

The Sacrifice of Detroit

Fifth Estate Collective

1980

“What really has me scared is I remember, I was ten years old during the last depression. There had never been much to worry about before. One time I asked my mother what there was for dinner. She told me, “Nothing.”

“I didn’t believe her—there was always something. Not this time though. There was really nothing at all...”

“I ate out of garbage cans then...There was a grocery store in my neighborhood, A&P, something or other. They would throw the spoiled food out back. That’s what I ate. You had to fight for it. We fought like dogs...over garbage.

“What scares me is I’m old. Things are gettin’ the same again. This is just the start...it’s nothin’ now. Nobody in this neighborhood has work...and there won’t be any. The government stole everything from us...from social security. It’s bad to be old. I’m going to have to eat garbage again...don’t know if I can.”

The above is a small portion of a lengthy conversation with an old man living in Taylor—a suburb outside of Detroit completely dependent on the auto industry. It does not illustrate the depth of his fears or resentments.

Like many of the old in this country, he is experiencing the beginning of a profound shake-up. The old, the invalid, all the “non-productive” elements of capitalist society are to be the first victims of the economic unraveling currently going on.

As people for whom the corporate powers have no use, they will be the first to fall from the bottom of the economy—cut away from “civilization.” Obviously they will not be the only ones. The list will lengthen as the range of life possibilities narrows. Those without a hook into the power structure will be starved out, killed in war, jailed, or eliminated in whatever way deemed “necessary.”

While constantly assuring us these will only be “temporary measures” for “unusual times,” politicians will eliminate vast numbers of people to preserve their own future. No sacrifice on our part is unthinkable. Their way of life will be preserved at any cost.

The depression that supposedly disappeared with WWII has never left. It was covered by a commodity-crazed lifestyle. We are indoctrinated from birth to consume. Not to use what is necessary or enhancing of our lives, but to buy, use up, and discard products at an insane rate.

Regardless of necessity or real value, we are to buy the objects paraded before us. It’s expected that we will mindlessly support an economy which exists only in our imaginations, planted there by advertising/marketing zombies through school, television and the entire culture.

As the U.S. consumer economy deteriorates, the cover is removed from the depression. We see areas in and around Detroit (where this process is accelerated) decimated by unemployment. Detroit is experiencing the depression now with more to come. No one is more aware of this than Detroiters themselves who, rather than grasp the significance of the situation, reconcile themselves to it. They continue to look to leaders and government for salvation. As their whole way of life falls apart, they look to its architects for a remedy.

Even those who realize they’ll be the first ones cut away refuse to take initiative or contemplate disobedience. The feeling conveyed is one of total helplessness; of a people so hypnotized by television and false promises that taking action is no longer even considered. The grisly possibility then becomes that the plea of many for strong lead-

ership will be answered. This dismal prospect offers nothing less than a fascism of either the right or left. Whether hard or soft, it will give many people exactly what they want—order to their destruction.

Our social reality is that of a population conditioned to behave like anxious sheep—dismayed over the prospect of slaughter, but unable to see any way out.

This turn of events leaves us with seemingly limited prospects. Optimistically we can hope that as things worsen and greater numbers face disaster, they will be convinced to join those who find hope in revolution. That they will realize all political solutions are lies and the only way out is through unmediated human relationships—no government, no leaders, no “order” as we know it.

At this point we seem to be left with little else than a few words for those planning to deal with the future: Our hope is in each other and in the freedom that results from things falling apart. The future belongs only to those willing to scrape the shit off and start over. See you there!

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