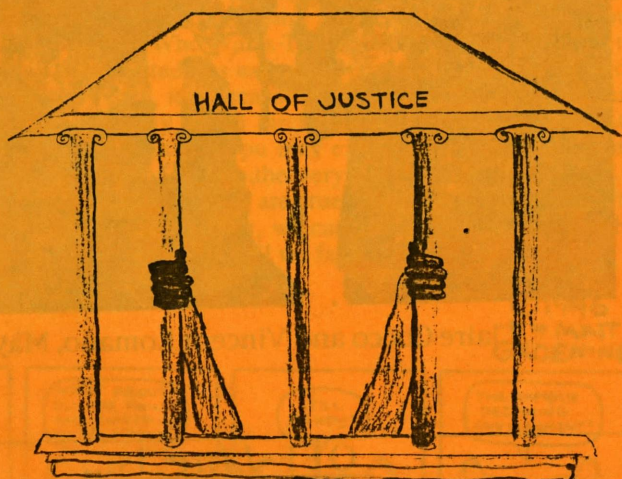


OFF-*Line*

A Coccoloco/
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Publication

Summer
2000

Issue # 13



COCO

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Claire Cocco and Vincent Romano, May 2000

OFF-Line is...

- Humor, Art, Poetry, Prose, You!
- defying authoritarianism and resisting convention
- truth, justice, and the un-American way
- sincere, diverse, thoughtful, and controversial
- avoiding alienating, bland, superficial, privileged on-line technology to fashion community and counterculture
- an intimate postmodern salon of intellectual discussion
- time well spent!

Issues \$1 by mail, free to low-income; trades welcomed.
 Comments, submissions, angry threats: Claire E. Cocco and
 Vincent J. Romano, 35 Barker Ave. #4G, White Plains, NY 10601.

Special Memorial Day quote!

"He who joyfully marches to music in rank and file has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him, the spinal cord would fully suffice." — Albert Einstein

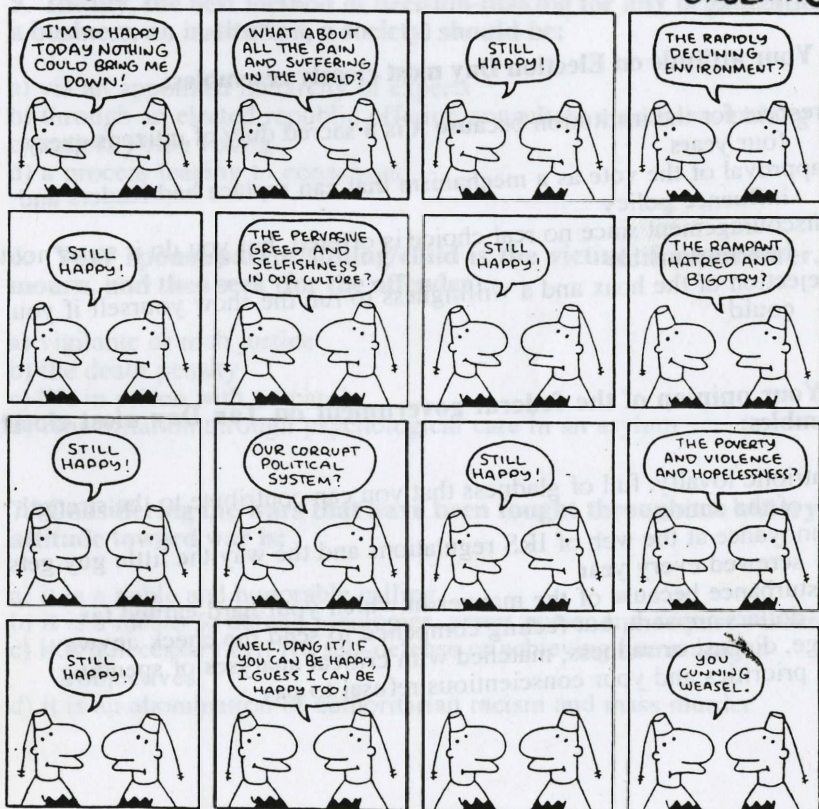
A Plea for Compassion

Vincent

Several readers have pointed out to me on more than one occasion that they find my writing in **OFF-Line** to be "negative," "sarcastic," "bitter," etc. If you share this feeling, then you are exactly the person I desire to reach most. I acknowledge the truth of your observation, but ask you to pause before recoiling. I write this way because it is an inescapable part of who I am, and because, quite simply, not everything in the world is as fun as "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?" While I try to add as much humor and lightheartedness as I can, because I believe in balance, if this zine strikes you as overly dark, it is because I seek to utilize it as a balancing remedy for what I experience in my social circles: unrelenting and unrealistic positivity. The feeling of unpleasantness you may experience from reading my anguished critiques in no way compares to the very real pain and suffering of literally billions of people on this planet, who are cruelly oppressed by others with more money and guns. Without compassion, we cannot process and act on this information. We will not change the world until we face the darkness within.

LIFE IN HELL

©1996
BY MATT
GROENING



Take This Anarchist Quiz!

Vincent

Ready for an anarchist version of Twenty Questions? Pick the answer to each multiple choice question below that best approximates your position. If more than one response appeals to you, choose the one that resonates most strongly.

1. Your car is stopped at a red light on an early Sunday morning. You are fully awake and enjoying the quiet and peaceful new day. However, the stoplight stays red for what seems like ages. You:

- a) hum a tune while your car engine idles
- b) curse to yourself and tap your fingers on the steering wheel
- c) would like to go, except you can't be 100% sure a police car is hiding around a corner
- d) check and double-check the intersection and then proceed to go through the red light

2. Your attitude on Election Day most closely resembles:

- a) respect for the institution because it is a sacred duty of citizens every four years
- b) approval of the vote as a mechanism that can replace bad leaders and influence policy
- c) discouragement since no real choice is offered, but you do it so as not to be irresponsible
- d) rejection of the hoax and a willingness to run the show yourself if you could

3. Your opinion of the federal government on Tax Day most closely resembles:

- a) patriotic loyalty, full of gladness that you can contribute to the strength of the nation
- b) annoyance at the web of IRS regulations and the way the little guy gets screwed every year
- c) disturbance because of the manner in which your hard-earned tax dollars are sent, but feeling compelled to send the check anyway
- d) rage, disgust or sadness, matched with critical analyses of spending priorities and your conscientious refusal to pay

4. The Catholic Church in the year 2000 continues to be the single largest religious denomination, both in the U.S. and in the world (one billion people identify themselves as Catholic). The Pope is recognized as the head of the Church by Catholics, as a head of state by world leaders, and as a dignified figure or celebrity by most others. If you are Catholic (or, if not, play along anyway), what would you consider your stance towards the Pope to be (or would be)?

- a) He is the Church's infallible representative of Jesus Christ, and his teachings must be adhered to by all Catholics as the law of the Church.
- b) He is a saintly man who is an important moral voice for our times, deserving of our respect.
- c) He is disagreeable to me on several issues, so I politely ignore him and make up my own mind.
- d) He may or may not be benevolent, but he is definitely a dictator, and as such he should be challenged and perhaps even deposed.

5. Ideally, the best method of decision-making for any organization (e.g. a business, an institution, a society) should be:

- a) via an appointed hierarchy of experts
- b) through an elected republic offering consultative decision-making
- c) majority-rule voting
- d) a process leading to consensus

6. Your spouse/parent/sibling/child is the victim of a murderer. You mourn, and then seek (for the offender):

- a) vigilante or mob justice
- b) the death penalty
- c) life in prison with no parole
- d) rehabilitation through psychological care in an asylum

7. Considering the wars that have been fought throughout history, your attitude toward war is:

- a) it is a noble and honorable calling
- b) it is a means to defend ideologies, assert power and acquire resources
- c) it is a necessary evil for self-defense or achieving humanitarian objectives
- d) it is an abomination of authoritarian racism and mass murder

8. Police brutality is on the rise in cities across the country, especially affecting people of color. Your response is:

- a) the police do what they have to do to catch criminals; they never bother me
- b) these incidents were unfortunate accidents caused by the police officer's mistaken judgment or a provocative action of the victim
- c) to press for sensitivity training for the police and disciplining the bad apples
- d) advocating the dismantling of police forces for their systematic racism and oppression

9. Which motivating incentive forms the basis for the best economic system for the world?

- a) survival
- b) individual profit
- c) state planning
- d) community need

10. For matters of military defense, you support:

- a) armed citizen militias
- b) procuring as many weapons and as much advanced technology as possible
- c) moderate military spending, relative to that of other nations
- d) a decentralized system of civilian-based defense

11. The proper parent-child relationship is:

- a) spare the rod and spoil the child
- b) spankings and punishments for bad behavior
- c) firm rules and discipline
- d) age-appropriate reasoning and modelling right conduct

12. Your attitude towards personal property is best expressed as:

- a) the sky's the limit
- b) desiring as few regulations as possible
- c) redistribute wealth via progressive tax rates
- d) possessions above individual need are exploitative and wasteful

13. You are called to jury duty for a criminal case. You will receive adequate compensation from your employer. Your reaction is:

- a) feeling competent and unprejudiced enough to evaluate any case
- b) respect for the system because it is a sacred duty of citizens
- c) to ponder ways in which you can maybe provide an excuse to get off
- d) revulsion at the prospect of participating in the criminal justice system

14. You are in a two-parent, one-income household. Your child's public school teacher instructs him or her in a controversial topic and takes a position with which you disagree. You may or may not choose to rally others to the cause, but your individual response is to:

- a) sue the district
- b) withdraw your child and send him to private school
- c) complain in the PTA
- d) seek to homeschool your child

15. Watching the evening news with your friend, you see a report of a notable court case in which a decision is close to being rendered. A large corporation has been found to have caused the death of several consumers and risked the lives of many others by marketing its harmful product. You turn to your friend and say:

- a) "Have you seen that company's commercial with the dog and the sled?"
- b) "For God's sake, can't they see it was an accident? This litigious society makes me sick. We need tort reform so there will not be ridiculously excessive penalties to fill the lawyers' pockets."
- c) "I can't believe it. Those poor people! I hope the families get millions from the judgment."
- d) "Is there any group organizing a nationwide boycott and civil disobedience campaign?"

16. Graffiti art is cropping up on walls, malls, signs and abandoned buildings in the downtown area of your city. Your reaction is:

- a) "Graffiti isn't art! Art is in a museum. This mess pisses me off!"
- b) "I don't live in that area of town because I seek to avoid that element. That's destroying private property."
- c) "I'd prefer not to see it. I support programs to repaint walls and heavy fines for violators."
- d) "Less ads, more tags! Three cheers for the kids!"

17. What is your position on the prospect of homosexual marriage in this country?

- a) "It's an abomination. God hates fags and they are doomed to hell. The Bible says so."
- b) "It degrades the sanctity of the institution of marriage. They should keep it inside the bedroom — I don't want it in my face."
- c) "I respect gays because I respect all who are different. I support civil unions as the proper alternative for their situation."
- d) "Gays and lesbians should be able to do whatever they want, social mores be damned."

18. Presently, the number of prisoners in the U.S. has reached two million, and the U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. The rapid growth of prisoners and new prisons in the last 15 years has largely been fueled by the war on drugs, as well as harsher sentences. Crime rates have declined, but the trend shows no sign of slowing down. How do you feel about this situation?

- a) Well, if you keep your nose clean, you won't have a problem.
- b) I say lock 'em up. Clearly, it is an efficient means of keeping criminals out of society.
- c) I'm concerned about the large number of nonviolent drug users in prison. We need new laws passed to reform drug users and focus on the drug dealers and murderers.
- d) Prison cages human beings like animals. It is part of an injustice system that is biased against the poor and people of color and profits the rich. Open the doors!

19. Americans have had different conceptions of freedom, law and government throughout our history. Which position would you agree with?

- a) "You hear about 'constitutional rights,' 'free speech' and the 'free press.' You never hear a real American talk like that." — Mayor Frank Hague, Jersey City
- b) "Freedom is about authority. Freedom is about the willingness of every single human being to cede to lawful authority a great deal of discretion about what you do." — Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, New York City
- c) "It is to secure our rights that we resort to government at all." — Thomas Jefferson
- d) "Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves." — Henry David Thoreau

20. Pick a song/lyric that most closely fits your personality. (These are four "pop" songs, so you may not care for any one in particular, but go with the lyric that fits you best):

- a) *Livin' La Vida Loca* (Ricky Martin) — "She'll make you take your clothes off and go dancing in the rain...her lips are devil red and her skin's the color mocha / She will wear you out / *Livin' La Vida Loca*"
- b) *The Star Spangled Banner* (Francis Scott Key) — "And the rocket's red glare / the bombs bursting in air / gave proof through the night / that our flag was still there...o'er the land of the free / and the home of the brave"
- c) *Another Day in Paradise* (Phil Collins) — "She calls out to the man on the street...'I have nowhere to sleep'...Oh, think twice / It's another day for you and me in paradise"
- d) *Imagine* (John Lennon) — "Imagine there's no countries / If isn't hard to do / Nothing to kill or die for / and no religion too / Imagine all the people / living life in peace / You may say that I'm a dreamer / but I'm not the only one / I hope some day you'll join us / and the world will be one"

ANSWER KEY: Time to total up your score! For each "a" you circled, give yourself 5 points. The "b's" will garner you 3 points, while "c's" net you 1 point. You get 0 points for each "d" response. While most anarchists probably do not play golf, one thing this quiz has in common with that game is that a lower score is better.

I've organized the quiz in a way so that all of the "a" answers would be selected by someone who is practically oblivious. If you score a perfect 100, I consider you to be extraordinarily ignorant, three steps beyond knee-jerk reactionary, and to have violent attitudes and/or tendencies. You've never critically examined anything in your life, and thus are a victim of our education system, your upbringing, and your own laziness. The chance that this type of person would even be reading **OFF-Line** is infinitesimal, however, as s/he would put it down quickly in favor of watching the teevee.

The "b's" are basically conservative responses. If you score a 60, you are likely a card-carrying Republican and might be extremely angry if I was demonstrating in your immediate vicinity. You have a deep respect for traditions, are very attached to the status quo, and cannot imagine anything different. Between 60 and 100 treads into the extreme danger zone. If you dare to be exposed to radically different views than the ones you hold, please keep reading this zine.

By now, you probably can guess that answering "c" indicates you're essentially a liberal. A 20 suggests you vote Democratic, definitely have questions about the way things are in the world, but maybe are a bit cautious in expressing them or prefer the legal, official channels. You are my ally, but we don't see eye to eye on everything I estimate a score of 40 as par for the course, and project that the "average American" would get a tally around this median.

Obviously, all "d's" and zero points means, according to my reckoning, you are a flaming anarchist. Hurray! You win the prize: the opportunity to be alienated from mainstream society, harassed by police, and perhaps imprisoned for your beliefs. You clearly are aware of the illegitimacy of authoritarian regimes, oppose the institutionalized -isms (race, sex, age, capital, etc.), and desire the freedom to choose your own way of life. Anything between 0 and 20 says to me that you are probably closer to anarchy than you think, and just need a little push to move further. We should talk!

You may disagree with the shades of meaning I've assigned to the quiz. I anticipate that many will find the quiz controversial, as it is admittedly unscientific and imprecise. Send in your complaints, but only if you (think you) have a better way of formulating the questions or answers. Since I designed the survey, my biases are unavoidably inherent. However, I tried to avoid some of the more obvious problems, such as questions weighing the existence of God or nonviolence vs. violence as a tactical matter. These are too relative and variable for each person.

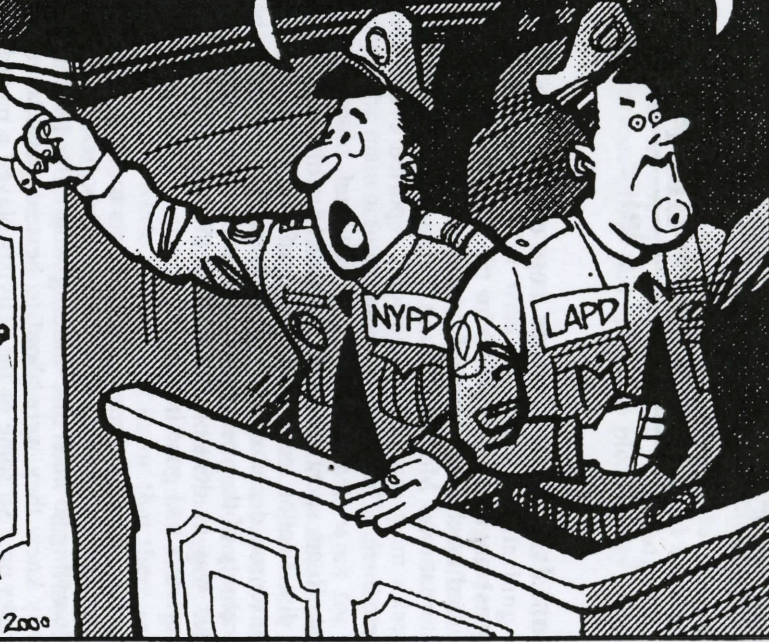
Some anarchists think a "true" anarchist rejects God out of hand ("No Gods, No Masters"), a proposition I've tried to dismantle in my various essays (i.e. **OFF-Line** #8, "Revolutionary Spirituality"). Others insist that the use of violence is a requirement of being a "real" anarchist, but I dispute that vigorously as well. In my thinking, violence against people makes you both immature and essentially the same as the system you oppose (if not in scale, certainly in character). Destruction of property may also be violence as well (see my essay in **OFF-Line** #5, "Is Sabotage Nonviolent?"). Thus, none of the "d" responses contain overt violent content, because I don't want to marginalize anyone who stands apart from the system but isn't comfortable with violence. If that's too weak a definition for anarchy for you, why don't you go blow something up, or maybe write a letter defending your position? I'd love to hear from you because I'll listen to anybody.

Thanks for playing!

WHAT POSSIBLE REASON
WOULD SOMEONE HAVE TO
FEAR AND ELUDE POLICE,
OTHER THAN GUILT?!

I DON'T KNOW!
THAT'S WHY WE
FILLED HIS BODY
FULL O' HOLES!

AND PLANTED
EVIDENCE ON
'IM, JUST TO
BE SURE!



KIRK © 2000

Who Are the Police? Claire

Part I: Agents of state repression

I was only able to be in DC for the demonstration on April 16th itself, and missed much of the general A16 mobilization against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. However, I learned about some of the week's most interesting and least reported events from two friends who were there. This is their account.

Kate Reuer spent the week before A16 at the Convergence Center, training in direct action techniques, the art of making puppets, dumpster diving, and consensus decision-making in large groups. She was inspired by the creativity of the young activists that planned the nonviolent resistance here. This was evident on Monday (A17), the day after I and most of the protesters had gone home.

About 2,000 of the remaining activists took to the DC streets. At a crucial point that morning, the activists stood in front of a blockade of riot police, attempting to enter the building where the IMF delegates were meeting. They knew they were about to be tear gassed because the cops had gas masks on. So some of the activists played a recording of the Darth Vader theme from Star Wars over a loudspeaker!

Their chants of "Stormtroopers!" clearly shook the cops. With no discernible order from a superior, one cop took off his gas mask. Seeing this, others in the row removed their masks as well. This diffused the situation enough that the activists could negotiate with the officer in charge. They agreed to end the standoff with a peaceful crossing of the police blockade. Some 600 activists elected to do this and accept arrest.

Eric LeCompte was one of them. At 6 feet 6 inches, he looks intimidating at first, but is known to some as "Big Buddha" because of his gentle voice and disarming manner. He is no stranger to arrests, having participated in many Atlantic Life Community protests against nuclear weapons and the Pentagon. Yet this action would land him in jail for the longest stay he has ever spent.

The activists spent their first night in a city jail, where they tried to sleep through the cops' deliberate loud noise. They were shackled to the floor, as regular inmates are.

The week before A16, the activists had been trained in jail solidarity, and thus most refused to give any information to the authorities. Withholding their names from the police would put a monkey wrench into the justice system and give them negotiating power. This solidarity held even when they were divided to appear in court in small groups. The judge lied to them, saying that each previous group had agreed to plead guilty and had left jail.

Most activists at this demonstration received violations that would involve a fine, but some faced felony charges for what amounted to attacking the police officers' clubs with their heads. In order to get all charges dropped or waived, the activists were going to (nonviolently) make life difficult for their oppressors.

The next day (Tuesday), the male activists were transported to the DC city jail by U.S. Marshals. I would think that since the Marshals work for the federal government, they would be the most skilled and professional at their jobs of law enforcement. Well, they were, in a sense. They were the most brutal officers that Eric encountered the entire time. He reported that, through the good cop/bad cop routine, they first tried to intimidate the activists. One would say, "We're going to treat you like the niggers we're used to unless you cooperate, you pussy faggot protesters." The "good cop" would then say, "Hey, you white boys should know that there are a lot of fags in the DC jail and they are going to rape you, so you might want to avoid getting with the general population." I was appalled to hear about this blatant racism, sexism and homophobia and how the Marshals attempted to use it to break down the activists' solidarity.

There was one guy next to Eric on the bus who repeated over and over that he wanted his lawyer. One of the Marshals warned him to shut up. He didn't. The Marshal then gave him a nice beat-down. Another guy protested and said, hey, he didn't do anything, and another Marshal picked this guy up and pounded him, too.

Once the men were in jail, some of the general population threatened the activists. The jail had been under lock-down since the weekend in anticipation of mass arrests. This meant that the men inside didn't get recreation time or other opportunities to go out of their cells. So they were angry.

Then the correctional officers allowed the general population to mix with the activists. (Keep in mind that for many of them, this was their first experience being arrested.) Eric reports that at first there was mistrust, but by being friendly and openly explaining why they had been arrested, the activists and DC jail population started to break down the barriers of class and race. Activists were invited into people's cells and took part in Bible study groups.

Eric found that many of the inmates understood the motivations of the activists and commended them. But the inmates also told the activists about the mistreatment they had received in jail. Someone demanded and received from the authorities a copy of a book that detailed the rights of prisoners. The anti-globalization folks interviewed the prisoners and learned that every right in the book had been violated. They recorded these in detail. On Wednesday night the activist men began a hunger strike to protest the treatment of the general population and to demand the dropping of the charges against the activists. Some of the general population joined them in the strike.

On Thursday the cops attempted to take the protesters to court again, without meeting their demands. Supporters on the outside tried to blockade the police vans from leaving the jail. And, most amazing to me, the women protested the move by stripping naked. They had to be forcibly dressed.

By Friday much of the DC injustice system had been "shut down." The men and women activists were not cooperating and thus taking up space in the jails for DC residents arrested on petty crime charges. These people could not be processed and had to be sent home. By law the jail had to closely monitor those on hunger strike, which siphoned time and money. And supporters were jamming the phone and e-mail lines of the warden's and the attorney general's offices. All this pressure coalesced to get the activists' charges dropped on Saturday to "jaywalking" with a maximum fine of five dollars.

Eric's story is the most convincing one I have heard about the power of jail actions for today's movements for justice. It seems to me that organized groups can become most engaged with democracy in jail because there they are directly facing state repression. It is the same as when people take the streets and are confronted by a line of police protecting some government building. There's no more pretense to the fact that the state can do what it wants with you — the veil is pulled away to reveal the ugly face of power. In theory, democratic laws and rights extend behind prison walls, but, in practice, the justice system is the place where democracy frays and dissolves. And even when there are no laws to safeguard the rights of prisoners, organized groups of people can obtain leverage through nonviolent action and force the authorities to heed their demands.

Up to a few months ago I had serious doubts about the efficacy of going to jail as an organizing tactic. But after experiencing an overnight in New York City jails, and seeing what happened in Seattle and DC, I am thinking differently. To change the system we need pressure from all parts of society, but we also need masses of people willing to confront state power at its most blatant, exposed point of convergence.

Part II: Human beings

Kate and I were headed toward our third (and, thankfully, final) day in court, answering to charges of Disorderly Conduct. We had both participated in a large civil disobedience action in the wake of the not guilty verdicts for the four cops in the Amadou Diallo police shooting trial. We arrived in downtown Manhattan near City Hall at about 8:30 a.m., and were greeted by the sight of police barricades, buses and cops in riot gear ranging for about five blocks in all directions. This was disconcerting — it seemed that whenever I ventured into a city nowadays I was anticipating tear gas.

It was May Day. As I walked to the court building, four buses filled with activists passed by. I felt a thrill go through me. Evidently, folks associated with the Direct Action Network had already attempted blockades of Wall Street, just a few blocks over from Giuliani's headquarters. With the DC protests still fresh in people's minds, no wonder there was tension and excitement in the air.

After court (at which Kate and I accepted Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal — basically, a six-month probation), we decided to head back to City Hall and check out the action. Meanwhile, we talked about how we wished the gap in understanding between police and activists could be overcome. No protesters were in sight, so we decided to split up and ask some of the cops what they thought was going on. We look pretty straight, so we figured they wouldn't tag us as activists.

I talked to a woman officer who said it was May Day and the IMF/World Bank protesters were in town. I didn't know where to take the conversation (being a shy person doesn't help), so I moved on to where Kate was engaged in conversation with two male officers, one black and one white. Here's what I remember of the conversation. It's not word for word, but I'm going to write this as a dialogue.

Kate: "So what's going on today?"

White Cop: "The communists who were protesting in DC are going to riot."

Kate: "Wait — it wasn't just communists who were in DC. Actually, many of the people who are against the IMF, WTO and World Bank aren't communists. I was there in DC, and most of us were nonviolent."

W.C.: (Slightly incredulous, but still friendly and interested) "You were protesting?"

Kate: "Yeah. And our message is that capitalism works for people in this country because it exploits people in other countries."

W.C.: "Capitalism is good. It's good. Show me one good communist country. I was a history major in college, so I've studied these regimes."

Me: (I think about bringing up Cuba but feel like that would take us down a fruitless tangent) "Do you feel like *you've* benefited from capitalism?"

W.C.: (pauses) "I have a house and savings in the bank."

Black Cop: "Don't mistake his opinions for my opinions."

Me: "So what are your opinions?"

B.C.: (smiling) "No comment. I'm the good cop, he's the bad cop."

W.C.: "So if they aren't communists, why are they here on May Day?"

Kate: "Actually, May Day didn't start as a communist thing. It started because on May 1, 1886, workers gathered at Haymarket Square in Chicago, striking to get the eight-hour day. Police shot at the protesters. So as a history major you know that communists weren't even in this country at that time. It's actually a workers' holiday."

W.C.: (says nothing)

B.C.: "Where I'm from, May Day is a celebration."

Me: "Where are you from?"

B.C.: "Barbados. People go into the streets but it's not a protest. It's like a festival."

W.C.: "So why are you two down here? Seeing the sights, doing some shopping?" (said totally without irony)

(Kate looks at me uncertainly)

Me: (taking the plunge) "Actually, we were at court. We were arrested at a protest after the Amadou Diallo trial."

(They ask us where we were when arrested and what we had done.)

W.C.: (with a little bit of an edge to his voice) "Were you treated brutally when you were arrested? What did you think of jail?"

Kate: "I wasn't treated brutally, but I saw others who were. I don't like getting arrested; I don't protest to get arrested. I didn't like spending a night in jail, but if I see something wrong I'm not going to stand by and not get involved."

W.C.: "Don't take it personally if we arrest you today at the protest. People take it so personally, but we're just doing our job."

Kate: "What do you think of working at protests, like protests against police brutality?"

W.C.: "I don't like it."

Kate: "Can I ask you something? Do you ever question what you're told to do?"

B.C.: "The thing is when you decide to take this job, you go in with your eyes open, knowing what you're going to be expected to do." (Other cop nods)

Kate: "We have to go meet our friend now, but I hope that when you see protesters today you won't feel a barrier between us, like this fence that is separating us, but see us as more human, just like I think we see you as more human now."

(They wish us well, don't get into trouble, etc.)

The Blue Rules in Pleasantville

Vincent

Our laughter echoed across the schoolyard. We were hanging in the schoolyard on a Friday night in June, just kicking back and shooting the breeze. Heck, there wasn't anything else to do in this town. It was always good to see Jay, Lena and Rob anyway.

As we swapped stories, a jagged flash rent the black tapestry of the night. The headlights of a police car lurched around the corner, illuminated us and held us in their glare.

"Aw, man. What the hell?" Rob groaned.

"It figures the keepers of the peace would drop by for a visit," mocked Jay. "But that's all these guys have to do. Their entire job is just to ride around giving parking tickets and harassing kids."

"Shut up, Jay!" Lena whispered fiercely. I bit my tongue and cast down my eyes involuntarily.

One of the cops sauntered purposefully over to our bench. "You know you're not supposed to be here after dark, right?"

"Come on, we weren't even doing anything," Rob said.

"Some neighbors called in and complained about the noise."

"We haven't been loud at all, officer," Lena said.

"Are you contradicting me, missy?"

"No," Lena blanched.

"You kids better scram," Officer Friendly concluded. "Take a walk. Go get an ice cream. But beat it."

What a patronizing jerk, I thought to myself. Get an ice cream!

The second cop, leering at us from the driver's seat, suddenly noticed my T-shirt, and read it aloud: "National Student Campaign Against Hunger And Homelessness." I shrank beneath his sneer. Why won't they just leave us alone?

His eyes narrowed. "What do you think causes homelessness?" he probed.

I was surprised. Of course, I have a stock answer prepared when I have to do a presentation, but his question caught me off guard. I had to say something quick, though, so I wouldn't look stupid.

"Well, um...a combination of things, really...not much affordable housing, a family crisis, domestic abuse, sometimes drugs or alcohol...a bunch of things," I stammered.

"That's a bunch of liberal crap," he spat contemptuously. "These people are deadbeats who can't hold down a job. You kids see the world through rose-colored glasses."

"No I don't!" I feebly replied, burning inside. But he'd already turned away with a harsh laugh. What did he know about it? The yuppies of this town had ridden them all out years ago. Even the church locked its doors at night to make sure no one who doesn't "belong" there doesn't get any ideas.

"Don't let me catch you all here again the next time I drive around," the first officer warned as he returned to the car.

I hate this town.

* * * *

I remember, vaguely – it must have been first or second grade when we had the class expedition to the police station. The officers were so impressive in their smart blue uniforms. They towered over us, and I might have been scared, except they smiled at us, and we were taught to trust them – the police officer was our friend who helped us cross the street.

"Come this way, and I'll show you the jail," the sergeant beamed, and the kids oohed with expectation. They led our class to the back of the station, where the four cells were tucked away – innocuous, bare rooms that were squeaky clean, with a cot and a porcelain sink with just a trace of rust. There was no narrow window.

"Who wants to pretend that they're a prisoner?" asked the sergeant, and most everyone's hand shot up: "Oh! Meee!" He was a courteous prince and welcomed us all to the tidy dungeon of his castle. With a twist of his key ring and a thunderous shudder of the iron door, he magnanimously swept all the children inside. All except me, as I clung to Ms. Stevens' hand.

The second officer caught my eye. "You don't want to go in?" he asked. "Go on and play. It's only for a minute. See, your friends are having fun."

Wordlessly, I shook my head.

My classmates tittered and laughed, joking as the sergeant slid the door almost (but not quite) shut. "Ooh! You're in jail now!" they mocked each other. "Oh, officer, please let us out! We promise to be good next time!"

Now I look back and understand the significance of that inch of space between the latch and the frame. That small gap signaled that the police also understood that this was a game. We were only children and of course we couldn't do anything severe enough to land us here for real. But we were white children, and well off, too – and thus, we *never* could do something that would make us deserve the bars fully clanging shut. It just wasn't conceivable. As teens, we might drink or smoke underage, or maybe get caught taking a tape from the store, but that's only to be expected. We'd get a slap on the wrist and carry on.

We were free because this town was made for us. The policemen were white too, and they were our friends. Heck, when we grew up we might be police officers ourselves. Those cells were reserved for the really bad people – like maybe the occasional black person who came to town and was caught lifting something from the store. Yes, much better to enforce the rules than to hear that latch click shut on you.

The minute was up, and the sergeant cheerfully rumbled the door wide open. Our class was happy, cuz this trip was definitely cooler than the one to the 18th century manor. This was play. We understood that, but we also absorbed the civics lesson they were teaching today – the one about authority, following the rules and staying on the right side of that doorway. Our parents and teachers and principal, and now the policemen as well, have taught us that those rules are there for us. Be good and all will be fine.

At seven years, I didn't comprehend all these subtleties. All I knew was that I didn't want to play this game, and I had to make sure that I didn't dirty my clothes before I came home from school, or I might be put in the closet again.

Now when I sit in the street to protest injustice and demand a stop to business as usual, and the policeman comes glaring at me with his nightstick, I get that sinking feeling – I've been a bad girl. I didn't learn my lessons properly, and it's time to get my spanking. My skin color won't protect me now, because I've turned my back on my schooling about the way things are and the way things should be. After all, everyone knows that the officer just wants me to finish crossing the street safely.

Letters from Inside

Bill McNulty

Bill McNulty was one of the "SOA 25" nonviolent protesters, imprisoned for crossing over a line painted on the roadway at the entrance of Fort Benning. In attempting to peacefully deliver petitions to the School of the Americas calling for its closing, he violated his "ban and bar" from the base for "crossing the line" at the previous year's demonstration. Thus, despite U.S. claims that it has none, he was a political prisoner. There are currently about 100 people in prison for reasons of conscience or resistance.

Bill served six months from March to September 1998 in Federal Prison Camp Schuylkill, Minersville, Penn., a minimum security prison for nonviolent offenders. When he began his sentence, the warden asked him his occupation. Bill related his work history, including stints as a carpenter, teacher, and minister. The warden thought he was being wise and growled, "Do you have a Jesus complex?" "I knew then that we weren't going to get along well," Bill said to me.

The following are excerpts of letters he wrote to me two years ago, containing many important first-hand observations about life behind bars.

5/16 — We have to be able to imagine something different. I think most of us do, to different degrees. But when you encounter someone who sees nothing else — and that's not hard to do — it is interesting to experience their reaction when you present their vision. That was what the trial of the SOA 25, with its accompanying statements, was all about. When I delivered mine I took special joy in turning from the judge to my friends in the courtroom. The vision was not picked up by the judge this time around, but he probably will have it presented to him again in the future.

Some SOA resisters are being hassled because they will not pay the \$3,000 fine. I did. People contributed. My job, as I see it, is to get back to my community and bring the message to affluent, complacent people. I'm not going to fight the fine principle. But power to those who do.

Violence here is the violence of domination. This violence can be traced right to the nuclear weapon, with a pass by SOA on the way. It's a new realization to me.

6/7 — Days go by. The program here is to move people from A to B; Keep them busy. Give them a routine. People working in service do get some things done. Not a lot but something. People working for UNICOR,

run by the prison industries, are part of a Soviet-style arrangement. They make products under strict government regulations. There are hundreds of workers for a few jobs. People start at 23 cents per hour (our rate in service is 12 cents an hour). The difference is the whole thing makes a profit. I've heard this facility made over \$43 million last year. An interesting thing would be to find out who the investors and how closely related they are to making the laws.

The tone and temper, as you know, is tough on crime, lock 'em up forever, forget rehab, nothing but punitive, no frills, we'll show 'em. European countries lock up 100 per 100,000; England, 120 per 100,000; the U.S. — home of Rambo — 650 per 100,000. Why? Some young kids are getting 30 years, and most of these convictions come under conspiracy charges, having forced someone to "rat" under threat of a long sentence for them too.

The reality is the violence we've practiced all over the world for so long is now being used on us with the approval of our fellow citizens. We need to work on changing the mindset of our poor unfortunate uninformed docile compliant complicit population. Many of my fellows — neighbors, church people, all the comfortable, everything-is-OK middle class folks — don't understand what this is all about. But they do respond in the donation department. So in a sense, they are being given a chance to participate. The task now is to bring the light, move away the fog, develop eyes that see and ears that hear. Then will come the change of heart that opens the door to the transformation we so desperately need.

6/11 — Prison life is hard. The separation from loved ones is the most difficult. It is a challenge to find community here. But it is happening. I remind myself daily why I am here. It is because of the death and suffering brought daily to our brothers and sisters in Latin America by way of the School of the Americas. It is also with the hope that after its closure we may continue to work towards a more complete transformation. I am seeing a connection between the SOA and the Bureau of Prisons. One is repression in the South, the other is repression here. Miguel D'Escoto (El Salvador) is one who was numbered by the U.S. for assassination. But I am hearing his words louder and louder: "Any country that exports the kind of violence that the U.S. does to my country, one day that violence will be used against its own people." This place is the violence of domination, authoritarianism, and control. This calls for closer examination.

6/22 — Bible study was in place when I came, but from a pretty fundamentalist point of view. I have introduced a new strain and many guys have responded. However, many cling to the old way. There's ignorance of any new way and a fear of trying it. They won't step out of the boat, sure they will sink. One night I offered that very image. I was

flattered when one guy told me, "I believe you could walk on water, and I would follow you." I better watch for the formation of a complex.

Prison authorities give their easy OK to all things religious. I think they think it helps the inmates stay in line. Much of the religion is in the atonement and personal responsibility mode. No one sees it as a force that could challenge systems. Chaplains usually cover that up pretty well, just like outside. But one night after I had facilitated another inmate said, "I hope there were no mikes in this room. You were talking treason." I am not telling that view to authorities. Actually, I try to have zero to do with authorities. There is a bad attitude displayed by counselors and case managers. There is also an education office. They are open to inmate-taught classes. Now going on: weather and real estate. I was going to ask to do one on grassroots organizing, but people said forget that one.

UNICOR here makes cubicles and desks for offices. They are shipped out of here too. They sell to government bureaus all over the world. Everyone has to work — or I should say take a job. You don't have to work hard. You can switch out if it's not good for you — not easily, however. Refusal would get you solitary.

8/11 — Bible study has been good. The group is about 20 in size. A lot of fundamentalism, but the group matures. I am facilitating next week. My topic is the readings for Sunday, which are about the division that the message of Jesus will introduce. The contrast of the King of Peace introducing division will be enlightening. There is the opportunity to relate here to others here in prison. Some do it better than others.

Work for me is not heavy. The tasks are small and intermittent. For the most part, it's a case of dividing the population up and sending groups to different places. I've learned welding by spending some time in that shop, and have qualified as a forklift operator. The key is keep occupied, don't be a "bump on a log." The UNICOR people work within a very fixed and supervised routine. This varies from group to group. Many of the educated work in a GED program.

The place you live is called a cube, shared with one other person. We have 23 cubes in one range. There are four ranges to a unit. There are two units in the camp — about 300 people (called "inmates").

9/14 — I will not cross the line again this year. I see my role now as trying to make this experience meaningful to members of my class of people. They are the comfortable, not involved, believing that everything is fine and there must be something wrong with these people who are always complaining or fighting for something. It's no easy task to get across the concept of empire among the affluent Catholics I meet.

Eugene V. Debs: Wars, Walls and Bars

David Dellinger

In his Introduction to Walls and Bars, Eugene Victor Debs wrote, "The prison as a rule, to which there are few exceptions, is for the poor." Today the United States has 268 billionaires and 35 million people living below the official poverty line. Wall Street is flourishing but the number of prisoners has grown from less than 350,000 in 1982, when there were only 13 billionaires, to more than two million today. The top 1 percent of families control the same amount of wealth as the bottom 95 percent, twice as much as the poorest 80 percent. And a recent study shows that 75 to 80 percent of the prisoners had incomes of less than \$7,000 a year, with a third of them unemployed the year before.

Debs makes clear that capitalism, militarism and imprisonment of the poor are all part of the same anti-democratic system that teaches that happiness comes from getting more material goods, privilege and power than the majority of people.

Here is a statement by a Major General Smedley D. Butler in the Marine Corps, who later resigned in disillusionment:

I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism...I helped make Mexico...safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street.

Meanwhile, Debs knew all these or similar facts from his extensive work for the rights of every human being. So he opposed what Americans arrogantly called the First World War. He was sentenced on June 18, 1918 to ten years in prison. Shortly after the War ended, on November 11, 1918, Debs was so popular that he had been nominated a fifth time for President of the United States. He was loved and treasured not just by his prison mates but by millions throughout the country. As a result, there was pressure on President Wilson to pardon Debs, but Wilson refused for years. Only on Christmas Day, 1921 did Wilson finally pardon him.

I wonder if Wilson had a special opposition to the charismatic Debs because he was one of the most convincing opponents of the War, with a huge active following. Wilson had argued that the U.S. must enter it and play a major role because it was the only way the world could be made "safe for democracy," as supposedly practiced by the United States. But



Eugene V. Debs

before Wilson died he came around to Debs' point of view, particularly after his disappointment in the Versailles Treaty that favored England, France and Italy more than the United States. Exhausted and disillusioned, he suffered a stroke in September 1919. When he first refused to pardon Debs it was self-defense, because Debs advocated truths that Wilson had begun to see but didn't want to face up to. After he finally granted the pardon, he made an amazing statement in terms of the truths that Debs had always stated.

Inevitably the elitist press buried Wilson's new views so that his words are not as well known as they ought to be. Most people at the time and ever since have no knowledge of the truths of World War I than Wilson finally came to understand: "Is there any man, woman or child in America — let me repeat, is there any child in America — who does not know that this was an industrial and commercial war?"

This, of course, is what Debs had always said: simply that wars are fought to increase the industrial and commercial wealth of people who don't believe in economic equality.

Debs' experiences in Cook County Jail

Debs first writes about his experiences in jail in 1894. It occurred when, as president of the American Railway Union, he was locked up in Chicago's Cook County Jail. 75 years later I spent time in the same jail when my bail was revoked in the conspiracy trial in which I and seven others were accused of having rioted at the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention.

Debs gives several details of how the prison "was infested with vermin, and sewer rats scurried back and forth over the floors of that human cesspool." I didn't see any rats but the prison's toilets had run over and it was a human cesspool. I and all the prisoners who had come in that day and for

several days afterwards were forced to sleep on floors that were flooded by several inches of poisonous water.

Perhaps I should say something about other experiences I underwent in Cook County Jail in addition to the toilet water. Unfortunately, everything is typical of treatments I have had in many of the prisons I have been in. When a full car of us entered Cook County Jail, with our hands manacled behind our backs, I soon found that I had to strip naked three times: first on entry to the next room, then in the next section, and finally in the specific section where I slept on the wet floor. Court the next day began at 10 a.m., but I and all the outgoing prisoners were woken at four a.m. Again, I had to strip naked three times before leaving the prison. Guards examined our anuses, testicles, mouths, ears, and everything else. Once I even had the handle of a guard's club shoved up my anus. But when I remonstrated with him and another nearby guard, it never happened again. Between sections we had to dress and were jammed into an overly crowded cell with one toilet that was in constant use. If I remember correctly, I got to a cell in the courthouse around six a.m., hours before the trial. I was not allowed to bring any reading material with me.

Often I refuse to pay bail because I feel that the amount of money a person can command should not determine whether she or she stays in jail while awaiting trial. It makes a mockery of the idea that everyone is innocent until proven guilty. And as Debs says: "Take a census of the average prison and you will find that a large majority of people are there... for the reason that they are poor and lacked the money to engage the services of first class and influential lawyers."

**Debs saw
elitist wealth,
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One time I spent three weeks in the Hudson County, New Jersey jail for refusing to pay bail before my trial. That time, when I had arrived and was being taken upstairs in an elevator, a guard was handling a prisoner roughly. When the prisoner protested, the guard began punching him. I got between them and received some of the blows, but then the guard stopped. Then I was put into a small, overcrowded cell with seven or eight prisoners who were in for murder. The guards urged them to beat me up, or, "If he resists, kill him." Instead, I was treated as a hero, because they had learned that I had intervened on behalf of a fellow prisoner.

Soon a well-known member of the Mafia sent word that I had saved a member of his group. He knew I was there for lack of money to pay bail, and said that he would pay it for me. I sent back word thanking him and

explaining why I would not accept the offer. Of course, I think that if the Mafia pays the bail or fine of a poor person, he may want to work for the Mafia afterwards, or feel that he wants to.

After three weeks of jail time I was found guilty a second time of refusing to register for the draft. But the judge delayed the sentencing. Then my newly pregnant wife called the judge and he let me out on my and her promise that I would attend the sentencing. Elizabeth had gotten pregnant because she knew from previous experience that the prison authorities in Lewisburg Maximum Security Prison would try to get me killed, as they had tried at the Federal Prison in Danbury, Connecticut. If they succeeded, she wanted to have our child in memory of our love and relationship.

Today's militarism and prisons

If Debs saw elitist wealth, poverty and militarism as products of the capitalist system, clearly U.S. militarism has expanded since World War I. That is why he built opposition to that war, including his condemnation of poverty, capitalism, and all militarism. He makes the connection clear in many chapters of his book.

As for militarism today, the Pentagon has 6,500 employees whose job it is to sell arms to 190 countries. Usually the sales are to both sides of a conflict. 75 percent of the sales to third world countries are to opponents of human rights. Despite these sales to supporters in foreign countries, U.S. military spending totals more than the next eight largest military budgets combined: Russia, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, Italy, and South Korea.

In line with this and in accord with General Butler's analysis in Debs' time, President Clinton and the U.S. military pretended that the reason for bombing Yugoslavia was not to get control of the oil, mines, and other resources, but to destroy Milosevic's racist terror against the innocent Albanians. But the U.S. created the terrorist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) as early as 1990. The KLA shot and killed Serbs for years before the NATO bombing. In the so-called negotiations with Milosevic at Rambouillet in 1998, the U.S. insisted that the KLA and NATO should rule Kosovo. Inevitably, that was rejected, and the bombing began.

As Philip Berrigan [currently imprisoned for 30 months for his role in the Plowshares vs. Depleted Uranium disarmament of illegal and immoral A-30 Warthog fighter planes at Andrews Air Force Base] has testified: "Kosovo contains the largest and richest mines in Europe — gold, silver, zinc, lead, cadmium, coal, and nickel. American and European oil companies already have begun intense exploration of the Caspian Sea and Black Sea area, striking deals with the republics of the old USSR." In April

1999 a new pipeline was opened, carrying Caspian Sea oil westward, and other Western pipelines are in development.

Meanwhile, the bombing of Yugoslavia from high in the sky prevented any risk of American or European deaths, which would have added to the protests. As it was there were militant demonstrations all over the country, but for the most part the corporate media never gave them proper coverage. The last weekend of the bombing, between 12,000 and 15,000 protesters marched from the Washington, D.C. Veterans' Memorial Wall to the Pentagon, but neither the Washington Post nor the New York Times carried a word of it.

The weapons NATO used included toxic nerve gasses, surface mines dropped with parachutes, bombs containing uranium, black napalm, cluster bombs with chemicals, sprayings to poison the crops and other new weapons the Pentagon has not told us about. As John Schuchardt has testified from his visit to Serbia immediately after the bombing: "The bombing strategy was aimed at civilian life, intending to wreak apocalyptic destruction on factories, energy supplies (gas, oil, electric), airports, bridges and other transportation, radio and television. We saw schools, churches, hospitals, markets and *thousands* of homes and apartments in ruins."

A Spanish pilot who flew for NATO, Captain Adolfo Luis Martin de la Hoz, said that "The majority of my [Spanish] colleagues, if not all, are against the war, this war of barbarity in particular." He noted that repeated bombings of civilian victims and non-military targets was on purpose. "Several times our colonel protested to NATO commanders because they selected targets that are not military. They threw him out with curses.... Once there was a coded order of the North American military that we should drop anti-personnel bombs over Pristina and Nis. The colonel refused and a couple of days later a transfer order came."

As U.S. militarism has gotten worse, so have the prisons. For example, Control Unit prisoners are confined separately for 22 1/2 hours in a six by eight foot cell, with solid steel doors. At each of the four corners of the bunk is a ring so that the men can be strapped down whenever prison authorities think it is appropriate. And prisoners have reported being chained like that for days at a time. Obviously, there is no congregate dining. But if they are not chained to the bunk they are allowed out, singly, for a 90 minute exercise period in an empty concrete yard. It is the size of three cells, with 20 foot high walls and metal screens overhead. Guards open the sliding doors by remote control and use loudspeakers to direct the prisoners in and out.

Marion, Illinois had the first federal Control Unit prison. It was established in 1963, after the federal prison at Alcatraz Island was closed because of public campaigns against its extreme barbarism. Alcatraz had been labeled

"the federal system's most repressive prison," and soon Marion took its place.

I joined a number of the extensive public protests at Marion from 1963 on, especially after 1983 when it changed the permanent lockdown from 72 prisoners to include all 353 prisoners. In 1990 the nationwide and international protests exploded because of evidence that the Marion prison was using seriously toxic water. As a result, the Federal Bureau of Prisons announced that the Control Unit would be moved away from Marion. At first they spoke of a Control Unit prison near Florence, Colorado, and ground was broken for it in July 1990. But a survey by the Federal Bureau of Prisons found that 36 states now operate some form of super-maximum security prison or a Control Unit within them.

As early as January 1990, the U.S. incarceration rate was the highest in the world, at 426 per 100,000. This was well above the rate of the Communist Soviet Union (which was 268 per 100,000) and South Africa under apartheid (333 per 100,000). It dwarfs rates in the Netherlands (40 per 100,000) and Australia (72 per 100,000). At the time, the U.S. imprisonment rate for Black people was more than seven times that for white people. Black people were 12 percent of the U.S. population and 43 percent of the prison population. Is it because Black people by nature commit more crimes than whites? Or is it a combination of their disadvantaged economic and social condition, abetted by the racism of the criminal justice system?

Moreover, most prison conditions have gotten worse in the last ten years! 46 states have changed their laws to allow juveniles to be tried as adults, at the discretion of the judge. Since October 1997, Amnesty International notes that all four children who have been put to death in the world were killed in the United States. And whereas Black children now comprise 15 percent of the population of ages 10-17, they account for 50 percent of cases transferred by juvenile courts for trials as adults. Amnesty also noted that two-thirds of the juveniles on Death Row are either Black or Hispanic.

Another harmful change in the prison system is the recent practice of large corporations taking over the prison-industrial complex. These are the same corporations that are involved with the military-industrial complex, genetic engineering, world trade, international banking, and the mass media. The elitist drive for selfish, maximum profits is the reason why so many Americans lack the necessities of life and do things that cause them to be imprisoned in the criminal justice system. Bad as prison conditions were in Debs' day, they now are much worse since private corporations own and control them. As usual their aim is to make extensive profits at the expense of the prisoners. They charge exorbitantly for medicines, health treatment, phone calls and everything else, including reduced wages for long hours of the prisoners' work.

Let me conclude with another quotation from Eugene Victor Debs. As I have said, he was so charismatic that he won millions of votes for President while he was in jail for working against "the First World War." And when he finally was pardoned, "Midway between the prison sentence and the street, we were halted by what seemed a rumbling of the earth as if shaken by some violent explosion. It was a roar of voices," expressing their love for him and their joy that he was free. And this love and devotion to him personally and to what he stood for was manifest throughout his life, both in prison and outside. For all his charisma, he absolutely believed in the value and potential of every human being and always refused to dominate anyone. Yet memorably, he said: "I would not be a Moses to lead you into the promised land because if I could lead you into it someone else could lead you out of it."

*This essay is reprinted with permission of the author, and is to be published as the introduction to the forthcoming reprint of Eugene Victor Debs' book Walls and Bars (Charles H. Kerr, August 2000). David Dellinger is a life-long peace activist, perhaps most known for his trial as one of the "Chicago 8" that helped to organize the nonviolent anti-Vietnam War demonstrations outside the 1968 Democratic Party National Convention in Chicago. He has contributed to **OFF-Line** previously ("National Protest Against the Kosovo Bombing," issue #5, Summer 1999). His autobiography is From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter (Pantheon, 1993).*



War Tax Resister's Letter to the IRS

To Whom It May Concern:

Greetings of peace to you, IRS employee! I hope you enjoy your job. If not, this letter may make your day more interesting.

According to my completed 1040 tax form, my tax assessment for 1999 is \$xxx.xx. Once again I am reminding the IRS of my commitment to resisting the tax law and not paying this sum. For reasons of conscience, as I have done for the past four years, I refuse to pay because approximately 50% of every tax dollar (excluding Social Security and Medicare but including the national debt) is earmarked for military purposes. **Just as I refuse to pick up a gun and shoot someone and commit murder, I also refuse to pay the U.S. government to train soldiers to drop bombs on other people and kill them in my name.** It is as simple as that.

As long as 50% of the tax dollar is used in this way, my stance remains inflexible. I will fulfill my social responsibility by donating an equivalent amount of money to a variety of organizations meeting human needs and struggling for peace and justice, including, of special importance, relief aid for the victims of U.S. wars in 1999 in Kosovo, East Timor and Iraq.

For two and a half months, the U.S. and NATO bombed the people of Serbia and Kosovo in a vicious war. Diplomacy was certainly a possible solution to the conflict, but the U.S. rejected this option at Rambouillet. Some may think that we were doing the right thing by bombing. Well, just look at the results of the bombing campaign. Is Milosevic out of power? No. Did thousands of additional people die? Yes, because Serbia began to drive hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians out of Kosovo three days after NATO commenced bombing. Is the crisis in the former Yugoslavia resolved? Not at all; now the roles have switched and Albanians murder Serbs with near impunity. Will additional civilians die in the future? Yes, because the U.S. used illegal, radioactive and toxic depleted uranium weaponry. Killing is always wrong, but especially in this case.

Are similar things happening elsewhere in the world? Certainly; for two weeks after East Timor's democratic vote for independence, the U.S. allowed hundreds of thousands of people there to be taken hostage, brutalized and killed by Indonesian paramilitary forces. Indonesia is a friend of the United States (where Nike and Reebok operate sweatshops profitably and the Pentagon peddles arms and military training). Thus, President Clinton prevented the UN from sending peacekeeping forces to East Timor before the vote to prevent such violence from occurring. It took two weeks of the media spotlight and outraged public protest for the President to take action on behalf of the East Timorese. Indonesia was forced to accept an international peacekeeping force when Clinton finally cut off U.S. aid and directed stern words at Indonesia's leadership.

The President had no such hesitancy before the U.S. and NATO unleashed thousands of bombs over the people they were trying to "help" in Kosovo and civilians in Serbia alike. The clear reality of both situations is that most if not all of the horrendous bloodshed in Kosovo and East Timor could have been averted if tens of thousands of international peacekeeping forces trained in nonviolence were in place beforehand. Indeed, the U.S. pulled out the small Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe forces that were successfully minimizing the violence in Kosovo so it could bomb freely.

Thirdly, there is a U.S.-sponsored genocide occurring now in Iraq, going on ten years this coming August. The economic sanctions are genocide, as defined by a 1951 UN treaty: "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, such as...deliberately inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." That is definitely what I would call a low-level war that sacrifices 6,000 children each month.

The gruesome statistics of Iraqi deaths from sanctions, infant mortality, child malnutrition, and infrastructure damage have come from independent agencies, including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, Food and Agriculture Organization, Harvard Medical researchers, and the like. Now, official U.S. policy is that no matter what Iraq does, Saddam Hussein must go before sanctions will be lifted. It is this inflexible U.S. position, which is contrary to the resolutions and the positions of other UN Security Council members, that maintains the sanctions, making the U.S. primarily responsible for this genocide.

Human rights may fill official rhetoric but mean nothing in actuality. The voices of the millions of people in Kosovo, Serbia, and East Timor who have suffered and died because of Clinton's choices cry out, but who in our country has ears to hear them?

The IRS is quick to point out that I should express my opinions to my Congressional representatives and through the democratic process. Certainly, I do these things; however, besides the fact that they are war-mad and can't hear what I'm saying, they are not the only ones with power. The government was installed to serve We The People, and **I as an individual have power** as well. At the very least, I can exercise my economic power, and you at the IRS will sit up and take notice because you want my money for mass murder. Surely you know as well as anyone else that this country was founded on money and murder, not democracy? That is why the Congress refuses to pass a law recognizing the individual's primacy of conscience. This I maintain, and I wish you well as you prepare your paperwork.

Sincerely,

Vincent Romano

When your only tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail: In a May 22, 2000 *New Yorker* article, Seymour Hersh, the journalist who exposed the My Lai massacres during the Vietnam War, presents interviews with numerous Gulf War veterans who claim to have witnessed war crimes committed against Iraqi prisoners of war, civilians and retreating soldiers during the ceasefire. The Army investigated General Barry McCaffrey for ordering the annihilation of a retreating, five mile-long Iraqi column of trucks, tanks, and soldiers. The Army backed up McCaffrey's contention that the Americans were under attack from the Iraqis, and he now serves as Clinton's Drug Czar. But some U.S. soldiers, who received and disarmed a group of nearly 400 surrendering Iraqi men, say they witnessed a platoon under McCaffrey's command blow up the prisoners as they sat huddled next to a hospital bus. Other saw their fellow servicemen gun down Iraqis when they confused their white flags for weapons.



In April, D.C. police closed down the IMF activists' headquarters and arrested others, claiming that vinegar, chili peppers, onions, plastic tubing, chicken wire and gas masks were proof of intent to make Molotov cocktails and chemical weapons. Police seemed not to notice the gazpacho cooking in the kitchen or the puppet-making going on. And, of course, Amadou Diallo lost his life because four NYPD officers thought his wallet looked like a gun. We think it's about time our men in uniform got an **EYE TEST**.

Youth Leading a Resurgence of Activism Vincent

On the long-anticipated "A16" (the April 16th day of protest against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), their spirit was strong and exuberant, transforming the streets of Washington, D.C. into a festival of theater and resistance. Marching with drums, whistles, and a gigantic sun puppet announcing "Globalize Liberation," and demanding a radical transformation of these financial institutions' policies that are widening the worldwide gap between wealth and poverty, a formation of young activists several thousand strong chanted, "This is what democracy looks like!"

This image may clash with one's impression of young people. While the students in Washington effectively communicated their rejection of the elitist model of globalization, they are still only a small (but growing) segment of American youth. Indeed, a recent poll of 18- to 24-year-olds conducted by the Medill News Service indicated that only 12 percent of respondents had ever participated in any kind of political demonstration.

This observation is not surprising, since it is likely that most young people have not learned about the importance of political activism from the adults teaching them in their families, schools and churches. The rate of youth volunteerism is higher, however. A broad study conducted by Do Something, a New York-based nonprofit organization that promotes youth involvement in the community, found that 73 percent of 15- to 29-year-olds have done some kind of community service in their lives, although only half as many had done so in the past year. This suggests that while their hearts are in the right place, many young people have not made the connection between the societal problems they seek to assuage – hunger, homelessness, illiteracy – with their systemic causes.

Of course, the largest group of young people, crossing all ethnic and class lines, consists of the individualist consumers that American society, through the omnipresence of advertisements, shapes from the womb. Endless trips to the mall yield Nike shoes, Tommy Hilfiger gear, and Britney Spears CDs – the status symbols for younger folks who have accepted the dominant culture, which equates identity and happiness with possessions.

Some, however, have made revolutionary activity their primary pursuit. "The April 16 anti-globalization protest is just the beginning for me," said Greg Wells, a 25-year-old anarchist from Richmond, Virginia. "May Day in San Francisco, the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, and the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles are next. For the global struggle, one needs to be prepared to go where the action is."

There is no longer any doubt that the protests that shut down the Seattle meetings of the World Trade Organization last November have inspired a new class of young people to activism. Free trade, globalization, and the international debt crisis – issues elevated, in part, by the focus of the Jubilee year – have taken center stage, and a growing number of youth have taken personal offense at the arrogance of power intruding upon the lives of every being on the planet.

A crop of new protest organizations with a strong youth component, such as the Direct Action Network and the Ruckus Society, has sprouted to reinvigorate the fragmented social movements in the U.S. They are developing an infrastructure to reach out to new constituencies of young people, train and equip them with the knowledge and tactics they need, and mobilize them to face government or corporate obstacles to change both nationally and in their communities.

"The coalition of groups forming the Mobilization for Global Justice in D.C. was phenomenal," said Kate Reuer, 22, of Faulkton, South Dakota. "I'm really excited because this movement is as much about what we're for as what we're against. In confronting these institutions that put profit over people, we're proposing an alternative: non-hierarchical based decision-making, simplifying our lives, taking care of each other, and making sure that this revolution is fun and beautiful."

Molly McGrath, a 23-year-old senior at the University of Madison, Wis., said that a hundred students traveled from her school to D.C. for the A16 mobilization. As a member of the Alliance for Democracy, part of the national United Students Against Sweatshops, she also toured the factories of Indonesia last summer, observing the thousands of workers cramped into factories making products for Western countries. Meanwhile, she noted, "Nike spent \$5.7 billion on advertising in 1997. Corporations are putting on huge public relations campaigns but are not changing anything for their workers."

The issue of sweatshops, intimately linked to globalization, has spurred many demonstrations at colleges and universities across the country. Students object to companies that manufacture sportswear with their college's logo in foreign countries with exploitative labor conditions. When discussions with school officials are unfruitful, students engage in sit-ins and hunger strikes in administration buildings to make their demands.

Students at Madison have been stepping up in militancy recently. Over 50 were arrested after 200 occupied the chancellor's office this year, insisting that the university join the Workers Rights Consortium, an independent monitoring organization, and agree to a fair code of conduct that would include the right to a living wage and to organize.

"Vocal opposition to sweatshops is building," McGrath said. "This is a way for students to find an entry point into having a say about what's going on at our schools. There is an apathetic majority we don't hear from, however. The problem is getting outside the class bubble in colleges and universities."

In addition to their burgeoning interest in economic matters, the passions of activist youth span several other causes, from hunger and the environment to human rights at home and abroad.

As a member of Indiana's Earlham College Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Group, Jenny Alshire, 21, has organized Oxfam hunger banquets – meals that assign the participants proportionally to different tables representing the world's division of resources. She is pleased that they have prompted conversations on campus about how much food is wasted in the student cafeteria, but the group also educates people about the structural causes of hunger.

"At my grammar school in Pittsburgh, Penn., about 75 percent of the kids were on food stamps. It made me realize that a lot of people don't have food on their plate," explains Alshire. "I think that being a white, middle class person at college is exactly why I need to learn and do something about hunger."

Young people embrace a wide spectrum of environmental action. While Julia Butterfly held a two-year sit-in atop an ancient redwood tree facing a clearcut, Maggie Bogle volunteers at the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, a group that monitors the continuing weapons production at the Y-12 nuclear plant. The Maryville, Tenn. 17-year-old recently helped to organize a march and rally as part of a campaign to inform people about the environmental and health threats Y-12 poses to the area.

"This is in my backyard, but everyone is paying for it," Bogle said. "People mostly roll their eyes at us, but I don't see how I could ignore it. I think it's important to be out there so that people can see you. For me, this is life-affirming work."

Human rights are a growing concern for many young activists. Racial profiling and police harassment and brutality in many American cities is of particular concern to young people of color affected by this oppression. In New York City, the public had no say in the Mayor's recent decision to impose police control on security for the city's public schools. Young people are outraged, and 3,000 students participated in a one-day walk-out, skipping school to march on City Hall.

Dante Motes, a 16-year-old member of the Bronx-based Youthforce, helped organize the walk-out, and is helping to build support for the safe schools campaign of the People's Justice 2000 Coalition in his community. "Now the police can enter schools with their nightsticks and guns," he said. "So when

students fight, instead of just being suspended, they will be arrested and put into the system. If there is a dispute between students and the police, it could be life-threatening."

Motes recalled one instance when he was hanging out with friends in a park near his home. Police officers accused them of creating a disturbance, chased them from the park and followed them. Others have had far worse experiences. "The police look at young people with suspicion," Motes said. "It's the way they talk to us, as opposed to how they might speak to someone else. You hear it in their voice – it's an aggressiveness, full of cursing and anger."

While Students for a Free Tibet agitates in support of Tibet's right to self-determination, other young people focus their outrage upon the ten-year-old economic sanctions on Iraq.

"I'm convinced that the Iraq sanctions is one of the most pressing issues of our time," said Kate Reuer. Organizing for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an international, interfaith pacifist organization, Reuer has led a "Campaign of Conscience" alerting people about the child health crisis in Iraq and marshalling open resistance to U.S. law barring humanitarian assistance for Iraq's people.

Reuer recognizes that "an entire generation is being wiped out. The sanctions are not just taking the lives of innocent people – they are destroying Iraq's social fabric and culture as well. Someday we're going to have to answer for the sanctions, and I want to be able to stand up and say that I did something about it."

Thousands of youth from all over the country are now making an annual pilgrimage to the Fort Benning, Ga. demonstrations to close the School of the Americas. Due in large part to the efforts of SOA Watch to organize on college campuses, increasing numbers of students are getting active and bringing the struggle to national prominence.

Expressing the sentiments of many, one of the line-crossers, Meg Doe, 21, of Dallas, Tex., said, "Since I know something about the SOA, I can't just sit around – I had to come here and do something about it. We're training soldiers to go back to their own countries and kill their own people, so we don't have to do it ourselves!"

In addition, perennial work on women's issues, gay and lesbian issues, animal rights, freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal and other focuses demonstrates that youth activism is as diverse as it is formidable. It is clear that young people are taking leadership and driving the movements for justice, peace and equality in the new century. The passion of young activists poses a challenge to all of us. "I feel that people are apt to listen, but not act," Jenny Alshire observed. "Why doesn't hearing the facts of an issue arouse people?"

TO: All Building Staff
FROM: Claire Cocco
DATE: May 10, 2000
RE: Hot Hot Summer!

I heard on the news this morning that New Jersey and Connecticut will have Power Watches and rolling Black-Out Days this summer. This is in response to last summer's energy crisis. You may remember that power plants couldn't keep up with the demand for energy — mostly the energy sapped by air conditioners in homes and offices during that sizzling summer. I haven't heard that New York is planning the same, but I wouldn't be surprised.

It is no accident that we are seeing some of the most extreme temperatures in recent years. Many scientists explain this by pointing to the greenhouse effect — the depletion of the ozone layer by carbon dioxide (from fossil-fueled cars and industry) and CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons, released by aerosols and air conditioners).

Notice the vicious cycle here? We pump up our air conditioners as it gets hotter, which only aggravates the protective ozone layer even more. The heat is bad now, but if we continue in our habits, it's going to get worse.

I want to suggest that people use the air conditioners sparingly this summer. (We may not have a choice about this if the power drain is too much on the suppliers.) There are things you can do to keep your office somewhat cool for part of the day and save energy at the same time. For instance:

- Open your windows and doors in the evenings and mornings to get a cool cross-breeze.
- Bring in a fan and stick it near your window. Face it backwards so that it is sucking the hot air out of the office and into the outdoors.
- Turn off the air conditioners when you leave for the day.
- Bring plants into your office and water them frequently.
- Turn off your computers and hard drives when you leave. They generate heat when left on, too.
- Leave lights off as much as possible. It saves electricity and makes you feel cooler, too.

Thanks for reading!

Garden of Vegan

Claire and Vincent

We've adapted the following recipe from Brad Misanthropic's *Please Don't Feed the Bears* vegan cookbook. Issue #3 is an outstanding publication. Send him \$2 for a copy at PO Box 1151; State College, PA 16804-1151.

Scallion Pancakes

2 cups flour	1/4 cup sesame oil
2 teaspoons sea salt (or table salt)	6 scallions, chopped
1 cup boiling water	2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon peanut (or vegetable) oil	1 teaspoon cumin
1/4 to 1/2 cup peanut (or vegetable) oil	minced ginger, soy sauce

Mix flour, salt, and boiling water in a bowl. Cover for about 10 minutes. Knead dough for about 5 minutes. Shape as a ball and place in a lightly oiled bowl. Sprinkle the dough with oil, cover the bowl, and let sit for 30 minutes. Roll out dough into a 10x16" rectangle about 1/4" thick. Brush dough surface with sesame oil and sprinkle on scallions, garlic, and cumin. Roll the dough into a thick cylinder about 10" long. Cut into 6 equal slices. Roll each slice into a 1/4" thick pancake. Fry as you choose in a pan/skillet/griddle. Serve with soy sauce and ginger in a dipping bowl.

The Best Danged French Fries You'll Ever Eat

Olive oil	Red peppers
Onion	Salt and pepper
Russet and sweet potatoes — approximately one per large serving	

Get your oven pre-heated at 400°. If you are in a rush, the broiler cooks this a little faster. Each large potato you use will require one baking tray (or one turn in the oven). Brush each tray with oil to cover its surface. Scrub the taters (but don't peel the skins, cuz you'll want that authentic french fry texture, not to mention the nutrients in the skin). Chop the potatoes lengthwise in 1/4" slices. Chop the onion in half, and then in half again, and then peel it apart using the onion's natural layers. Cut the peppers into 1" strips. Take the potato slices and lay them out on the trays, brushing each side to cover them fully with oil. Arrange the onions and peppers in the leftover spaces between the potatoes. Bake for about 25 minutes. You may wish to check on them halfway through, to move the fries around on the tray and switch the trays on the higher shelf in the oven to the lower shelf, which is closer to the flame and thus will get the fries crispier. Serve with veggie or falafel burgers and chow!

Naturally, organic food is dangerous

Summer is just about here. And with its approach come thoughts of fabulous, juicy, sweet, inexpensive and available fruits and lots of delicious vegetables. Move over tangerines. Bring on the strawberries.

Another thing that can "move over" is all the organic products flooding grocery store shelves and, more and more these days, entire grocery store chains. You know what I mean — the produce, bread products, meat

Betsy Hart

chemicals.

Well, these organic items may be all the rage for their supposed "natural" benefits. But when I head to my local grocery store I avoid organic things like the plague. Why? Not just because such "natural" products often look awful and cost a lot more. But because I've got three little kids to worry about and I want the healthiest food available for them.

You see, the most likely cause of food-borne illness is not herbicides, pesticides and other synthetic chemicals. Although these have been peddled to today's American mom as dangerous, they've been shown over and over again by the Food and Drug Administration to be safe for her children at levels hundreds and thousands of times above what anyone could actually consume in a lifetime.

The primary cause of food-borne illnesses are actually "naturally occurring pathogens — disease-producing organisms and their products," according to food safety expert Dr. Dean Cliver of the University of California at Davis.

In other words, it's the "natural" stuff that poses the biggest threats to children and for that matter the rest of us — not just the

The most likely cause of food-borne illness is not herbicides, pesticides and other synthetic chemicals. It's naturally occurring pathogens — disease-producing organisms and their products.

potentially deadly e. coli, but also things like salmonella, listeria and a host of other all-natural bacteria and organisms sometimes contaminating the food, other times produced by the food itself.

Now, it's true that America has the safest food supply in the world. And much of the problem of food-borne illness that we do have could be avoided by proper handling, refrigerating, cleaning, and cooking of food. The problem of many pathogens could be further, dramatically mitigated by irradiation, a process that sends a kind of harmless X-ray through food, safely destroying many harmful bacteria. (Food safety experts applaud such technology, recently allowed by the FDA for some products and already in use in others, while so-called food safety activists often oppose it.)

But the bottom line for me as a mom is that, as Dr. Ruth Kava of the American Council of Science and Health told me, "You're not going to get sick from the pesticides used in your salad. But you might get sick from the e. coli." Yes, produce from

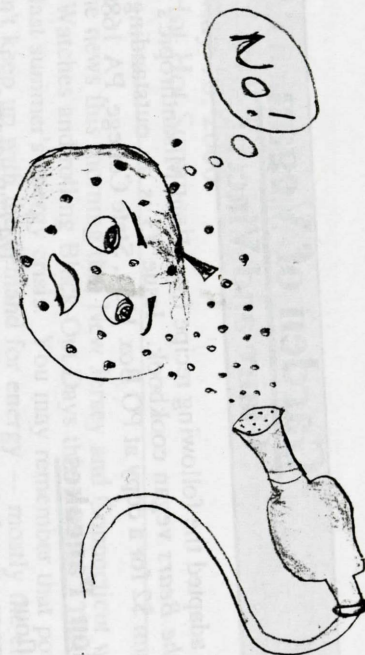
whatever source can be contaminated through improper handling, and needs to be washed. But in addition, organic foods are often fertilized with animal manure, Kava explained, and that's a haven for e. coli bacteria. Properly composted manure shouldn't pose a risk. But there are few guidelines to ensure appropriate handling of animal fertilizers, and Kava knows of at least one outbreak of e. coli in organically grown lettuce. Synthetic fertilizers pose no such risk, so thanks, I'll go man-made.

I also prefer, for instance, to have fungicide used on the wheat in the bread products I buy. I'd rather consume traces of the harmless synthetic chemical than be exposed to aflatoxins — a potent "natural" carcinogen — in moldy bread. (Our food supply is rife with organic carcinogens that would have to be banned by the FDA if they were produced in factories instead of animals and plants.) Further, synthetic chemicals help to keep food fresher and make it last longer. That means it's more likely to get eaten and impart healthful benefits to my family than its "natural" counterparts that may well spoil too quickly.

Finally, as Kava explained, there's no evidence that "organic" foods impart any particular health benefits whatsoever. Their big danger, she said, may be that they give those who buy and use them a false sense of added food safety, making those who consume them more careless when it comes to the proper care and handling of food.

So once again this season I'll take the conventionally grown big, red rosy summertomatoes over their "natural" counterparts anyway. And I, and my family, will enjoy and benefit from every bite of them.

Betsy Hart is a frequent commentator on CNN and the Fox News Channel.



Pesticides are Good for You!

Vincent

...Or so this opinion piece on the editorial page of a Boston-area newspaper in May would have you believe. I couldn't help but laugh when my friend clipped this and sent it to me. The author's blatant manipulation of the reader's emotions, with numerous less obvious but nevertheless false arguments, is but another shining example of corporate "journalism." Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, it purports to be written with your interest in mind, so its sham populism is especially worthy of exposure here in **OFF-Line's** "Media Rewind" column.

The first thing that should tip you off is the byline: the author "is a frequent commentator on CNN and the Fox News Channel." In other words, she fits comfortably in the mass media machine that is dominated by just six gigantic corporations. These corporations are businesses, with the same aims as the giant agribusiness companies promoting industrialized agriculture. It is rare that such news organizations would go out on a limb to do critical investigative research in areas that would harm the flow of profits: namely, questioning mass food products containing non-organic ingredients (watch those advertising dollars plummet).

It's not a conspiracy to withhold information I'm talking about here. It's more like being trained to look elsewhere, away from taboo thoughts that would ruffle feathers. In case you think I overstate the situation, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press and the Columbia Journalism Review is revealing. About 40 percent of 210 reporters at major news outlets admitted that they exercise self-censorship, steering away from doing stories on topics that they consider important but dull, too complex, or that their editors or advertisers may find objectionable.

Now that Betsy Hart's motives have been called into question, we can proceed to the actual content of her diatribe against organic food. First, she mocks the attributes of organic food by placing "pure" and "natural" in quotes, dismisses the rise in popularity of organic as nothing more than a fad, and then goes right for the emotional gut with a cliché: "I avoid organic things like the plague." Somehow, the world has managed to get on for centuries without the use of pesticides, but we are supposed to envision an enormous death toll from organics.

Ignoring this baseless smear, she next charges that organic foods "often look awful and cost a lot more." Why American society seems to emphasize cosmetics over quality is beyond me. I'd rather eat a ripe,

bursting organic tomato than one that's coated in pesticides, engineered to sit on supermarket shelf for months, and tastes like cardboard. With its rubberized skin, you can practically bounce it off the floor.

The higher cost of some organic products is the result of a limited supply unable to meet the huge and growing demand for organic foods. Currently, less than one million acres of farmland are devoted to organic crops, whereas over 60 million acres are employed to raise genetically modified (GM) crops — plants engineered to be able to withstand higher and higher doses of pesticides. The Monsanto corporation designed its "Roundup Ready" GM seeds expressly to increase the sales of its Roundup pesticide.

This lopsided difference in acreage is no accident or evidence that organic food is a fool's delight, however. The fact of the matter is that GM crops have exploded from zero to their present abundance in just five years because of government subsidies. The USDA has applied hundreds of millions of tax dollars to the development of biotechnology, and then allowed Monsanto to patent the science for its own profit. Meanwhile, the Clinton administration has been the enemy of organic food, seeking to corrupt and stifle the push for organic standards and budgeting only a token amount to help advance the science of organic farming.

Despite government aid making biotechnology artificially competitive in the "free market," many people have begun to see through the slick public relations campaigns of the biotech industry, and the market for organic food has exploded. Besides the incestuous relationship between government food agencies and biotech corporations — these institutions have spun a revolving door for officials looking to extend their careers with another posh directorship — the main reason for the government's preference for big business is the nature of organic farming. It is decentralized, which means it can't be controlled by a few managers for their own benefit. Indeed, government policy has accelerated the destruction of small family farms nationwide and around the world.

The need for pesticides comes from the trade-oriented aims of industrial farming, which focuses on quantity rather than quality. Unsustainable monocultures (single crop farming) allow pests to breed with profligacy. Organic crop diversity and crop rotation eliminates much of this problem. Instead of preaching dependency on pesticides, we should listen to the voices of real organic farmers. Here is a quote that I procured from a story I'm working on at my job, from Olvidio Alvarez, a farmer in Panama: "Chemicals aren't necessary. They work well at first, but the second year, the size of the harvest that they yield starts to get smaller. And each time [pesticides are applied] the land produces less. So it's not like organic fertilizer, which makes the land better and better. And in time the land is very good for planting whatever you want."

Hart claims that FDA studies prove the safety of pesticides, but a growing body of research is suggesting that is wishful thinking. The tests chemical companies and the government conduct are woefully incomplete and do not include the immune system. The scientific evidence indicating that pesticides damage the immune system is impressive. The World Resources Institute, an environmental research organization, reports that animal studies have found that pesticides alter the structure of the immune system and weaken response to infection. These findings carry over to human populations.

For instance, atrazine is a toxic weed killer peddled by the Novartis corporation. It is banned in seven European countries, but remains the most widely used pesticide in the U.S. Over 75 million pounds of atrazine are sprayed each year on corn to feed cattle. The runoff is polluting the tap water of 800 Midwestern communities, and traces of the pesticide also have been found in meat, fruits and vegetables. Atrazine is an endocrine disrupter; studies link it to breast cancer and female reproductive tissue cancer, leukemia and lymphoma. Nevertheless, the EPA classifies atrazine merely as a "possible" carcinogen.

Another example is a study published last April in *Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly* #648. A group of 4-5 year-olds in a Mexican valley community were exposed to pesticides via spraying in nearby fields and runoff in tap water. They were compared to a control group in a hill community far from the pesticide use. The test group of children suffered a decrease in mental ability and an increase in aggressive behavior. Children are more vulnerable to pesticide exposure because of their acute sensitivity during the tender years of their development, and also because they consume far more pesticide-treated foods by weight than adults.

One of the most eminent scientists in the field, Rachel Carson, had this to say about the health effects of pesticides in her revolutionary work *Silent Spring*: "Human exposures to cancer-producing chemicals (including pesticides) are uncontrolled and they are multiple. An individual may have many different exposures to the same chemical....It is quite possible that no one of these exposures alone would be sufficient to precipitate malignancy — yet any single supposedly 'safe dose' may be enough to tip the scales that are already loaded with other 'safe doses.'"

So when someone tells you that pesticides are good for you, remember this rare instance of reporting. Published in the May 13 *Washington Post*, an article divulged that Ed Gray, a lobbyist for the pesticide industry, was the author of a bill sponsored by a California Congressman that sought to undermine a law protecting children from pesticide exposure. "I was the guy with the typewriter," he admitted; his backers stood to lose money from the sale of chemicals used to treat apples, peaches, tomatoes and other children's foods.

After talking about what a concerned mom she is, Hart next delves into propaganda by calling the U.S. food supply the "safest in the world." Yet Vandana Shiva, an Indian world agriculture expert, noting the U.S. Center for Disease Control's own statistics, points out that there were over 81 million cases of food-borne illness last year, and that food poisoning deaths have multiplied by a factor of four since safety laws were deregulated. I don't think I'd be so fast and loose with my praise.

Next, Hart touts the wonders of irradiation for making foods free of all evil, not mentioning that the food-borne illnesses so prevalent today (e. coli, salmonella, etc.) mostly are rampant in meats due to the filthy processing conditions in industrial factory farms. Moreover, the Spring 1999 issue of *Food and Water*, an environmental journal, charges that the FDA's review of irradiation safety tests was seriously flawed (surprised?). The food safety problems of irradiation include "the loss of vitamins and nutrients and the introduction of free radicals, radiolytic products and carcinogens" such as benzene, a known toxic, as well as many chemicals that are new and as yet unidentified. Bombarding food with the equivalent of hundreds of x-rays doesn't sound that yummy to me. Nonetheless, we're not supposed to worry when the industry says that the cancer risk is negligible, as it salivates over potentially millions of dollars in business.

Are you with me? We're just now getting to my favorite part! Hart trots out Dr. Ruth Kava from the American Council of Science and Health (ACSH), who assures us that we won't get sick from pesticides. Well, let's find out a little more about this organization. Based in New York, ACSH touts itself as "a unique voice, backed by mainstream science, defending the achievements and benefits of responsible technology within America's free enterprise system." Yes, that pretty much is the definition of "mainstream" science. So, we must ask: who is part of the mainstream? Who says so? What are their interests? Are they excluding others on the basis of sloppy methodology or ideology? Obviously, upholding American capitalism is in no way a disinterested position; to imply authoritative scientific objectivity is a joke. As we just saw regarding the FDA testing of pesticides and irradiation, science is not a purely objective arena. It incorporates the biases of the funders and testers, and sometimes what's discovered depends on what is being looked for.

The ACSH claims to be a "consumer education organization" in health domains such as food, nutrition, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and the environment. Not surprisingly, in most of the above areas, the agency identifies no dangers. Those who might have some concerns with industrial pollution are denounced as having "agendas based on unfounded fear, not science." Essentially, its advice is don't smoke or drink too much, don't sit out in the sun too long, and don't go for a swim in a nuclear waste dump or toxic chemical vat. This obviously is very informative, cutting-edge work.

It seems that, in urging common sense and not pushing the envelope, ACSH may be promoting a different kind of agenda. This is reflected in the quotes of supporters it hypes, including *The Wall Street Journal* (the world's leading business newspaper) and this one from the wealthy right-wing Heritage Foundation: "ACSH has stood as a bulwark against the contemporary Luddites who see the beginning of civilization's end in every technological advance that reaches the marketplace." The demonization of reasonable people who may have some questions about why 1 out of 5 Americans get cancer is revealing.

In addition to finding no problems with herbicides and irradiation, the ACSH also insists that the pesticide malathion poses "no health threat to people." Malathion is a mosquito killer, sprayed in New York City, Westchester and Rockland last fall to combat the West Nile virus. Studies have linked malathion to child leukemia, kidney failure and birth defects; one 1992 Florida study showed that children exposed to malathion during the second trimester of pregnancy had 2 1/2 times more gastrointestinal disorders in comparison to children not so exposed.

So, far from promoting sound science, ACSH turns the burden of proof on its head by challenging concerned groups to demonstrate that pesticides are unsafe (and then mocks their studies as flawed). It is the advocates of pesticides that should have to prove their safety. In reality, since the accumulation of all pesticides and radiation exposures in our bodies over a lifetime can't be traced, it is easier for corporations and their front groups to just put these products on the market and dismiss the questioners.

Returning to Ms. Hart and Dr. Kava, they invoke the specter of animal manure fertilizer used to grow organic food to scare us. As a matter of fact, animals aren't necessary for creating compost; farmers can use things as diverse as lime, rice husks, wood charcoal, sugar, and decaying plant matter. But doesn't animal poop sound so much nastier than nice, clean, scientifically developed chemicals? Why anyone would have faith in the technology of the same chemical companies that brought us Agent Orange and PCBs escapes me. This attitude, that man-made is superior to nature, is a hallmark of Western civilization; our adversarial approach to the environment has made the world what it is today.

Continuing, Hart mews about how synthetic chemicals keep food fresher and help it last longer, whereas organic produce may spoil. Well, any good cook knows that farm-fresh food is best. Accepting chemically-treated food for the sake of convenience makes no sense from either a health or a taste perspective. Why not visit your community's weekly farmers' market? The organic fruits and vegetables you bring home will easily last for seven days.

Finally, Hart cites the ACSH once again to insinuate that organics have no proven health benefits; rather, they may bring "a false sense of food safety," leading to careless lack of washing. If this is the best she can do, I really shouldn't feel obligated to compose a much more thoughtful essay on the subject. But, as the resident media critic at **OFF-Line**, that's my job.

The benefits of organic food are many. The Cal.-based Pesticide Action Network refers to a 1987 National Academy of Sciences report, which estimated pesticides might cause an additional 1.4 million cancer cases among Americans over their lifetimes. Besides consumers' health, farm workers dealing with pesticides are six times more likely to contract cancer than organic farmers. Consider the health of the earth as well: industrial farming is depleting the U.S. of 3 billion tons of topsoil each year. Without healthy soil, the nutritional value of food as well as total farm output decreases dramatically. Organic farming also doesn't expose groundwater supplies to toxic chemicals like industrial farming practices. It's just good food, pure and simple.

I feel sorry for Betsy Hart's kids. I really do. In promoting apathy, she's exposing them to increased risk of cancer over their lifetime, while preaching that all sensible moms should do the same. Hopefully, this critique at least will give you pause for reflection, and enable you to read media opinions upholding the status quo with a skeptic's eye.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

NOTE: The satirical commentary which follows will undoubtedly provide most readers with more cartoon satisfaction than they ever dreamed possible. However, a recalcitrant minority may find this week's offering predictable, heavy-handed, or otherwise disagreeable. Fortunately, there's something for them as well:

A RAINY DAY FUN GAME!

That's right! You see, we've deliberately inserted numerous mistakes throughout the following four panels. Can you spot them all? We believe the attempt to do so will provide untold hours of non-partisan entertainment!

1 SO, LET'S SEE, BIFF-- IN D.C., PROTESTERS WERE SUBJECTED TO TEAR GAS, UNJUSTIFIED ARREST SWEEPS, THE CLOSURE OF THEIR HEADQUARTERS ON THE FLIMSIEST OF PRETEXTS--

--ISN'T THIS THE SORT OF SUPPRESSION OF DISSENT WE ALWAYS ACCUSE OUR ENEMIES OF PRACTICING?

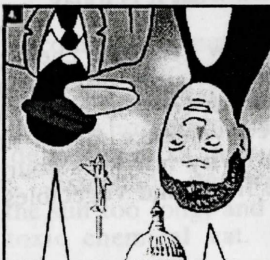


2 OH, GET OVER IT, SPARKY! THOSE PROTESTERS WERE JUST A BUNCH OF UNION THUGS AND LONG-HAIRED WEIRDOS TRYING TO RE-LIVE THE SIXTIES!

THEY NEED TO CALL AMTRAK AND RESERVE SOME SEATS ON THE CLUE TRAIN, MY FRIEND!



3 GLOBALIZATION IS A FACT OF LIFE AND THERE'S NOTHING YOUR TREE-HUGGING, BLEEDING HEART COMRADES CAN DO ABOUT IT! THEY NEED TO STOP WHINING ABOUT "HUMAN RIGHTS" AND "ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS" AND GET WITH THE PROGRAM!



SO INSTEAD OF PROTESTING THE ECONOMIC RAPE OF THE WORLD--

--THEY SHOULD JUST LIE BACK AND ENJOY IT!

DID YOU SPOT THE MISTAKES?

1. When Sparky says "we," he is clearly referring to government officials and their apologists, of which he is neither. Whoops!
2. Amtrak doesn't really operate a "clue train."
3. An actual defender of the I.M.F. would be unlikely to phrase his arguments in quite this manner.
4. Sparky is talking about the protesters-- but Biff's rejoinder seems to refer to the third world nations affected by I.M.F. structural adjustment policies. Whoops again!

SPECIAL NOTE TO READERS PLANNING TO LET US KNOW THAT OUR ENTIRE POINT OF VIEW IS A MISTAKE: Ha, ha! Good one! We sure didn't see that coming!

Readers' Forum/Reviews

edited by Vincent

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- 2) **Reprints:** *The Zine Yearbook Volume 4*
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- 4) **Letters:** M. Colby, A. Trudgeon, C. Boland, F. Biscotti, B. Misanthropic, G. Wells, V.R. Smith, K. Haas, M. Emerson, C. McNinch, R. Grover, B. Casey, K. Rosson
- 5) **Zine Reviews:** *The Zine Yearbook Volume 3, Book of Letters, Retail Hell, Ten Books, Thought Bombs, 9 and a half left, Spunk, Cement Squeeze, In Abandon, Contrascience, Ten Thousand Things, Imagine*

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### 1) Distribution

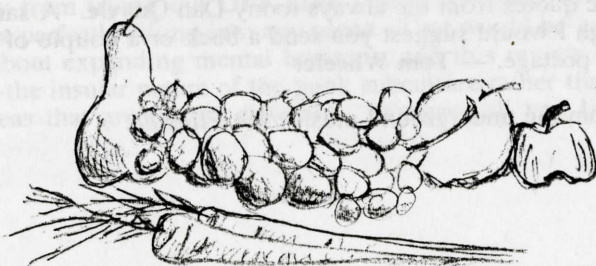
**OFF-Line** is now available from Doug at ChimpWest distribution. Write to PO Box 713, Eureka, CA 95502 for his catalog of fine independent publications.

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2) Reprints

I am very happy that Claire's article "An Education in Relative Sacrifices" (from **OFF-Line** #1, as well as The Best of **OFF-Line** compilation — copies are still available from us), about her experience crossing the line at the School of the Americas, will be reprinted in *The Zine Yearbook Volume 4*. This selects the finest writing from the small distribution underground press. We are grateful for the wider exposure. *Volume 3* is reviewed below; send away for a copy today!

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### 3) Reviews

Finally, the word about **OFF-Line** is getting out there, at least a little! We got two reviews in issue #12 of *A Reader's Guide to the Underground Press*:

• **OFF-Line #4**: I was very absorbed by this publication, and am sorry to read that this is the final issue. Vincent and Claire put together eloquent, well-informed essays about the myriad ways that an anarchistic society would be superior and more human than, say, a greed-driven corporate oligarchy. He throws in a couple of religious references (which I am always wary of), but keeps them in check, using them only when pertinent, and balances them with other religious viewpoints. Some quality news articles and a pinch of creative writing round it out. Too good to disappear. — Violet Jones

• **OFF-Line #5**: A pretty good political zine. These folks need a little focus (a review of *The Phantom Menace*?), and political humor is not their strong suit. But there are some fine political essays here; I especially liked Claire's piece on white privilege, which expresses a lot of things that I've felt about the topic. And Vincent reprints a letter to the editor he wrote that effectively questions the notion that sabotage against property is "nonviolent." — Steve Omlid

*Alternative Press Magazine* (Volume 5, Number 1) also reviewed this issue:

• **OFF-Line #5** is a 44-page personal zine written by a pair of activists and filled with plenty of political commentary from a pacifist perspective on a variety of social justice issues. In "Roots of Radicalism," Vincent Romano weighs in with some thoughts on the recent spate of highly publicized high school shootings. Claire Cocco shares her thoughts on the issue of privilege from both an economic and racial perspective. Dave Dellinger contributes a short piece on the June 5th march at the Pentagon against the Kosovo bombing. There is also a reprint of the *New York Times* ad opposing the sanctions and renewed bombing of Iraq, a reprint of a letter from Vincent to the quarterly journal *Food and Water* expressing unease over their promotion of "nonviolent acts of eco-sabotage," and a collection of some classic quotes from the always loony Dan Quayle. A sample copy is free, although I would suggest you send a buck or a couple of stamps to help offset the postage. — Tom Wheeler

Here is one from the underground music zine *Flipside*:



• **OFF-Line #8:** Thoughts and commentary from what seems to be the popular left of politics. Spirituality, revolutionary spirituality, recent protests at WTO meetings in Seattle, thoughts on Scripture of the Christian sort and more. Lots of print to read.

And one from issue #63 of the venerable punk zine *Slug & Lettuce*:

• **OFF-Line #9:** This was a bit of a mixed zine to review. It's definitely packed with writing. Some I enjoyed while other parts left me with a bad feeling. The standout article is a reprint of a lecture given by a Greenpeace guy who focuses on the subject of genetically altered crops. And he never throws in any Greenpeace plugs, which is nice. Just concise, immediate info. There's an academic article where the author worked as a bartender in a strip club to study sexism for two years. The discussion of eliminating the words "Fuck" and "Bitch" due to their "violent meanings" (?) sent my censorship alarm blaring. But there's also a creepy Christianity undercurrent in this zine that left me leery. Other stuff: top 33 movies list, subversive Simpsons quotes, zine/book reviews, mini-script of a video play they did, pranks at elementary school and more. — Aprille

*Vincent responds:* I have something to say about this last one. I can take a little criticism, but Aprille's perspective strikes me as a little warped. I don't understand why a discussion of the words "Fuck" and "Bitch" would hoist a waving red flag. We are not bloody censors — a fact I've noted on several occasions. We merely put our views on a controversial topic out there, and stood up for what we think is right, advocating that people consider for themselves what they want to do about those words if they use them in their own speech. Aprille's flippant "(?)" after the "violent meanings" suggests to me that she didn't even attempt to reflect on the four pages we wrote; she wouldn't be so confused if she had.

Also, what's up with the "creepy Christian undercurrent" remark? Talking about morality (i.e. in anarcho-lingo, resisting oppression) is creepy? I think if we were in your face with "Jesus saves" and all that, you might have a point. Both of us have written about our estrangement from organized religion, although it is true that our religious upbringing may affect our thinking in various ways, as it has been known to do for many other "recovering Catholics." We promote figuring out your own belief system, which I think is pretty punk. Yet Aprille's warning may steer other punks away from trying out **OFF-Line**, which continues to live up to its name by not perfectly fitting into any scene. That would be a shame, since **O-L** is all about expanding mental horizons, and this review may wind up reinforcing the insular nature of the punk subculture rather than cracking it open to ideas that are (gasp) different. Disagree all you like, but don't dismiss us.

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4) Letters

Readers' Forum policy: any correspondence received pertaining to the zine potentially may be reprinted here, unless explicitly requested not to do so.

• Dear Vincent,

Thanks for the copy of **OFF-Line** (#10) and the nice plug you gave for our publications. Bravo on your "nonprofit dinosaur" rant ("Masturbatory Peacemaking")...right on...write on...

— **Michael Colby**, Walden, VT

• Dear Vincent,

I enjoy your zine, since I do not follow politics much. **OFF-Line** seems to be unique and holds my interest. I like your cut-and-paste style. Your phrase about "growing into the system and upholding it" (in "The Writer's Block," **O-L** #11-12) is a good observation. But for those in it, it is hard for them to see that simple truth. The lifestyle you like living can be done if you're single or married with no kids. I'm sure with kids it can be done, but it would be tricky.

I liked your article on heavy metal because you wrote it intelligently. I agree that being musical is a God-given talent, and you can see it, like you said, even with those who sing anti-God songs. As for myself, I don't want to get in touch with my dark side because when I do, I bear bad fruit. It's a challenge for me to bear good fruit such as love and patience....I definitely would like to keep trading zines.

— **Aaron Trudgeon**, Detroit, MI

Vincent responds: It's true that it is easier to live outside of the system (as much as is possible — pioneers in the Alaskan wilderness still need bullets and guns, for instance) if you are unfettered by children or other entanglements. However, I have met families who are war tax resisters, home school their children, grow their own food, live off the power grid, etc. Living this kind of lifestyle is better suited to mutual aid networks, and many such supportive communities exist. It is our individualist orientation in the U.S., driving us to the "ideal" of the house with the white picket fence, that precludes these opportunities to live freely. I do the most resistance I can while still having a large debt. I must work to pay it off, which hampers my activity to a great degree, but I make certain not to accumulate any more debt. But many of our present attachments can be profitably shed as well. As Gandhi said, "Renounce and enjoy."

Fear of the dark side is, I think, one of the main things holding this country back from real spiritual progress. By that, I mean moving further away from our addictions to the system of death we have now. It is that tendency to smooth everything over, make "nice-nice," and pretend the darkness within (ourselves and our society) doesn't exist. If we acknowledge it, we'll have to deal with it. Yes, damn it, it's scary, but I know I'm a stronger person for having encountered it, and I am convinced that everyone has the resources within themselves to cope as well. There are guides (from music to books to teachers) who can assist us readily available. If we wouldn't shelter our children so much, for starters, their innate wisdom ("But why would the President want to make bombs that can kill people, and other children like me?") would show us precisely what we need to do.

• Dear Vincent,

Thanks for the copy of **OFF-Line**. You raise many worthwhile points in the many articles, dialogues, etc. within its pages. I can relate to your tendency toward "puritanism" (in "The Writer's Block: Individual Choice and Responsibility," **O-L** #9). I've been trying to implement small changes in my life that I consider beneficial to the society/environment at large, such as riding the bike, using less packaged products, buying organic foods (also a health-conscious decision), attempting to compost leftover foods (not easy when you live in the big, bad city). I also cannot get into not using tissues. It just doesn't work for me. It seems akin to using a towel instead of paper. With any of these practices, it's all a matter of doing what you can. Don't beat yourself up for not doing more.

The strip-club piece was rather intriguing, though I think for many it may be overly academic and dry. On a similar subject, your dialogue piece with Claire touched on good points too, such as the power of language, though you could have gone further and evaluated English as a language of power and domination over other languages. I don't know its linguistic roots, but I don't consider "fuck" to be inherently misogynist. I can see why one would consider it as so, but I think the word has many varied meanings and uses. I don't deny the possibility of it being an oppressive word — no, a word with oppressive connotations. But I don't think we should concentrate on the dangers of words as much as the dangers of actions. Any why not spell out the naughty words? This is the underground press, the do-it-yourself press, not the *New York Times*. There are no rules.

Both of you also bring up an interesting point with your "Woostah Ghetto-bustas" thing. I see your opinion of the skit as parody. Yet when I read it, I would not think it a spoof without your disclaimer. It just looks

ridiculous and pointless. It seems like bored white suburban kids trying to play black, and at worst, it almost appears like you mock African-American inner-city culture. I live and work in predominantly lower-class and under-class African-American neighborhoods. That ghetto-style plastered all over MTV is indicative of black youth. I'm not saying it's everyone, and I don't say I think it's good how violent attitudes and violent actions are so common. Fuck, I probably generalize and misunderstand what's going on here. But it doesn't sit right with me when white kids from a privileged background attempt to lampoon other cultures. O.K., you do say you intended to make fun of the gangsta image as propagated by TV. But I just don't think the Woostah skit is a clear parody of media presentation of African-American youth. Your intention is worthwhile. All you ever see on TV are these kids killing each other and acting tough and looking tougher. But what should we expect? Violence means ratings and racism is an integral part of the corporate structure that is the bulwark of power in this country. O.K., I just re-read the Ghattobustas play and I see more clearly your satire.

Elsewhere, it's obvious you're a skilled writer. I don't like most writing in zines I've seen, but you have quite a way with words. As for your reviews, I'll comment on something that popped up in the zine review section. In your thoughts on *Spaghetti*, you delve into the issue of stealing. Personally, I have no compunction about stealing from major corporations. I don't do it often (for fear of getting caught), yet I see nothing wrong with such an act, considering their methods of expansion and treatment of their employees (I'm talking about what they pay). I take issue with your conceptions of "honorable" and "character." Who is to define what is an honorable thing to do and who is to define a "character blemish?" In cases where one takes something from someone who oppresses them or their community, I do not consider the act a blemish of their character. It doesn't make them lesser of a person. Or perhaps I blow all of this way out of proportion.

O.K., O.K., enough of my critique. Your zine really made me think, something so few seem to do these days. You also seem to be coming from a different side of zine-dom than myself (I being somewhere in that punk-hardcore tundra) and it was refreshing to read a zine as diverse as yours. I hope you continue with zines.

— Casey Boland, Philadelphia, PA

Vincent responds: Hey! I totally appreciate all the kind things you had to say about **OFF-Line**. Thanks for being so gracious. I laugh about the tissues; my drippy nose won't allow me to go without them too! I take many of your points well. I've already responded to others' letters on the articles, so not to rehash: I think the most important thing I'd like to convey on language is that I'm just tired of hearing everyone from bands,

protesters and "cool" people in general use the word "fuck" (and its derivatives) to describe pretty much anything. It often cheapens sex and women by implication, in my opinion, and clearly is the lowest common denominator of vocabulary (like Orwell's 1984, where all language is reduced to one word, and creative thinking is abolished). On GhettoBustas, here's another interpretation: besides satirizing tough-guy black culture and corporate culture, it also satirizes middle-class white culture that laps up and recycles these portrayals (can you say Kid Rock?). I'm an equal-opportunity offender, and all these groups are worthy of a crack. And I like that you responded to my response to Frances, which is exactly what I hoped **OFF-Line** could be: a forum for diverse views to meet in free expression. I'm sure Frances will be pleased to see her "Intensely Unpopular Opinion" treated with such continued consideration; anyone else want to weigh in?

• Dear Vincent,

I loved the latest **OFF-Line** (issue #11-12). I've liked the other ones too, but not being a very political-minded kind of person, this latest issue impressed me the most. I'm a real sucker for anything having to do with being in love, so I really enjoyed the piece about the retreat. Your description of your walk and the way the trees looked could only be written by someone in love.

— Frances Biscotti, Erie, PA

• Dear Vincent,

I thoroughly enjoyed your thoughts on metal music (**OFF-Line** #11-12). Metal first struck a chord (or dischord...ha) with me when I was about six. I heard and saw Kiss on TV and was both scared and obsessed. I listened to the radio constantly, but wasn't hearing the heaviness I needed. At eight, I started checking out Dio records from the library. A year later, my friend and I discovered Iron Maiden. Then Metallica. Then Megadeth, Anthrax, Slayer, and S.O.D. It all went downhill from there. Though the classics still get their fair share of play on my stereo, I've really moved further into the extremities. Death metal (Cryptopsy, Nile, Internal Bleeding, Incantation, Suffocation), grindcore, (Assück, Phobia, Cianide, Excrutiating Terror), old school thrash (D.R.I., Cryptic Slaughter, Acrophet), and black metal (God Dethroned, Bethlehem, Sacramentum, Immortal, At the Gates) take up most of my metal collection these days. I am particularly intrigued by the absolutely devastating stuff that walks the line between music, noise, and outright absurdity, like Mortician and Gore Beyond Necropsy.

I can't say I feel a spiritual connection to the music (I'm kind of put off by the connotations of the word "spiritual" these days)...it's more aesthetic. The music is congruent with the feelings within my head and my body. It reverberates through me. I get so used to antagonism from people who judge me for how I look, from police, from whoever, it's nice to hear something that is complimentary to how I feel inside. When I turn metal on it is speaking to me, and it's saying and expressing things I want to hear and feel, things I would say or express if I could.

The music also serves as an emotional outlet for me. As I can feed both my positive and negative energy into it and feel good because of it. Assück puts me in the best mood. I cook to it all the time and jump around roaring along with it. On the other hand, there's a particular riff in "Spirit in Black" by Slayer (if you know the song, then you know the riff) that I can't listen to without imagining killing people. Lots of people. Sometimes I need that. When I let the anger go through the music, it takes away the need to hurt others and myself. Or to smash things.

Like all things, metal is not without its faults. It's a constant process of weeding out the stupidity and ignorance. I love Dying Fetus' sound, but man, those guys are sexist jackasses. Malevolent Creation used to be one of my favorites until I read an interview where they made some racist remarks. Same with Deceased. And Mayhem. I think that as long as you keep your eyes *and* ears open, it's not too hard to pick out the questionable stuff.

By the way, I was surprised to read that you are 25. For some reason, I imagined that you were a bit older...possibly in your 30s. I don't meet many people my age (25) who subscribe so steadfastly to pacifist beliefs. I tend to assume that comes with age for many people.

— **Brad Misanthropic**, State College, PA

Vincent responds: Beautifully put. I hardly could have said it better.

• Dear Vincent,

It's good to see the ultra-personal nature of the current issue (**OFF-Line** #11-12). It's vital and important to step back every once in a while and clear your head. I must admit, being a former metalhead, I really have never looked back on that era of my life as a positive experience. Drugs, sexism, machismo are all things that I've left behind. However, I can appreciate where you're coming from with your piece and I give you much respect for printing that article in **O-L**.

— **Greg Wells**, Richmond, VA

• Dear Vincent,

I see a lot of zines, but **OFF-Line** is exceptional. I really enjoyed the heavy metal article (**O-L** #11-12). I thought I was the only one who ever had anything good to say about it. Heavy metal seems to be universally despised; meanwhile, for the past 24 years, so much of the "underground" and the mainstream tell us that punk and its spin-offs are the greatest thing since sliced bread. I would like to run this article in issue #13 of my zine *Cement Squeeze*.

— **V.R. Smith**, Tempe, AZ

• Dear Vincent,

Thanks for **OFF-Line**. As the sleep-deprived mother of a three month-old who doesn't take naps, I haven't had much time for reading, but Mr. Baby did fall asleep for a brief period yesterday, and I was able to read your zine. My goodness, there actually are folks out there in the world with the time and energy to write about politics, social change, work, etc.! It's difficult sometimes to remember this when the only thing I can clearly ponder is whether he'll manage to sleep for two hours in a row at night instead of one and a half. Anyway, I enjoyed **OFF-Line** very much.

— **Kate Haas**, Portland, OR

• Dear Vincent,

I enjoyed the #11-12 issue of **OFF-Line**, particularly the story that followed "The Trembling" and "The Writer's Block" essay. I, too, am on a mission to maintain my youthful mindset and it gets more difficult every day. (I am currently sitting in my cubicle at my 9 to 5 job.)

— **Mark Emerson**, Columbia, SC

• Dear Vincent,

Hey...thanks for writing and sending me a copy of **OFF-Line** (#10)! I'm enjoying it — smart and intelligent writing. I'm glad to hear that for the most part you liked *Asswhine*. Thanks! Don't worry, the Davida thing is over. And I see what you're saying about the trivialities. I sorta felt the same way about some of the stuff you mentioned.

— **Carrie McNinch**, Los Angeles, CA

Vincent responds: Wow. Carrie gets mad props from me here. She actually accepted the critical comments in my review of her zine, *The Assassin and the Whiner*, constructively. That is a first, I think, for letter writers to this zine (except for Brad Misanthropic, maybe). This is a rare grace and a big plus in my book (or zine, whatever). (On the other hand, it may be a little easier to accept criticism if it concerns a past relationship from which you've gotten some distance, as opposed to graciously accepting differences of strongly-held opinions. So Brad is up there too.) I feel more confident now in offering a stronger endorsement of Carrie's zine. Go out and give *Asswhine* a read! (Send \$1 to PO Box 481051, Los Angeles, CA 90048.)

• Dear Vincent,

Damn, dude, how the hell do you put out so many zines in such a short time?! Out of the three I have, I think your latest (**O-L** #10) is the best. I thought your article on non-profit organizations was really interesting. Keep up the good work.

— **Ravi Grover**, Naperville, IL

• Dear Vincent,

Hey, thanks so much for sending **OFF-Line** (#10), I truly enjoyed it. I liked the back-to-back text without tons of band pictures and stuff most zines have. I enjoyed your article "Masturbatory Peacemaking." It always seemed to me that many nonprofit groups are ineffectual. It seems all they really do is raise money and send out those packets asking for money. Maybe you get a free sticker or address labels. But they don't seem to be making any real change. Too much bureaucracy, and as you said, the hierarchical structure.

I like reading about people's personal accounts of protests and stuff. Claire's Amadou Diallo article was really interesting. And now Patrick Dorismond? And Giuliani has cancer? I find it difficult to have sympathy for him. Let's just hope this keeps him out of the Senate race, as the man who has seen the lives of so many as worthless realizes he is not immortal.

I got in contact with the War Tax Resisters ("Understanding Militarism") and my friends and I are looking into it, seeing what we can do. The man I talked with used to live in Pittsburgh...on my street! I really liked and agreed with most of Deb Morra's article ("Pornography and Misogyny"); the analysis of *The Little Mermaid* was really interesting, even without having seen the movie. Sexist ideas are forced on us in ways we'd never realize.

"Candles in the Darkness" made me think. It's rare to find a zine talking about good things Christians (and especially Catholics!) are doing. I tend to have prejudices against Christian groups due to bad previous experiences and the fact that I am an agnostic, but what the people are doing is courageous and I hope the people they're helping can find lasting, political peace as well as spiritual peace. I didn't know much about Sudan except they had a civil war going on and about what we did to the pharmaceutical plant. So your article showed me a lot of new info.

"The Changing Workplace" was pretty funny. It's scary what morons are put in charge of us workers...and they walk around with attitude like we're the dumb ones! It's all too much. :-) How do you pay for **OFF-Line** — out of your own money?

A few friends of mine have been planning to get together and do a collective zine with a focus on the local scene. I'm really into that idea because there's a lot of cool things going on in Pittsburgh that no one knows about: punk rock, Spanish class twice a week, pirate radio, Free Ride (which rebuilds old junk bikes and gives them away to the community), the Mr. Roboto project (a collectively-run/owned show space), and Food Not Bombs is building carts to attach to bikes so we can go carless! So much cool stuff happening here, and I think the world needs to know!

I'm also considering starting a movement for a license for a low-watt community radio station. The FCC is, for a very brief period, allowing a few low-watt stations to apply. The five days for Pennsylvanians to apply is next spring. I'd have a hell of a lot of organizing to do, and quickly. I've never done anything so large scale and I have no idea where to begin. But I think I'm going to give it a try. I just hope it doesn't hurt the pirate station here.

Well, I just spent a really productive day gardening; now that I'm rested I'm going to build a bookcase. Spring makes me feel so good, like I can do anything!

— Breen Casey, Pittsburgh, PA

Vincent responds: Wow and double wow!! Your letter is just so awesome. I'm really psyched to read all of your considerate comments about the zine. The best thing you said was that you called to find out more about war tax resistance. In my memory, this is the first instance when somebody has told me explicitly that they were motivated to action on this issue based on something that I said or wrote. Most ignore my deviant behavior — just don't want to go there — and some might say it is good that I'm standing up for my beliefs, but you actually followed through to find out for

yourself. Thank you so much and I hope what you learned will inform you and inspire you. It's funny that the guy you talked to was from your neighborhood. Look out, world, the revolutionary tax resisters are taking over!

Poor Rudy has cancer. Couldn't happen to a nicer guy, right? But I'm not gloating or anything, cause I wouldn't wish cancer on anybody. We are surprised and glad to learn that he is withdrawing from the Senate race because of it. I really thought he would try to use it to his advantage by creating an image of a guy heroically battling to overcome this disease, unlike all the people of color in New York that simply whine and complain about their "victim" status. But I don't really care, since I'm not voting. I guess that makes Hillary a lock for six more years on the Beltway. She's as full of shit as Rudy, only she thinks hers smells sweeter. Not.

I think being agnostic only makes sense when there's no way we can truly *know* all of the articles of creed we have to follow to be part of a religion. Yet I don't mind covering topics of spirituality when they're a vehicle for people to serve the greater good (God). I wish that Aprille of *Slug & Lettuce* would take your viewpoint.

Yeah, we pay for the zine out of pocket. It's not so bad now because I finally have a steady income. We can't afford a big print run, but that's OK — my aim is hopefully to thoroughly inform and nurture ties among a small group, not conquer the world with my writing.

I printed up your writing on the Pittsburgh scene because I agree: people should know about what's going on in your city. And I'm *so* impressed with all of the personal projects you're taking on. Um, I got my bookcase at a yard sale....Thanks for heartening me in return. You put my friends who read *O-L* and don't write and dialogue about it to shame. I hope you inspire others as well. Keep up the good work and stick with the growing *OFF-Line* community!

• Dear Vincent,

Howdy. Went to visit my mom this past weekend and *OFF-Line* #10 kept me going through the bus ride. I seem to have a short attention span these days, and while I read the entire issue, I enjoyed the smaller pieces best. I thought your "Ten Indisputable Facts" was excellently written and I appreciated the lively letters section as well. It's always refreshing to get a letter with dialogue and well-intentioned criticism.

— Keith Rosson, Portland, OR

5) Zine Reviews

• **The Zine Yearbook Volume 3** is a collection of some of the best independent writings of 1998, compiled by Jen Angel (*Fucktooth, Clamor*). If you're new to the zine scene, or just looking for the finest unfiltered features of the small press, this is a must. The range of topics spans from wrestling (*Marketing Ploy*) and a critique of homophobia in heavy metal music (*Alice is an Island*), to "Imprisonment: A National Pasttime" (*Contrascience*) and "Direct Action" (*Cheapskate*). "The Dark Side of Cheerleading" (*Slow Leek*) and "Time to Feed the Worms" (*Here Be Dragons*, on composting) are also representative of the enormous diversity contained in these pages. Other selective highlights (there are so many) include pieces on the fine art of bonsai, "Franchise Activism" (*The Secret Files of Captain Sissy*), "Hierarchy and Anarchy" (*Inside Front*), and "A reluctant examination" of evil ventriloquist dummies (*Throwrug*). Perhaps my favorite line overall comes from *Holiday in the Sun*, "The Real Corporate Conspiracy": "I'd rather be a hypocritical, inconsistent anarchist pissed off at injustice and dreaming of a better world than a consistent liberal, smugly satisfied with my lot in life." A new edition culled from 1999 zines will be available in June. Highly recommended. 128 pp. (full size, perfect bound). Send \$7 to Become the Media, PO Box 353, Mentor, OH 44061.

• The **Book of Letters** is a zany compilation of correspondence between the Rev. Rich Mackin and various corporations, i.e. asking General Mills for the origin of each of the Lucky Charms cereal symbols (timeline of introduction dutifully provided). Many of his missives of free-form strings of random goofy thoughts get no reply (which he marks with a feisty rubber stamp: "NO REPLY!"), but those that do span the gamut from officious and snide to boring and anti-informative. A precious few customer service representatives actually have a sense of humor, though, and use the opportunity to elevate an otherwise boring job into lighthearted madness. Ansell Perry, for instance, replies to Mackin's complaints: "Obviously, we have no intention of controlling society, nor are we evil aliens....We are simply a medical glove manufacturer....Live long and prosper." Some of my favorites included his haiku ("Dear Cocoa Puffs: Cocoa Flavored Corn / Hyper Stimulant Breakfast / Sonny Goes Coo-Coo") and his series of letters to Lever Brothers Co. attempting to find the meaning of the "2000" in Lever 2000 soap brand. "Consumer Defense, Corporate Poetry," as his slogan goes...well, it's an original idea for a zine! Of the two I sampled, I liked issue # 6 better than # 12. That may indicate the approach gets a little stale as time goes on, but decide for yourself. Recommended. 36 pp. (1/2 size). Send \$2 to PO Box 890, Allston, MA 02134.

• The first issue of **Retail Hell**, Frances tells me, hasn't received much attention, and she has plenty of copies left. That's really a shame, because this slim digest is surely worth at least its modest price. I had to forcibly stifle garrulous laughter while reading it at work, and I'm not the kind of guy who laughs deeply very often. Yes, we've all heard and read rants on work before, but this booklet mocks life in retail from the manager's point of view. Clearly, the highlight of this collection is the piece on public restrooms. If you're one who can't find some fascination in a recounting of a Bigfoot sighting (or at least his poop), or an incident where "it looked like someone pulled down their pants, grabbed their ankles, and spun around 360 degrees while experiencing diarrhea," then maybe this zine isn't for you after all. But there's sections on customers, management training, and "war stories" as well. Get ready to plumb the sick depths of humanity. Recommended. 24 pp. (1/2 size). Send \$1 to Frances Biscotti, PO Box 8782, Erie, PA 16505.

• **Ten Books** is yet another of Frances' titles. My biggest complaint is that the page margins are way too big. The rest of what I have to say is good. This is like "Frances' Notes" for her favorite fiction. She revisits the books that had the greatest impact on her, sometimes years after her first read, to explore why they affected her so. Better than a book report and explicitly not as snooty as literary criticism, this zine draws you in with a conversational style. In issue #1, on Nausea by Jean-Paul Sartre, she finds that she doesn't relate to the existentialist protagonist as much anymore, but learning about Sartre's life adds a new dimension to pondering the book. This book is pretty deep: the basic premise is, "Everything exists independent of meaning," so you see what I mean. Issue #2 is on The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge by Rainer Maria Rilke. She sees this in a new light as well. Rilke is one of the "tortured artist" types who really has nothing to complain about, but does his best to "create" suffering to inspire his writing. I agree: that's pretty lame. This zine isn't. 24 pp. (1/2 size). Send \$1 to Frances Biscotti, PO Box 8782, Erie, PA 16505.

• **Thought Bombs** is a personal/political zine that focuses on local politics, anarchism, and the prison system. Anthony Rayson is married, and his son contributes cool drawings. The interview conducted with himself by "Turkish anarchists" (issue #12, Feb. 2000) reveals that he is very active in projects like opposing a new airport development. He writes on the Seattle WTO demos, oppression of children in America, and includes an article on the Iraq sanctions. I like this guy, because he's a toll booth worker who does his zining on the job. His above the median age (for zinesters) means that he's got some different things to say, from the perspective of the Woodstock generation. Recommended. 60 pp. (1/2 size). Send \$2 to PO Box 721, Homewood, IL 60430.

• **9 and a half left** features the despondent 4:00 a.m. ramblings of a 20-year-old alcoholic. The cut-and-paste layout of issue #7 is appealing, but the writing mostly doesn't distinguish itself. I'm becoming all too familiar with this kind of personal zine. However, there was one highlight — a quote that had me pondering all day. "If you died at this moment, would you be content with the life you lived? Did you scream all you wanted to? Did you love all you wanted to? Did you accomplish all you wanted to...or even half of all the shit you wanted to? Neither have I." Hey! He read my mind. It's a good question, and since I feel like I'm on the 20-year plan with my student loans, definitely not, because there's lots I'd like to do once I'm free. I feel like I'm building toward something. I certainly haven't raised all the hell I want. I want to do something big with my life. I hope I haven't reached the highest plateau in my relationship with Claire. I want to go higher. Mike concludes, "For the most part, complete honesty and the 'live for yourself' idea doesn't work....It is impossible to be completely happy in an honest world because you are constantly hurting people, but an honest world is a million times better than a fake world." That pretty much describes my stance. 32 pp. (1/2 size). Send \$1 to Mike Rodemann, 1460 W. 110th, Cleveland, OH 44102.

• **Spunk**, "The Journal of Spontaneous Creativity," is simply a two-sided sheet by Violet Jones, a library shelfer and reviewer for *A Reader's Guide to the Underground Press*, among other things. Here she passionately defends the virtues of the independent press and advocates for the strengthening of a true zine community. She is a good writer and I hope this zine gets bigger. Send \$1 to PO Box 55336, Hayward, CA 94545.

• **Cement Squeeze's** motto, courtesy of Edward Abbey, is "It's better to write the truth for a small audience than tell lies for a big one." Here, here! This is an open political journal, involving quite a few people. Like any publication with a number of contributors, the articles here are of varying quality. My favorites from issue #12 include Terry Martin's ruminations on "The Millenium (sic.) Bug," which thankfully stray away from Y2K and denounce the culture more generally: "Violence has become an accepted way of life. Remember peace and love? How did those words, which were so omnipresent...become ridiculous and outcast in the present? We can blame the mind control media. There is no surprise here, but you don't talk about it either mom and dad." Jim Sullivan suggests "A Panacea for America's Problems" (siestas!), and Dr. Julian Whitaker counsels that "The Reason Behind the Madness" is antidepressant drugs (which are three of the top 10 pharmaceuticals sold in the U.S.). Be warned: there are several pages of poetry as well. 40 pp. Send \$2 to PO Box 2112, Tempe, AZ 85280-2112.

• *In Abandon* is most definitely a punk zine, but definitely heads up above most. Mike has written a documentary/novella that is just packed with some of the most powerful, inspiring, emotional and personal writing you will find anywhere. He's traveled the country with his band, met all kinds of cool kids, slept on floors and created so many precious memories for himself. Mike has a deep reverence for his true friends, and his writing is strong enough that they come to life in their own right in his stories. He writes passionately, like his zine's title, and impressed me with the genuine, freestyle form of his flowing prose, as well as his attractive layout (some excellent drawings, well-resolved photos, and inverse white type on deep black backgrounds). From Suitcase City, Tampa to notes from towns and cities from coast to coast, to "Love Letters Never Written," *In Abandon* has a lot to offer. After a while, all his stories started to run together in my mind and sound the same. But I loved how he celebrated his youth. A quote from the front and back cover: "And in the end, we're nothing more than broken children, attempting to rebuild ourselves and finding that comfort in each other, more than anywhere else. We're tearing it down and turning our backs on that spoonfed version of happiness....I guess that's what growing up really is...it's the loss. It's forgetting exactly what made you a kid in the first place, it's the realization of how good things used to be and how much you fucked them up as the years went by." Highly recommended. 72 pp. (1/2 size). Send \$2 to PO Box 82192, Tampa, FL 33682.

• *Contrascience* is one of the smartest zines I have read to date. It's smart-looking and highly intelligent in its contents. Bryan Alft is doing great work by publishing these thoughtful, well-researched (and footnoted!) essays on topics of critical importance. Issue #6 contains treatises on "Teaching as Activism: Punk Teachers" and "The Trucker's Strike of '34," exposés of the timber industry and U.S. arms sales abroad, and a view of Cuba straight from interviews with its working class. I particularly liked Bryan's tarnishing the mythic figure of President Woodrow Wilson (broached by David Dellinger and Eugene V. Debs in this issue), bringing what the history textbooks mask — his extraordinary racism, shredding of the first amendment, and military interventions to advance U.S. imperialism in the Western hemisphere — to the forefront. Bryan's personal story of being called to jury duty is remarkable and revealing. As a person of conscience, he sought to avoid being placed in a situation where he would be required to judge one of his fellow human beings, and perhaps shunt him into the corrupt prison system. If the mission of this zine — "Everything should be questioned....have some faith in yourself and your ability to decide what you believe" — inspires you, and the concept of the contrascience — "the false set of ideas taught to children by a society of child abusers..." — intrigues you, I suggest you follow through on that open-mindedness. Highly recommended. 64 pp. (1/2 legal). Send \$3 to PO Box 8344, Minneapolis, MN 55408-0344.

• *Ten Thousand Things* is quite the interesting little booklet. Within these pages (numbered backwards, having started at 10,000 — the last page of issue #35 is 9,386, so I guess we can expect that many more pages of his writing to come) are some well-written and interesting stories, both fiction and non-fiction. #35 features "The Third I," a short story about a mathematical philosopher who's convinced that he is locked into a cycle of death and rebirth, and pursued by a shadowy arch-enemy named The Crow who seeks to terminate his existence for good. It's actually rather engrossing, containing some interesting observations. Issues #24-25 contain two parts of a very weird workplace experience: after returning from a leave from the office, K.D. finds that all of his fellow employees have been brainwashed by a management consultant company. Everyone has signed on to a ludicrous plan to triple their production by mere force of will. What follows is a fascinating tale of industrial psychology. In betwixt the writing are random photos with cartoon thought bubbles of semi-clever dialogue imposed. This is definitely worth a read. 24 pp. (1/4 size). Send \$1 to K.D. Schmitz, PO Box 1806, Poughkeepsie, NY 12603.

• *Imagine* is quite a darn good anarchist read, and frankly, it was partially responsible for inspiring the anarchist quiz in this issue of *O-L*. In this promising first issue, John Johnson tackles "Anarchist Questions from Left Field" ("What would you do if a serial killer who raped and ate your wife wanted to move next door?" — truly the pressing concern of all political philosophers), and also examines that thorny topic driving us lefties wild: is Noam Chomsky truly an anarchist? J.J. is also pro-vegan and atheist, and includes sections dealing with these topics as well. The zine is peppered with notable quotes, contains very detailed, dialogical reviews, and his letters section is tops. His replies are thoughtful and restrained, and I find myself almost always agreeing with him. Finally, he paints quite a picture of our society's insanity with "Life in these United States" and "Humor in Uniform" (on police brutality). However, I can't say that being bludgeoned over the head with dozens of depressing articles from a web search revealing how much this country sucks is particularly insightful. Someone said that there's not much of a point to the news since it's all variations on the same story, which J.J. clearly demonstrates here. I'd like to read more of his own writing, which is so much more full of life and logic and feeling than this clinical compilation of blurbs. Nevertheless, you should go for this zine. Highly recommended. 72 pp. (1/2 size). Send \$2 to PO Box 8145, Reno, NV 89507.



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