

Detroit Seen

Fifth Estate Collective

1986

You may note the repetitious opening to each of these columns: a plea to subscribers to respond to their renewal notices and a thanks to those who have made special contributions when re-subscribing or ordering books. These donations are the life blood of this newspaper, and although their mention may appear, at times, automatic, please know that they are nothing we take for granted. We have no special funding and other than the support of our readers, no means to finance this project. When we offer our thanks for your continuing support we recognize that distinct quality of mutual aid which enhances the libertarian vision present in each donation.

Speaking of libertarian projects, our circle in Detroit held a picnic in July attended by about 50 people (including comrades from Toronto and Montreal) to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Spanish revolution. It was an afternoon of good cheer capped by a wonderful meal with those in attendance ranging in age from 6 weeks to 84 years. There were two veterans of the Revolution present, one of whom gave a short talk on his experiences. Two films were shown, one made during that period about the revolution and the other of a libertarian picnic held 50 years before to raise funds for the Spanish anarchists. As is the tradition at libertarian gatherings, a collection was taken to support anti-authoritarian publications and projects and political victims of the state.

A total of \$450 was raised which was distributed between the Anarchist Black Cross, Spanish prisoners, Big Mountain support, Guatemala refugee relief, *Anarchy*, *New Iron Column*, *Reality Now*, *Kick It Over*, and *Bulldozer*.

The Detroit Cass Corridor, home to students, drop-outs, rebels, poets, artists, weirdos, winos and the urban poor held its latest "Daily in the Alley" in early September, which drew thousands to the annual event. As usual, non-stop music and poetry were featured along with a flea market, food and a host of other diversions. The Fifth Estate set up a table and we sold \$150 worth of books and pamphlets plus gave out hundreds of our current issue as well as a lot of foreign language publications that we've been accumulating over the last year.

Department of Total Confusion: Opening sentence in an October 8th *Detroit Free Press* (page 3) article about the city's latest boondoggle—"Detroit's new downtown (monorail) People Mover will be operated from a NASA-style control room where technicians will stop and start the cars, open and close the doors and monitor traffic by remote control." Then on page 8 of the same day's paper in an article about the space program: "The (House) Committee said it is not assured that NASA has adequate technical expertise to conduct the space shuttle program properly." Riding the Detroit People Mover might turn out to be quite a challenge!

Same day, same paper—front page headline: "Experts Call Detroit River Cleaner"—page two headline: "High Levels of PCBs Found On River Bottom."

Following a Summer of diminished opposition to Detroit's planned \$500 million carcinogenic trash incinerator, a decision was made at a recent community gathering to picket the construction site at Russell and Ferry, 4:30 p.m., every Tuesday afternoon. The return to direct action comes after the dismissal by the courts and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) earlier this Fall of legal and environmental challenges to the plant.

Our initial enthusiasm for the opposition to this hazard was based on an elementary sense of self-defense (since we all live and work within range of what will be its poisonous emissions), but also on what we saw as its political potential to suggest the whole of technocratic-chemical society (see "Resistance to the Plan is Heavy: Opposition

to trash-to-energy waste-incinerator grows," FE #323, Summer, 1986). However, the early resistance to the facility wound down after it became clear that a few spirited demonstrations and the presentation of the obvious bio-ecological dangers were not only being ignored by the city administration, but were failing to elicit a response from city residents.

With participation waning, a small group of those who had been the core of the opposition sponsored a costly and seemingly ineffective community meeting featuring liberal environmentalist, Barry Commoner. The talk was well attended, but it was clear that the radical edge of the original resistance was missing and conversation at the meeting never left the plane of demand for single issue reform.

Hopefully, though, the meeting acted as a bridge to the renewed call for direct action. None of us are taking it for granted that the plant will be built, but realize the gulf between potential and realization in any situation. All of us are aware of the models of direct confrontational strategies employed by the European anti-nuclear movement and the mass community mobilizations against construction of the Tokyo and Frankfurt airports in the mid-'70s. Whether opposition to the Detroit trash incinerator ever moves to that stage depends not only on the conscious commitment on the part of masses of Detroiters to stop it, but on the extension of a radical anti-industrial perspective.

Not every model citizen is as fortunate as those in Citizens for Clean Urine who were able to present their drug-free urine samples directly to President Reagan (see p. 5 of this issue) in support of his war on drugs. Numerous groups throughout the country (including Detroit's Patriots Pissing for the President [see the latest *Daily Barbarian*]) have been calling on others who want to exhibit their loyalty to do the next best thing: Send the President and Nancy your drug-free urine sample by mail to the White House, Washington DC. Be careful when packing your sample, since a poorly tightened jar, or worse, a plastic bag could leak, spilling piss all over our country's leaders.

Congratulations to our friends in the Layabouts for being chosen Detroit's top rock band in *The Metro Times'* annual Music Poll. Although the band incorporates styles closer to West African, reggae, calypso and ska than standard American rock and roll, there did not seem to be another category more appropriate for their unique blend of musical idioms.

Copies of the Layabouts' album, "No Masters," are still available from the Daily Barbarian, Box 02455, Detroit MI 48202 for \$8.50. All proceeds from the record go for food relief in the Cass Corridor area of Detroit (see FE #322, Spring, 1986 for a review of the LP).

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