

# Census Resisters Snub Government

Fifth Estate Collective

1980

The 1980 census has come and gone without much ado. On the face of it, it appears as though most Americans dutifully mailed back their forms and provided the government with its constitutionally mandated information needed to apportion each state's Congressional representation. Although there was a massive propaganda effort on the part of the Census Bureau to count every resident of the U.S., it is still believed that millions of illegal aliens, poor and minority group members went uncounted.

Also, going uncounted were those who refused to fill out the census forms for a variety of political and moral reasons and for whom non-cooperation with the government is a matter of principle. Everyone on the *Fifth Estate* staff who received one directly refused to return their forms, but to date the promised government effort to include everyone in the national tally has not amounted to much. One FE staff member's house was contacted personally by an "enumerator", who was easily diverted and at least four other households we know of have received no follow-up visit, indicating to us that the oft-stated desire to count the poor was probably a lot less than stated by the government bureaucracy.

No one from the *Fifth Estate* has been making a public issue of our refusal, but in San Francisco, 5 members of the Libertarian Party publically burned their census forms to show their opposition to government prying and coercion. Non-compliance is a federal offense punishable by a \$100 fine, but according to the April 3 *Berkeley Barb*, a local official stated that the only way to run afoul of the law on this issue is to do exactly what five Libertarian Party members did: make your census protest public. According to the *Barb*: "Although two persons were convicted for failure to answer the 1960 census, almost 3,000 persons resisted in 1970" and with no convictions. The courts ruled that jailing of those who resisted the census out of opposition to the Vietnam war were being subjected to selective prosecution and the class of violators would have to be brought to trial to make it legitimate. This would have involved tens of thousands who did not respond for a variety of reasons.

Besides the reasons for refusing cooperation which appeared in the last issue of the *Fifth Estate*—at root, not to be categorized or enumerated by a government we despise or to cooperate in its purposes—other reasons have come to light. In spite of the continual insistence by government officials of the sanctity of the census responses, it is clear that the accumulated information has and could be used as part of the government's police apparatus. According to the *Berkeley Barb*, "Office of Management and Budget Director, John White told a Senate Committee on March 11 that the census can also be used to compare the number of draft-age youths with the number actually registering to circumscribe pockets of draft resistance. White told the sub-committee that he was shocked that the government would 'directly or indirectly use census data given by parents to imprison their children.'"

A Berkeley census official admitted that information which the census provided could be used to determine how many people in a given county had failed to register. The *Barb* continued, "A precedent for (Budget Director) White's concern was set during World War I. At that time census officials provided age information on men accused of draft evasion. "Similarly, during World War II, the Wartime Civil Control Administration reports it requested and received 'several special tabulations of Japanese census cards which became the basis for the general evacuation and relocation' of Japanese-Americans into detention camps."

Further, the Barb reports that the statistics once completed will be available on computer tapes to corporations (the complete set will cost \$120,000) and will be used as demographic models in marketing strategies.

So, if one feels a bit squeamish about being part of a marketing strategy, doesn't want to be drafted into the army, forced into a concentration camp, or doesn't give a shit about how many crooked politicians are elected from a given state, the reasons for cooperating with government snooping just seem to melt away.

**NOTE TO READERS:** Sorry to have such a limited Letters section this issue, but we were in quite a space squeeze. Please keep your comments coming.



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