

Letters

Various Authors

2023

Send letters to **fe — at — fifthestate — dot — org** or Fifth Estate, POB 201016, Ferndale MI 48220.

DON'T VOTE

In order to engage in electoral politics by claiming it as harm reduction, you have to ignore the fact that each new law creates new criminals, and that the state has always sought to isolate and punish criminals. Aside from whatever fantasy of minimizing damage Kathy Ferguson proffers in her article, “Anarchism & the Vote,” in FE #413, Spring, 2023, that’s an objective harm to individuals and even entire classes of people.

While she acknowledges that our desires as anarchists will never be supported by any authoritarian individual or system, she insists that voting (whether for representatives or propositions to make new laws; she never makes that clear) is on the same level as getting a valid passport or hiring an attorney, as Emma Goldman did, even though Goldman, quoted by Ferguson several paragraphs earlier, was explicit that voting is pointless.

The entire article contains an amazingly naive perspective on how the state operates, what it claims as its purview, and how it maintains itself. Among the primary issues in non-monarchist states is the question of legitimacy.

This thorny issue is tackled differently in different contexts, but in the U.S. the mythological illusion of democracy (one person, one vote; majority rule; checks and balances, etc.) is invoked and fostered despite its innumerable and obvious flaws, and that’s putting it mildly.

Ferguson mentions that “voting legitimizes the system of representative government by habituating us to the state,” but can’t bear to accept the logical conclusion, which is to refuse to participate in legitimizing it.

Anarchist electoralists constantly bombard anarchist abstentionists with the argument that this election is the most important one of our lifetimes, and Ferguson is no exception.

Her penultimate sentence (“In grave times, we need to work against the worst threats however we can.”) is a typical plea.

Yet, she does not enumerate any of the characteristics of these grave times we live in. What’s more grave this year (or next year) than last year or ten years ago? It’s a weak conclusion to a weak argument.

Boles

Northern California

Kathy Ferguson replies: I think it’s best to analyze politics by starting from the position that there is always more than one thing going on. Voting in governmental elections could both contribute to unearned legitimacy for the state and at the same time ward off some of the more draconian outcomes of elections.

Sometimes the latter is more compelling than the former. For instance, if Donald Trump had not been president of the United States, we would probably not have the Supreme Court that we have now and *Roe v. Wade* would still be law. I am not arguing that this would have magically fixed everything. I’m arguing that access to legal abortion,

to take one example, is important enough to pursue through voting. If there is always more than one thing going on, then establishing the logical conclusions of our arguments is a complex and open-ended process, not a done deal.

WHERE ARE THE ECOVILLAGES?

Among the Fifth Estate-associated writers and activists, John Clark seems to have a sense of why establishing ecovillages should be a primary endeavor.

(For Clark's FE articles go to fifthestate.org/archive/search.)

I rarely hear other FE writers say anything about the ecovillage movement. Yet, David Watson, a long-time writer for the publication, wrote:

“At a time when the synergistic cyclone of industrial civilization seems hell-bent on the destruction of the planetary life web, we sorely need agents of transformation, indeed, of salvation, to work as conscious collectives, even Beloved Communities, to save the world.

“We need revolutionaries of a new kind and for a new dispensation. And yet, just when such a human subject is most needed to stop the drift and thrust to extinction, mass technics seem to have eroded the very social and psychological basis for such subjectivity, making human beings less able than ever to confront this crisis” (from his English Afterword to *En el camino a ninguna parte: Civilización, tecnología y berbería*).

My sense is that he has in mind collectives rather than real residential communities. I don't understand why he, and the Fifth Estate generally, rarely advocates for the latter. Ecovillages could be base camps for us as we support each other making social change together.

Steve Welzer

East Windsor N.J.

FE Note: Steve Welzer is co-editor of *Green Horizon* magazine. Besides ones by John Clark on the subject, the FE has published two articles by Steve on Ecovillages, the last one in our Summer 2021 issue.

CANCEL SUBSCRIPTION

I have to cancel my subscription because anarchist literature is no longer permitted here.

Thanks for looking out for me all these years.

Name withheld

Allen-Oakwood Correctional Institution

Lima, Ohio

FE Note: This publication has been gifting the incarcerated free subscriptions for almost all of its 58-year existence.

During the Vietnam War, hundreds of issues were mailed each week to GIs fighting the conflict with its anti-war message. In both situations, censorship was arbitrary.

Recently, prison refusal of our magazine has greatly increased and usually for no stated reason. When there is, it's almost laughable as when an issue was rejected because in the classic French painting, Eugene Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People," a bare breast is visible.

Often issues are returned stating the address needs to include the prisoner's number when it is clearly showing on the label. And, in what can only be interpreted as intentional malice, the rejection sticker is glued over the entire label making it almost impossible to determine who is the addressee.

Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do other than delete this prisoner's name from our subscription list. Most carceral facility policy is to inform the prisoner that mail was refused, but this is rarely done.

Still, the overwhelming majority of issues sent to prisoners are received as we can tell by the appreciative letters that are sent to us each time we publish.

Please support our Prisoner Fund when subscribing or renewing.

Sidebar

Three collectives belonging to the history of Portuguese anarchism, Centro de Cultura Libertaria, BOESG (library) and *A Batalha* (newspaper), have purchased an Anarchist Center in the Lisbon region: a common space, open to old and new collectives, that will rid them of the pressure brought about by gentrification and real estate. The new Center will also host the archives and libraries of the three collectives. They are asking for contributions of solidarity.

Crowdfunding: whydonate.com/en/fundraising/anarchistcenter

Paypal: paypal.me/cculturalibertaria

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/414-fall-2023/letters>
Fifth Estate #414, Fall 2023

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/414-fall-2023/letters)