

Detroit Seen

Fifth Estate Collective

1986

Our offer of bulk copies of our back issues turned out better than we expected and we were swamped with requests. With a reduced volume, we can now make available issues only on a single copy basis. We have a list of back issues available for those who are interested.

Those of you who were sent subscription renewal notices last issue responded in greater numbers than any time in our memories. Thanks, since we hate doing bulk mailings and it saves greatly on postage when we don't have to send a second reminder. By the way, some of you who have not responded to a second notice are getting this issue anyway since we wanted you to see our coverage of the Chicago gathering, but if you haven't renewed, this is the last one you will receive.

Thank you, thank you, thank you to those of you who send in donations with your subscriptions and book orders. It is these extra dollars which keep us going.

Detroit's favorite expressway graffiti: "FREE HINCKLEY!"

It is amusing (and "terrifying") to see how easily a word, a name, or a label grabs hold of a people's consciousness and so quickly becomes the new pervasive bugaboo. The word "terrorist" is now the catch-all tag for anyone who challenges or opposes established laws or prescribed plans.

This is blatantly apparent on the international scene, where the term is used selectively by governments to condemn armed groups and anyone else that threatens their political hegemony while mystifying their own structural terrorism against civilian populations. But lately the term is being used in the most incongruous contexts, and we've seen it recently on the local scene.

In a recent *Detroit News* editorial for example, individuals and environmental groups opposed to the enormous waste-to-energy incinerator to be built in our neighborhood (see other articles in this issue) were called "environmental terrorists." The term is never explained or justified within the text of the article, of course. And why should it be? The mere mention of the word "terrorist" summons up all that is fearsome, violent and negative. The article need not even be coherent (which it is not), nor make its point clearly (which it does not). That one word does it all—obscures the facts, turning meaning on its head, and "sabotages" the intentions of people who are trying to defend their community, protect the earth, and simply breathe clean air.

This is very scary. It's scary too when you notice that the editorial directly underneath the one on the incinerator is a screed against Nicaragua entitled "No More Libyas."

The pointed juxtaposition of these editorials is not at all surprising. What else can be expected of the "legitimate" mass media? But the repercussions of this paranoid and conspiratorial vision are widespread and far-reaching.

When a small group of about 40 protesting residents showed up with their signs at the ground-breaking ceremony for the trash incinerator, they were far outnumbered by the police. While police helicopters circled overhead, the protesters noticed that they were surrounded by police sharpshooters on the tops of various buildings around the site.

And the day after the U.S. bombing of Libya, an FE staff member was walking down Woodward avenue and passed by a big fat white Detroit cop leading a thin black man, with his hands handcuffed behind him, toward the

patrol car. The cop shook his head, smiled smugly and asked his prisoner, "Do you know what you are? Do you know?" The man looked blankly at the cop who was quick to answer his own question. "You're a terrorist," the cop told him, "a goddamned terrorist." Two men stood outside a store, watching the scene, and our friend asked what the man was being arrested for. "Shoplifting," they said.

Colonies of Great Lakes cormorants (long-necked, glossy, fish-eating, diving birds) were wiped out in the 1950s by the widespread use of pesticides such as DDT and by human abuse, but early in this decade they began to breed once again on the rocky offshore islands. Since 1978, the Michigan population of cormorants has risen to 1,000 pairs. Recently, however, a number of cormorants with deformities and health problems has been sighted.

Chicks suffering from cataracts and edema (a severe swelling of the neck and head that makes it difficult or impossible for them to open their eyes) have been found, as well as increasing numbers of birds with deformed bills. The reproduction rate of some colonies has again begun to decline.

It is believed that the toxic residue in their fish diet is directly responsible for these problems. A Michigan zoologist, James Ludwig, lists many possible sources for the chemical contamination, including PCB's and other chemicals dumped into the Great Lakes years ago, chemicals released by paper mills and other industries, as well as airborne contaminants, or acid rain.

There have been advisories on human consumption of Great Lakes fish for some time already. The cormorants, along with fish and other wildlife that depend on the Great Lakes for their sustenance, have become our guinea pigs, and we measure the magnitude of progress' unconscionable abuse of nature with the rising number of deformities and the increasing threat of their extinction.

Reagan Economic Recovery Dept.: Since Mazda, the Japanese automaker, announced it will begin producing cars at its first U.S. facility in Flat Rock, Michigan, over 130,000 people have applied for a scant 3,500 production and maintenance positions. This avalanche of job seekers gives eloquent testimony to the rampant unemployment, underemployment and low-waged positions Michigan workers experience even in the face of claims that the Reagan recession has ended.

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