

FE & the Anti-nuke War Movement

Where we've been

E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)
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Contrary to the impression the accompanying photo may give, we have not been lying down on the job. Rather, since our last issue we have been quite heavily involved in holding several anti-nuclear war conferences (including the one announced in our January 19 issue), as well as various anti-war, anti-draft activities, and on-going discussions concerning our activities and our relationship to the momentum against nuclear war now taking shape throughout the country.

The first conference, held at Detroit's Grinning Duck Club on March 4, 5, and 6, grew out of a desire to create our own discourse around a question which we saw as becoming increasingly important. We attended a Convocation Against Nuclear War held at Wayne State University last fall which was run top-down fashion by a host of bureaucratic arms control organizations and starring a bevy of experts, military men and celebrities, during which politicians and academics argued one or another nuclear "deterrent" system against those being set into place by the present administration.

After nearly being ejected for pointing out (without being asked) that one technique of mass murder was being preferred over the others, and for distributing the FE against the rules of the Convocation organizers, we decided that we should hold our own conference to make the statements about this urgent problem that were being made nowhere else. We also wanted to create the kind of space in which people could democratically discuss all aspects of the problem without monitors and experts at the podium telling us to sit down passively and be given the wafer of knowledge by the proper authorities. (See "The Pull Back From Armageddon," FE Nov. 19, 1981.)

The Grinning Duck Club

People around the Duck Club and friends from the neighborhood were already talking about such an idea, and so we joined with what was from the start a diverse group of people interested in taking on the question of nuclear war, its possibility, its history, and its meaning. Most of the people involved were not in any way directly associated with the FE, though most were united by long term friendships or activities around the Duck, hung out at the bars together, lived together, and made up the loose community that comprises the Cass Corridor/4th Street axis which makes up our little world here in the city.

Many people were not sure that they shared our extreme position on technology, and certainly many were not anarchists, but everyone was interested in discussing all of the issues related to the question of war. Pretty much everyone involved was also in agreement that the nuclear war question was a symptom of an entire social system in crisis, that it reflected a problem much greater than itself even though it could be argued as the ultimate and most far-reaching result of that crisis.

The conference in March was extremely successful in nearly every way: hundreds of people attended over the three-day period, many people that we knew and many from all over the city whom we had never met before. Some had been active in the anti-war and counter-cultural movements; others were new to it all. People came in from Toronto and Kitchner, Ontario; Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Lansing and Monroe, Michigan; and one participant even came in from Texas.

Though much of the material presented and discussed was available at any anti-nuclear war conference, such as the medical effects of nuclear attack, descriptions of weapons technology, the first uses of the Bomb, and others, the thrust of every presentation tended to be anti-state, anti-authoritarian, and anti-capitalist. Critiques of technology, the nuclear state, the U.S. empire, daily life and passivity, and revolution were all made and discussed, subjects all missing in nearly every other conference we've heard of. Everyone was energized, new friendships were formed, new contacts were made, and new ideas raised.

Even the party on Saturday night-an anti-nuke skit presented by children, and the antics of Dirty Dog the Clown, followed by general madness and dancing to the music of the Layabouts-seemed to reflect the high quality of the experience we were having. On Sunday, workshops were held to discuss what to do with these critiques in an open, spontaneous and democratic manner which was almost as exciting as the ideas themselves.

On Monday-of course-everyone went back to the daily grind. But we can only suspect that we all went back to the rotten reality of daily life with a renewed sense of our desires and our opposition to the Death Machine.

Out of the week-end came a group of about thirty people which met several times subsequently and which began to set up a cooperative printshop, engaged in anti-draft registration work, formed a study group, and which produced two other one day conferences -one at the Downriver Center of Wayne County Community College, a two-year working class school, and at the Center for Creative Studies, an elite design school. In each case, though some of the discussion was valuable, the attendance was sharply reduced from the original conference and severely lessened our enthusiasm for continuing our road show. We also held a "Die-in" on April 3 at the local farmer's market upon the sounding of the air raid siren tests. (Actually, the weather was inclement and the sirens weren't even sounded!) We had doubts about doing the Die-in, but finally went ahead with it with a sense of play. The Die-in raised several problems with our activities-we were ridiculed by the daily paper ("Protest Bombs"), and we realized that people were not seeing enough of a difference between us and the arms control politicians and the nuclear freeze campaign. It was at this point that we began to discuss the burgeoning anti-nuclear movement in a more fundamental way, and to criticize the direction that our own activities were taking and their general tendency to be lost in the crowd of reformist arms control proposals, etc.

Part of the problem seemed to be that everybody was already opposed to nukes (many of the basic arguments against nuclear war had been appearing in the daily press and on television). Also, most of our efforts to create activity free of politicians and voting probably seemed "ineffectual" to many when compared to the mass acceptance that things like the Nuclear Freeze and Ground Zero were receiving.

Still, we persist. Most of us are off to New York on June 12 (way past by the time you read this) not as one critic put it, to participate in "demeaning spectator-lemming non-events," but to see if some free space can be opened up. None of us will parade robot-like down the official march route, herded to a rally point to listen to a chorus of cretin politicians, priests and trade union officials. Instead, we hope to have linked up with numerous other people like ourselves, who have critiques and aspirations similar to ours, and who can make the march a joyous celebration rather than the somber protest the anti-nuke politicians intend it to be. Large marches are often intense political and personal experiences if you ignore the official goings-on, and we hope to spend the time passing out this FE, talking to people, arguing for our ideas and overcoming our isolation.

The anti-nuke movement, left to the politicians and the reformers will only be part of the drive toward war. We have no dreams about "intervening" and turning it into a "truly revolutionary movement" but we do want that section of it where we are located to be touched by our presence. We assume no special role for ourselves. We are sure there are numerous others who must feel a similar dissatisfaction with the limited nature of the anti-nuke movement. Hopefully this march will be one arena where we can begin the necessary leap beyond what has come to constitute a totally inadequate response to what faces us.

The nuclear threat is not just one more component of our misery; it is the most gruesome example of how our lives are robbed of their potential; it is emblematic of our utter powerlessness and the state's omnipotence. To take

on this issue at its root-the power of a few to distort and destroy our lives, and the powerlessness of the many who continue to reproduce the very system which hurtles ever more rapidly toward total destruction-is to take on every other aspect of this society.

fifth Estate

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