

# Detroit Seen

Fifth Estate Collective

1981

**A shortage of staff, and not money problems,** kept us from putting out this issue sooner. For the first time in a long time we are in good financial shape, thanks to your numerous and extremely generous contributions. The contributions have helped tremendously, but they haven't solved our logistical problems. Most of us work, and those that don't, scrape, and we find that our commitments to Capital—jobs, survival, cars that break down on an increasingly regular basis, all the vicissitudes of what is commonly referred to as “normal” existence—keep us from our true commitments and our projects. So be it; we'd be the last ones to deny the gulf that separates our desires and the pleasure we derive from this project and others like it on the one hand, and the struggling and daily despair on the other. Thanks again for your support. Hopefully we'll have another issue in your hands within two months at most. We know you've heard that one before, folks, but this time we really mean it...

**Local officials have been grinding their teeth** about the proposed Reagan cutbacks, fearing the loss of funds may mean that they will be unable to finish useless ecological disasters such as the last leg of Interstate 696, the ridiculous Detroit subway, and the downtown people mover (legs unnecessary in the new Detroit). In our opinion not a single tree should be sacrificed for yet another highway whose ultimate function will be to bring even more cars into the area, produce more pollution, and demand even more time spent in driving from or to farther away in order to get to still more shopping malls, fast food joints, and claptrap condominiums. The subway would so disrupt normal street life for so many years and bring people in over so short a distance that this project can only be seen as a make-work project proposed by a desperate Mayor Young. The people mover probably would be a fitting accompaniment to the grotesque “renaissance” architect re already built downtown during the last few years, but again it would disrupt public life for essentially a gimmick. The need for this economy to be ever involved in building and ripping down and then building up again is just another element that makes life so unstable; nothing looks familiar for more than a generation...

**Disgusting to hear pioneer rock dj Wolf man Jack doing commercials** for the Selective Service. System urging young men to submit to registration even to the point of assuring them that “this is not a draft.” Turn him off the next time he's on the air...

**People's fascination with products like designer jeans** makes one sometimes doubt Lincoln's dictum about not being able to fool all of the people all of the time. The elevation of workpants to the status of a fashion item is bizarre enough in itself, let alone to find people paying double and triple their value because of a name attached to the fanny. Everyone is into the act now including country and western stars and TV shows (J.R. Jeans) and coming close on their heels are breweries, including Detroit's own Stroh's Co. The Brew Jeans (ugh!) will be cheaper than designer models costing only (!) \$35 a pair and consumers can pick their favorite suds. Asked why anyone would go around with advertising on their butt, a spokesman for the manufacturer offered, “People want to identify with a product.”

**Edgar Poe couldn't have done better.** The gruesome story of the Wayne County Morgue scandals continues. In 1976, Dr. Millard Bass, a Wayne County medical examiner, was dismissed from his job and charged with beheading and stripping flesh from morgue bodies without proper authorization, a felony under Michigan law punishable by

ten years' imprisonment. Bass was found to have stored a collection of hundreds of bones of some sixty to seventy-five people, along with horse, monkey and elephant bones at three separate locations, Harper Hospital, Wayne State University, and a Greektown warehouse. He was charged with decapitating twelve bodies and stripping the flesh from fourteen, and admitted under questioning that his "scientific collection" was barely catalogued. In 1977, all charges were dropped. Now Bass is seeking over a million dollars in damages for his firing and for malicious prosecution by the county.

Wayne County lawyers have attacked him in U.S. District Court, alleging that his collection was little more than clutter, and that he couldn't even recognize it from photos taken at the Greektown location and shown at the trial. He testified in his defense that a catalogue wasn't necessary, that "Some bones, when you see them you can't forget them. It's just like seeing somebody's face."

Jurors have gotten "a graphic verbal tour through the murky world of forensic pathology," according to the *Detroit Free Press*, having had such tools of the trade as "brain buckets" and "skeletonizers" explained to them. Even the defense attorneys for the county have gotten into the ghoulish spirit, describing to jurors at one point in magnificent detail how portions of the body are turned into bone specimens. In general, according to attorney John McCann, "You boil them like stew until the meat falls off the bone." But Bass added that another method is the "beetle pit," containing beetles that strip the bones of flesh.

Perhaps it is just another delicious episode in the spiritual degeneracy of contemporary society—but the temptation is too strong to avoid observing how the cultural crisis extends from the highest echelons of nuclear-bureaucratic power to the morgue sinks and the skeletons of its anonymous victims. And one cannot help but assume that this crisis cannot be washed away like blood. Like the OLD blood, it calls powers into play that neither surgeons nor politicians can control. (As we go to press we have learned that Bass won his case against Wayne County, which will have to pay \$1.8 million in damages. He had originally sued his former boss, Werner Spitz, Wayne County Coroner, as well as the county, for malicious prosecution, claiming that Spitz was trying to cover up a business he ran out of the morgue selling pituitary glands for his personal profit by scapegoating Bass who had called attention to this illegal practice. When Spitz counter-sued, a deal was reached by which Spitz' suit was dropped and his name was dropped in Bass' suit. The taxpayers of Wayne County have ended up rewarding one ghoul with close to \$2 million while the other one gets off scot free!)

**Motor City Bye Bye...** Local United Auto Workers bureaucrats have offered to cut auto workers' weekly wages by as much as \$50 to \$60 in a desperate attempt to prevent the foundering Ford Motor Company from eliminating 3,200 jobs in the steel division at the Rouge manufacturing complex, an act which follows on the heels of similar union-approved cutbacks of workers' living standards at Chrysler. (One "concession" made last year by Chrysler to the UAW for the enormous wage roll-backs amounting to millions of dollars, was to put UAW President Douglas Fraser on its board. One Chrysler director was recently quoted by the Wall Street Journal as saying about Fraser, "He acts just like a normal board member. He doesn't give the sense of being just a labor advocate.") The union, which has never been much more than a brokerage racket for wage labor at its best, and a defense line of Capital to head off working class militancy and independent activity at its worst, has now been reduced to administering the lowering of wages in order to save the industry. But the \$4 billion losses last year of the Big Four auto manufacturers are making apparent what many have suspected all along: the auto industry is finished (at least in this town) and will never make the come-back touted by the corporations and the unions. What survives of the dinosaur—military production as well as this or that reorganized and recycled fragment—will desert the city as the going gets rougher. Once again the unions are proving their utter inability to defend the interests of the workers. Throughout the process of capitalist economic disintegration they have allowed the increasing lumpenization of workers in this city, and have struggled only weakly to even defend their short-term narrow interests against the needs of workers as a whole. The pimps at Solidarity House must be worried—as the auto industry goes so goes their reason for existence. But leftist opposition strategies make the same error of trying to save a white elephant that never should have been developed in the first place. The workers in this dying industry must find another way, collectively and consciously, but everyone is learning quickly that the automobile represents a nightmare and a dead end. One thing is absolutely sure—there is no point in calling Detroit "Motor City" any longer. Good riddance to the automobile...

## **HARD TIMES AT CIENFUEGOS PRESS**

Dear comrades:

Because of the recession and the high cost of credit our financial situation is graver than ever before. Unless we raise about \$10,000 within the next few months, we'll be forced to close down Cienfuegos Press or at least suspend operations for the foreseeable future. The bank has started to return our cheques, and unless we can pay off a substantial part of our \$80,000 debts and commitments we'll be obliged to sell our house and office premises at "Over the Water". To add to our problems we have also just been served with notice of a writ for \$3,000. However, if people would like to become subscribers to Cienfuegos for \$40.00 yearly (14.00 Pounds if living in the U.K.), it would make it possible to continue with the publication of the many titles we have planned for 1981.

We know only too well that there isn't much money around but we also hope people will be sufficiently pleased with our efforts so far to think we are worth supporting. The Fight for Freedom; Red Years, Black Years; High Intensity Subversion; Marxism and a Free Society (2<sup>nd</sup> edition); The Poverty of Statism; Anarchy—For and Against and the Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review 6 are all in the final stages of production, and if we resolve our present financial problems, should be out in the next twelve weeks.

Fraternally,

Cienfuegos Press

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