

Detroit Seen

Fifth Estate Collective

1985

[two_third padding="0 20px 0 0"]We have finally firmed up plans for the Fifth Estate 20th Anniversary celebration. It will be held at Alvin's, 5756 Cass Ave., Detroit, on Dec. 7. Hopefully, the event will bring together many of those who have worked on the paper over the last two decades, as well as all those who want to help us celebrate. Music will be by the Layabouts who will have just released their album by that time. Also, there will be a dinner the same night for present and former staff members, so if you were part of the paper at any time, please write so we can plan a grand reunion.

A special note of commendation is due Patty Maceroni, editor of the Wayne State University *South End* for her decision to cease accepting military recruitment ads for the student newspaper. Her courageous stand was based on her opposition to the murderous U.S. war in Central America and has incurred the wrath of the school's publication board which sees the paper only as a sandbox for aspiring student journalists. At this writing, a confrontation is under way with Maceroni refusing the board's demand that the war ads be re-instated or face being disciplined or fired. One student conservative on the board was overheard to say, of the embattled editor, "She's history." He may be more right than he realizes.

Just as the national media tries to create the image that other than a minority of citizenry cares intently about the election farces held every so often, so locally does the smaller manifestation of the lie machine do similarly. The turnout for the recent Detroit mayoral primary was so dismally low-15%—that if one removed those directly involved in the power scam itself—politicians, appointees, hangers-on, city government workers, etc.—there is a good chance the percentage of participating citizens would be right around the zero mark. Incumbent Mayor Coleman Young, who ran for a fourth term campaigning on the ad agency-generated slogan of "Power for Tomorrow," was characterized by the press and television as having "won by a landslide." This is the function of media as a waterboy to power exemplified. Wouldn't a more honest headline have been "Hardly Anyone Votes—Politicians Dismayed!"?

U.S. school textbooks boast about this country's "free" press, but this is essentially meaningless in view of the fact that our private media is no less a toady of power than any government-run operation. There exists nowhere in this country anything even resembling an opposition press or broadcasting facility. Rather, all of the media start from the identical assumptions as do the rulers. Their faithfulness is so taken for granted that the term "courageous" is used to describe those who dare to strain the leash by occasionally dickering over details, i.e., should we have Star Wars or just the MX and Trident?

In the Age of Reagan, however, even barely left of center organs such as *The Detroit Free Press* fall all over themselves trying to prove they are "objective" which translates into practical terms by the paper catapulting to the Right. Several recent examples will suffice to make the point:

- 1) When the *Free Press* reported the John Walker spy case in June and mentioned that he was a KKK recruiter, they also ran the Klan's box number in Virginia, one supposes just in case a reader wished to either join the nightriders or a spy network;

2) The following day, the paper ran a lead photograph and a feature story on a local group, Citizens for America, which suborns murder in Central America by raising funds for the contras. On the other hand, the numerous and constantly active critics of Reagan's policy rarely rate a line in the "liberal" Free Press.;

3) Perhaps most hideous was a story by photojournalist Damon Hartley on a secret mercenary training camp, discreetly described only as being somewhere "in Michigan." The school for terrorists featured instructors who bragged of their connection with the Nicaraguan contras and is associated with a similar camp in Alabama whose alumni include the two Sikhs suspected of bombing the Air India jet in England. Hartley traveled to Nicaragua last year and saw first hand the results of such mercenary training. No one suspects him of having any sympathy with these psychopaths for hire, but his uncritical presentation, with five large photographs and an exciting text serves to at once legitimize the mercenaries while also acting as an advertisement for their recruitment.

Over on Jefferson Avenue, near Belle Isle Park on the Detroit River, the wrecker's ball is cracking the concrete and sending bricks and steel girders of the old Uniroyal Rubber Plant crashing to the ground. What a pleasure to have the landscape rid of this vile eyesore, its penitentiary architecture, an actual prison for generations of workers. Lives sacrificed at arduous labor, lungs filled with noxious fumes, all to put tires on the murderous machines this city is famous for. In its place let there be erected no new plants, no malls, no apartments. Instead, grass, trees, and flowers which slope gently down to the river are the only way to make amends to the land and the people this engine of industry consumed.

The destruction of the Uniroyal plant is part of a larger picture of the extensive demolition that has taken place in Detroit following the Depression of the early 1980s, which left hundreds of shuttered factories and office buildings in its wake. So many have been cleared away that recently a native Detroiter who returned after several years absence commented, "Hmmm, almost ready for planting."

Perhaps the most notable good result of this near-collapse of industry was that the tons of particulate matter, exhaust and sulfur thrown into the air each year was substantially reduced. This served to bring the city within the government pollution limits, and although this level still allows for the slow poisoning of the citizenry, the air was noticeably cleaner. Now the "Captains of Industry" want to stoke up the furnaces of new plants, and say that in order to begin production they need a waiver of the existing pollution regulations. They aver that without the waiver, they can't operate profitably and so extend a devil's choice to a job-hungry population: agree to breathe poisoned air or stay unemployed.

A final architectural ecology note: If, as Mary Wildwood suggested last issue, the flaw-ridden, over-budget Detroit People Mover is not completed, we have two suggestions: 1) inscribe each of the concrete pylons with the message "A Monument to Entropy," or 2) if it is dismantled, use the scrap to fill in that horrible assault on the environment, I-696, before the unwanted expressway destroys any more trees and homes. **[two_third][one_third_last]**



On June 12, the Fifth Estate staff joined with several of our friends in participating in a blockade of the street in front of the Detroit Federal Building. About 400 people attended the demonstration called by the Pledge of Resistance following Congressional approval of aid to the contras. Following a confrontation with two county buses that attempted to drive through the demonstration, one of our friends was arrested. Several days later, five of us were ticketed for holding signs over the expressway denouncing the U.S. war against Central America. The case above ended in an acquittal and the others are expected to go to trial soon. Attorneys for the National Lawyers Guild and the ACLU cooperated in both cases. Photo by Michael E. Samojuden / The South End

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