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Dear Editors:

Concerning Kevin Tucker's letter to *Anarchy* (Fall - Winter 2006, pages 72-72): In my extensive correspondence with Kevin, he would never under any circumstances admit that he was wrong about anything. Whenever I pointed out a fact that he found inconvenient, he would manipulate words, assigning eccentric meanings to them in order to make the inconvenient fact go away. Kevin continues to use this trick in his letter to *Anarchy*. I pointed out examples in foraging (= hunting and gathering) societies of what clearly constitutes competition as that word is normally understood, but Kevin doesn't want to believe that there was competition in foraging societies, so he changes the meaning of the word, implying that competition isn't competition unless there is a "conspiracy" or a "grand scheme."

He uses the same gimmick in response to the facts that I cited showing lack of gender equality in foraging societies. Kevin claims that equality is a "legal issue" and that therefore irrelevant to foraging societies. But since when is equality exclusively, or even pri-

marily, a legal issue? Only since Kevin decided to make it so in order to evade the inconvenient truth. Maybe Kevin should explain to John Zerzan, the patriarch of anarchoprimitivism, that the concept of equality is irrelevant to foraging societies, because Zerzan has repeatedly stated that prehistoric foragers had “gender equality”; e.g. in *Future Primitive*, 1994 edition, page 16, and in an article titled “Whose Future,” in *Species Traitor* number—published by Kevin Tucker himself.

Kevin claims that gender relations among foragers were “egalitarian.” His explanation of what this means is vague enough so that it is difficult to see how it applies in concrete cases, but it seems plausible to describe some foragers, e.g. the Mbuti, as “egalitarian” in Kevin’s sense. It seems much less plausible to apply that term to certain other foragers. E.g. among the Bushmen studied by Richard Lee, girls in their early teens were forcibly married to men much older than themselves. “I cried and cried,” said one such girl, “I ran away again and again.” Nancy Bonvillain, *Women and Men*, second edition, 1998, pp. 21-23.

In a letter to me dated 4/7/03, and in support of his claim that no patriarchy was apparent among the Australian Aborigines, Kevin referred me to A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 1964 edition.

Kevin’s choice of authorities is astonishing because Elkin (pp. 132 - 38) reports that Australian women had no freedom to choose their own spouses, that young girls were often forced to marry old men and therefore had to work to provide their aged husbands with food and water, and that on certain ceremonial occasions women were subjected to compulsory sex, of which they sometimes lived in terror.

True, Australian Aboriginal women had means of resistance, but clearly those means were insufficient to prevent the forced marriages, compulsory sex, etc. In our society there is no forced marriage. Rape occurs, but modern women have far more effective means of resistance than Australian women did: They can call the police. If the rapist is caught, he will serve a long prison term.

Wife-beaters too can be jailed. But Australian women had no such recourse.

So on what grounds does Kevin claim that Australian Aboriginal society, or any foraging society, was more egalitarian than modern society? Well, he implies that modern women are “persons without agency,” that they don’t “fight back,” and that they are “subservient.” But I think most modern women would find that description insulting. No such description fits most of the women I know.

Kevin now discounts the evidence from Australians and Eskimos (Inuit) on the grounds that they had dogs and (Kevin claims) “high rates of sedentism or close contact with sedentary societies.” This is a technique characteristic of certain anarcho-primitivists. Whenever anyone points to counterexamples that discredit their idealized images of foragers, they say, “Oh those people don’t count because they had dogs” (or because they were in contact with agricultural or pastoral societies or because they were not sufficiently nomadic or whatever). But the Mbuti had dogs, the Bushmen had dogs, and as far as I know all recent foragers (“recent” here means recent enough so that we have eyewitness accounts of them) had dogs, with the exception only of the Tasmanians, the Andamanese, and the Indian of Tierra del Fuego. See Carleton S. Coon. *The Hunting Peoples*, 1971 edition, p.XVII. And, as far as I know, nearly all foraging societies outside of Australia, Tasmania and the far north of North America either were sedentary, or had been in contact with agricultural or pastoral societies for hundreds of years, or else had been thoroughly ruined by the intrusion of Europeans before anyone got around to studying them. So were are these perfectly pure, highly nomadic, dogless foragers, free of all contact with agriculturalists or pastoralists, on whom the anarcho-primitivists base their theories? I don’t know of any, and Kevin doesn’t name any. As far as I know, all foraging peoples were “impure” in one way or another by the time anyone wrote a detailed description of them, so you can always discount any evidence from recent foraging soci-

eties on the ground that they were in some way “impure.” What the anarcho-primitivists do is this: They automatically discount any evidence that conflicts with their theories on the ground that the people from whom the evidence is derived were not perfectly pure, 100% nomadic, dogless foragers, but they uncritically accept any evidence that supports their theories, regardless of how “impure” the foragers in question may have been. When you reason that way you can prove anything you want.

Anyway, Kevin has his facts wrong. He says that the Australians and the Eskimos had “high rates of sedentism or close contact with sedentary societies.” Over most of Australia the Aborigines were highly nomadic, not at all sedentary and had no “close contact with sedentary societies” until the arrival of Europeans. See Coon, op.cit. pp. 105, 217, 253; Aldo Massola, *The Aborigines of South-Eastern Australia*, 1971, p. 78, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2003 edition, Vol. 14, article “Australia.” pp. 434-38. Some Eskimos were sedentary, but the ones mainly cited in my interview were those described by Gontran de Poncins in his book *Kabloona*, and these lived very far from any sedentary Eskimos. From Poncin’s account it appears that their only contact with a sedentary people (Europeans) was through a single, extremely isolated trading post and one missionary who “went native” to such an extent that he seems to have lived at a more primitive level than the Eskimos themselves. The Siriono were definitely nomadic and their population was very sparse. Read Allan R. Holmberg, *Nomads of the Long Bow*, 1969 edition.

Kevin claims that foragers’ quarrels over food were “light hearted,” but he offers no evidence to support this claim. The food quarrels I’ve read about don’t look light hearted to me. You can read about them yourself and form your own opinion. See Coon, op. cit., p. 125; Holmberg, op. cit., pp. 79-81, 87- 89. 151, 154-56; Colin Turnbull. *Wayward Servants*, 1965, pp. 120, 157-58. 198. Paul Schebesta. *Die Bambuti-Pygmendenvom Ituri*, Vol. II. part I. Brussels. 1941, p. 97, mentions a quarrel over the distribution of meat

that “almost led to bloodshed,” which does not sound very light hearted. Among the Bushmen, according to Richard Lee, improper distributions of meat could lead to “bitter wrangling.” Bonvillain, op. cit., p. 20. If the wrangling was “bitter” than it was not “light hearted.”

In discussing foragers’ work, Kevin employs his usual gimmick of changing the meaning of words to conclude that foragers don’t work at all. I agree with Kevin that modern work (for an employer) is demeaning servitude and therefore should be distinguished from the work of autonomous bands. But much of what foragers did was very hard “work” as that term is normally understood. Using a more conventional definition of “work,” Kevin says that some forager bands worked only 20-30 hours a week, others twice that or more; hence, up to 60 or more hours a week. I don’t know of any normal foraging bands whose total working time was as little as 30 hours per week, but Kevin’s admission that some foragers worked 60 or more hours per week should serve as a corrective to those anarcho-primitivists who state without qualification that foragers only worked some very small number of hours. (E.g. *Green Anarchy*. #), p 13: “the hunter- gatherer workday usually did not exceed three hours.”)

I’d like to answer more points from Kevin’s letter, but I’m out of space.

Civilization in general, and modern technological civilization in particular, is an incalculable disaster. The world would be far better off if the human race had remained permanently in the hunting-and-gathering stage. Accordingly, we need a revolution against civilization. But the anarcho-primitivists do a grave disservice to the cause by carrying their admiration for foraging societies to the point where it becomes a kook cult.

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