

Convention & Counter-Convention

Republicans in Detroit

Fifth Estate Collective

We should have realized that the anti-convention efforts in Detroit were going to be a flop when only two people responded to the FE article about planned activity which invited others to “join us in a game with no rules” (See FE #301, Feb. 26, 1980). And a flop it was. Only about 200 people turned up here to greet the Republicans July 13–16 coming mostly from cult/sect/political groups like the Communist Workers Party but also including a few valiant Yippies who refused to believe it wasn’t 1968. A sponsoring coalition of leftists and liberals (the FE declined to participate) planned a series of protests aimed at the delegates and the media but each event proved to be more disastrous than the one preceding it.

Things began with an absolutely unattended “counter-convention” (the first night had to be canceled when only 15 people turned up), which was followed by a Sunday afternoon Rock Against Reagan concert held in a city park located in a predominately working class district. The main feature of the day was the continuous physical assaults on the overwhelmingly middle-class audience by a local motorcycle gang and some neighborhood toughs, who objected to “commies and assholes coming in our park.” The culmination of the protests, a march to the convention site the night of Reagan’s nomination, saw only about 200 in attendance. Had not 15 Yippies first sat and then laid down in the middle of the street almost demanding to be arrested, the whole affair would have gone virtually unnoticed.

Overall, the response to the “counter-convention” was dismal, but perhaps not unreasonably so. There is no reason to believe that most people wouldn’t see the organizing efforts of the assorted opportunist “alternative” politicians and leftist impresarios as simply just another institutionalized part of the convention program as a whole, one of the many sideshows of the political circus. It is clear to mostly everyone that the Republican and Democratic Conventions, as well as the entire political process which has spawned them, are part of the optical illusion designed to conceal the brutal truth which underlies it. Most people will show their disdain for all of the political parties by voting with their feet, and avoiding the polls.

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