suggest, but do not claim hard evidence for a terrible patriarchal overthrow, a mythic story told in many cultures to explain women's fall from power.

Also fascinating is that some traditional cultures may have preserved more than mythic memories, but actual cultural traces of these earlier cultures. This is not in the book, but the Cherokee were part of the Mississippian culture.

A small Cherokee town in Northeastern Alabama near Wills Valley was still called Tsu-sau-ya-sah, or "Ruins of a Great City" when the whites got there, although it had been gone for a thousand years.

The Cherokee were strongly matrilineal, with some women having real power in times of war and even deciding what to do with war captives; whether to execute or adopt them. Cherokee women had kin-making power, as the focal points of genealogy and keepers of homes and farms, which passed from mother to daughter.

So, it is possible there once really was, if not matriarchy in the sense of a simple inversion, a civilized world where women had much more social power before organized warfare became so important. The Davids suggest, based on archaeological evidence of temples and living quarters, that these great cities were less fortified, centralized, and hierarchical than the patriarchal cults that succeeded them, often symbolized by pyramids.

The two Davids suggest, as they must if their story is to hold out hope, that these early cities show, not just a superseded stage of human development, but something that is still possible.

Jim Stodder,
Hartford, Conn.

UNDERWHELMED

Your magazine has had many fine issues. Unfortunately, I found the last one to be underwhelming and problematic. It raised serious concerns for how reviews are written in radical publications. Many of the reviews were entirely too informational and affirmative.

I'd like to think that there is more to the reading of a book than the mere categorization of it as a good or bad book and that the conversation around these texts can expand beyond the rehashing of the information therein. Jacques Ellul once relayed (to paraphrase) that books are intended to be read, not consulted. In many ways the radical "review" is a compilation of books which may be consulted. We can do better, no?

There have been many fine reviews that develop ideas or record the reader's ever-burning questions—an attempt to convey to fellow readers possible errors and implications.

I found few original interrogations in the latest issue. The opening review of *The Dawn of Everything* is, on top of being written by a friend of Graeber (one of the co-authors, now deceased), a summary of affirmations the reviewer has with the text.

While the review does respectably bring forth important questions about resistance brought out by Graeber and Wengrow, it seems sublimely unaware of the mass of negative reviews piling up from anthropologists.

In fact, many had been critiquing Graeber's thesis for years before the book and, it seems, were ignored. Recently a session at the Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (CHAGS) in Dublin, Ireland directly addressed these critiques.

Treating new and exciting best-sellers as game-changing originals is relatively easy. It is with the momentum of the culture. But let us not be fooled, the publishing industry is within the apparatus which controls us and, as such, the rebels and anarchists on the outside must be thorough and critical when we encounter its products.

Steve Kirk

Wardensville WV

FE Note: Steve Kirk publishes *Oak: A Journal Against Civilization*. oakjournal.org. He has written for this magazine several times.

Eric Laursen replies: It's certainly important to be careful in reviewing a book on any subject as important and contentious as the origins of human society, but it's next to impossible to explore all the issues thoroughly in a review with a tight word-count limit.

Therefore, I focused on conveying why I think *The Dawn of Everything* is an important book in the anarchist tradition.

I was not unaware—"sublimely" or otherwise—that the book had received a "mass" of negative reviews, nor that it had received a "mass" of positive responses as well.

I think a careful rereading of my review will make clear that it isn't a "summary of affirmations." I didn't have enough space for that, even if I'd wanted to provide it.

What I tried to convey was that, whatever they might be wrong about, Graeber and Wengrow have changed the conversation in their field by showing how human social development never follows a linear, deterministic line from "primitive" communities to the modern State, but twists and turns and probes different possibilities.

There are all kinds of revolutionary implications in this reading of the evidence (Jim Stodder's letter points out one of these), and that's why I gave *The Dawn of Everything* an overall good review.

692 FILMS

I read with interest the movie reviews in FE #411, Spring 2022. John Thackary's starts with "Director Steven Soderbergh is well-known for both prolific output (an astounding 47 films and counting) and speed of production (roughly a movie a year over the past decade)."

It might interest you to know that the most prolific movie maker in the entire 127-year history of movie making is an anarchist; namely, myself: who goes by the name of "Tentatively, a Convenience,"

In the last 47 years, I've made 692 movies, 206 of which are features. If you would like to check out what an ultra-low-budget anarchist movie maker's work might be like, in contrast to the Hollywood movies reviewed in *Fifth Estate*, a list of my movies is at idioideo.pleintekst.nl/tENTMoviesIndexanchored2.html. Most of them are online available for free.

All of them were paid for with what I made working at jobs that didn't necessarily pay that well. The entirety of my body of work was produced on less than 1 percent of 1 percent of what a single movie of Soderbergh's costs. None of my movies rely on murders to engage the audience emotionally.

Tentatively, a Convenience

Pittsburgh

EAGERLY AWAITING

I have been reading the *Fifth Estate* for almost six years prison. I have become aware of a completely new approach in anarcho-syndicalism to the social issues facing us today.

I have quite a few people eagerly awaiting behind me for each issue as I make sure to pass them around get some conversations going.

My only gripe is the long time between magazines.

Seth Yates Ferguson Unit

Midway, Texas

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/412-fall-2022/letters>
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