

News & Reviews

Fifth Estate Collective

1986

The Daily Barbarian is loose again after almost a year's absence. The large, 8-page broadsheet filled with libertarian news, poetry, an essay on S & M, a great back-page Reagan poster, irreverent humor and imaginative layout makes one wish for more frequent issues. Alas, the barbarians in charge refuse to be pushed, wheedled or cajoled into working harder at publishing so its appearance will remain "infrequent!" We will send a new Barbarian with each book order or contact them directly at Box 02455, Detroit MI 48202.

On the road again: the dynamic duo, Christina Floyd and Arthur Miller, who are responsible for organizing an amazing amount of Native American and prison support work and still find time to publish Bayou La Rose, have moved again. After a reportedly unhappy short stay in Kansas City, they have relocated their publication and their Survival Network Center at Box 2576, San Diego CA 92112. The current Bayou contains its usual fare of articles, statements, letters from prisoners and petitions in support of the environment and those most victimized by the state including reports on imprisoned Native American Leonard Peltier and Big Mountain.

The number of foreign language publications we received from anti-authoritarian and anarchist projects across the world is suddenly beginning to take up a large section of our bookstore space. They do neither their publishers nor us any good just sitting there, so if you speak French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Greek or Portuguese send us some stamps or a buck or ask for them in your book orders and we will gladly pass them on. We also have for the asking, papers from the U.S., Canada, England, Ireland and Australia.

Normally we wouldn't bother to comment on the dismal machinations of corporate liberal journalism, but since the saga of the *Mother Jones* magazine/Michael Moore dispute is partially being played out around here, perhaps it's worth a word or two. Moore was summarily cashiered recently from his post as editor of *Mother Jones* after a brief tenure marked by continuing disputes with its publisher, Adam Hochschild. MJ, sort of a *Time Magazine* for the tame left, is a tedious journal which exposes the minutia of capitalist abuses without ever coming to the conclusions such observations would suggest.

The sordid details of the wrangle have been chronicled in Alexander Cockburn's columns in *The Nation* and Detroit's *Metro Times*, and from those accounts Moore's sacking centered on his objection to running a social-democratic criticism of the Sandinistas and his righteous protest against a political firing. Hochschild says the dismissal came about because of Moore's problems with the staff.

In any event, Michael is now portrayed as a Mid-Western naif, seduced and abandoned in the big city, his dreams and career in shambles, having foolishly let his paper back home, *The Michigan Voice*, collapse in favor of his ill-fated San Francisco job. All said, it's still hard for us to work up much sympathy for Moore even though he may have gotten screwed. Essentially this is a dispute involving upper management—how bosses relate to one another and to their staff. When bosses fight among themselves—even if they are liberals—it just doesn't cut much slack with us since our chosen mode of decision making—the collective—is at total variance with the authoritarian and traditionalist way things are done at *Mother Jones*.

The other end of the "tragedy," that Moore's move ended *The Michigan Voice*, seems strange to us as well. Why does a paper collapse because its editor leaves? In all honesty, *The Michigan Voice* never commanded the interest

or readership it was touted as having by people like Cockburn and supporters. Although Moore's paper had tens of thousands of dollars pumped into it through grants and star-studded benefits, and featured a slick, full-color format similar to *Rolling Stone*, its existence was so tenuous that when the boss left, it collapsed.

What is closer to the truth is that *The Michigan Voice's* tepid left-liberal politics, with its focus on electoralism, civil liberties and exposes of civic abuses, created a paper without an ounce of oomph that appealed to only a narrow spectrum of comfortable liberals.

At a recent Detroit lecture where Moore shared the speaker's platform with Cockburn, he spoke at length on the need for extensive financing for alternative publications to keep them afloat. When a Fifth Estate staff member in the audience replied that, to the contrary, it was reader support and not rich angels which should be the basis of a paper's existence, and that the FE had never received a donation larger than \$200 even when it was publishing weekly in the 1960s, Moore just looked blank and went on to the next question.

There is another interesting irony missed by those who were not privileged to hear Moore's lecture. After a laboriously long-winded harangue against the *Detroit News* and *Free Press* for their flattening of reality and distortion of complex political issues (with all the almost embarrassingly histrionic indignation at this unsurprising state of affairs so typical of rad-lib types), he came to rather astonishing conclusions: "When Reagan declares 'I am a contra,' we've got to stop equivocating," he argued, and called for a dramatic and simple reaction which could be "understood" by people. "We've got to respond, 'I'm a Sandinista,'" he said, thus missing altogether the irony of calling for a "left press" which mirrors exactly the form and the operational character of the capitalist mass media. Of course, this happens to be what all reformist and leftist politicians want to do, just as they want to create an industrial, hierarchic society where they dictate policy to "the masses"—including defining reality in "simple and dramatic" ways.

This turned out to be a central issue in his firing. Moore objected to printing an article by Paul Berman, a New York *Village Voice* writer who, although critical of U.S. Central American policy, also voices strong criticism of the Sandinistas as undemocratic and becoming more authoritarian. Moore responded, that "no magazine under my name will come out that says that stuff about the Sandinistas."

Although Cockburn has charged that Berman's flawed social-democratic analysis at times could dove-tail with the murderous conspirators in the White House, the *Fifth Estate* is no stranger to criticisms of the Nicaraguan government (see FE #321, Summer 1985).

No one should be surprised that when an armed party of stalinist-castroist politicians and priests seizes power in a small neo-colony, they begin the project of the consolidation of their power, the centralization of the police, the army, and the capitalization and development sector. The leninists and the christian symps in the US like Moore think that people will be confused if any criticism of "el proceso" in Nicaragua is criticized, that only a crude propaganda of a nazi-yanqui Reagan crushing a christian-marxist People's Utopia is appropriate.

This is only a variation of the old theme of defending the "soviet motherland" from imperialism and from those who might criticize the workers paradise, or their song about the Spanish Republic (as communist cops were massacring revolutionary workers in dungeons in Barcelona and militarily attacking revolutionary councils). The leftists would like to repeat their simple and dramatic fables about nationalist revolutions in the third world in order to maintain ideological hegemony among those who might act to oppose the US empire and its war machine. A binary oppositional formula, not truth, is what counts, comrade, when keeping the masses in a nice, disciplined line.

Mother Jones "will survive this crisis," wrote a *Guardian* commentator. "But it—and the left as a whole—will be the worse for it." But the left is living a lie; if its lie is debunked once and for all it may be all the worse for the left, but it can only be a step forward for authentic radical transformation. As for *Mother Jones*, it's hard to imagine that its demise would be anything other than a matter of supreme indifference, even to the left.

The final chapter in this mess has not been written since Moore has begun a law suit for breach of contract against *MJ* for a cool \$2 million after spurning a \$50,000 severance offer from the mag. Ultimately, how dull this all is when you think of the many exciting, self-published newspapers and zines that are cropping up all around the country. You can check out the magazine *Factsheet Five* for address listings: 6 Arizona Avenue, Rensselaer, NY 12144.

The Collapse of the Empire and other Erotic Fantasies from The Peace Mobs. 1035 Revere, San Francisco CA 94124 (priceless, so try \$5). Greg Fain delivers great lyrics with scalpel and axe on this 45 minute cassette. My personal favorites include “Homo Ferox” and “America Can’t Come,” but the guy really needs a band here. The lone electric guitar usually pales next to the sneering vocals, even with the techno-aid of foot pedals and electronic effects.

It wouldn’t have to be a bass and drums, just some additional people making noise so you’d want to still hear it after you’ve caught all the lines. And with lyrics like this, Fain should have little trouble attracting some intense music makers. “It’s raining, it’s pouring, the government is snoring” in “Acid Raid” made me drive off the road (so I could catch the rest). Like, may this mob grow and grow.

—Bill Blank

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Fifth Estate #324, Fall, 1986

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