

# Controversy Over Wooden Shoe Trashing

Fifth Estate Collective

As we were completing work on our current issue, we received a letter for publication from the Wooden Shoe collective in Philadelphia regarding the vandalism of their bookstore last October. At that time the premises were entered with a key, a sink stopped up with towels and books and periodicals thrown into the overflowing water. A quantity of record albums and \$150 in cash was stolen as well. Although the damage was extensive, collective members worked all through the night and were able to open the next morning.

The Wooden Shoe people, who describe their project as “non-profit, non-hierarchical, worker-managed collective store run by unpaid volunteers with a rotation of jobs,” thought initially that the trashing was the work of local right-wingers. But after a series of neighborhood inquiries and the publication of an anonymous pamphlet taking credit for the action, it became clear that it was the work of several people in the Philadelphia area who were critical of the Wooden Shoe and the manner in which it functioned.

The letter to the *Fifth Estate* specifically names those thought to be involved and after several conversations and letters between us and the Wooden Shoe people, we have strong reason to believe that at least one person is accurately accused. Still, we have declined to print their letter not wanting to assume the role such publication would thrust us into. However, this refusal is not from a lack of solidarity with the position of the Philadelphia group.

The Wooden Shoe condemns the perpetrators of the vandalism as the “thought police” and this is a description we concur with. It is difficult for us to conceive of a situation under which such an action would be justifiable even if all of the accusations leveled against the Wooden Shoe were, in fact, true. It would seem an appropriate response to the critique of Wooden Shoe made in the vandal’s pamphlet would be separation and denunciation, not the totalitarian act committed by this band.

However, even feeling thusly, we cannot become the instrument of exposure/punishment without assuming a role which grants us power over who should be publicly ostracized and scorned, a role we are compelled to refuse. The Philadelphia people have been done an unwarranted harm and we have had close and comradely relationships with several of them throughout the years and it was difficult for us to refuse them their request for publication of their letter. We are in solidarity with their anger, but unfortunately cannot comply with their request.

One of their arguments for running the letter is their desire to inform people around the country as to the identity of those involved so they cannot easily repeat their actions. Wooden Shoe has printed a copy of their letter in the bookstore newsletter which is available from them by writing 112 S. 20<sup>th</sup> St., Philadelphia PA 19103.

One ironic postscript: the person accused by the Philadelphia people of being central to the trashing recently visited Detroit and harangued FE staff members at length about the necessity of “personalizing” the paper, i.e., making known our motivations for activity and detailing our personal lives within these pages (we declined), but when we informed her that Wooden Shoe named her as being responsible for the damage, she phoned us in a frenzy asking that it not be printed. Consistent with her “critique,” we ask that she write us under her name and make public her actions and reasons for publication in our next issue.



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