

# Detroit Seen

Fifth Estate Collective

1990

**According to our staff box**, this newspaper is officially a quarterly, but in reality, we have become an “episodic,” coming out between or in conjunction with our political, cultural and environmental projects. It has been common practice in this space to offer explanations for our long printing delays and infrequent publishing schedule which is now about three issues a year. That is contrasted to twenty years ago when the *Fifth Estate* appeared weekly. It is perhaps time to formally declare that three-four times a year will be it for a while and devote this column to matters other than apologia.

As usual, our thanks to those who have made donations, renewed their subscriptions and ordered books. It is solely these efforts which allow us to concentrate on publishing a newspaper and not constant fundraising. Though many anarchist papers have an admirable practice of publishing the names or initials of supporters, we have always been too scattered in our office procedures to do similarly. However, each donation or extra contribution with a subscription is noted by at least a portion of our staff and the recognition exists of the generosity of our readers.

As of this issue we are raising our cover price to \$1.50 due to rapidly increased costs in printing and mailing. One disadvantage of publishing so infrequently is that many of our costs remain constant while our income drops off considerably.

We're not pulling the panic lever, but we ask that readers continue their support by adding extra donations when re-subscribing and doing so promptly so as not to require mailing a second reminder. We have several benefits planned for the summer which should lessen the cash squeeze.

**The Fall Fifth Estate will be our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue** and will contain a retrospective on a quarter century of radical publishing and reprints from past issues, particularly from the '60s.

Can we do another 25 years? How is this for a better idea? Let's have a revolution, get rid of all the printing presses, and all go camping.

**The center eight pages of this issue** were published separately in early April as an Earth Day “intervention” with a press run of 6,000. The idea for the special was generated as it became clear that the official Earth Day activities were at best going to be a dismal, liberal spectacle that announced a “concern” for the environment, or at worst, direct buy-off by corporate polluters and their apologists in government. The reception our efforts received was excellent, so much so that it left us wondering why it isn't the liberal environmental movement which is in the minority rather than the more radical one.

A reader who had been a distributor of the *Fifth Estate* recently sent us a bunch of back issues which he was considering discarding. Gratefully, he wrote us first and we arranged to take them for our archives. Please, anyone with back issues of any quantity, particularly from the '70s and early '80s, send them back to us. As it is, numerous issues from that era are no longer available, so receiving the above-mentioned shipment was like finding buried treasure. We'll cover postage or extend your subscription to cover mailing costs.

## FE Benefit

San Francisco's Sabot will join the Blanks and Blame Mother bands in a special benefit for the *Fifth Estate* when they come to Detroit, Friday, July 6 (to pay for the new fleet of FE limousines). No, really, if you're in town that night, around 9 pm, come to the Art Center Music School, Cass at W. Alexandrine, to rock for a good cause. No none of the bands will be doing your favorite oldies...

**As our subscriber rolls increase**, we have received several inquiries into the meaning and origins of the Fifth Estate's rather ungraceful and oblique name. The tale is a sad, short one and easily told. The paper was founded in 1965 by a 17- year-old student who had previously published a number of fanzines in the early '60s and who worked for a summer in 1964 on the grandfather of what was then called the "underground press"—the *L.A. Free Press*. While in Los Angeles, our founder frequented a Sunset Strip coffeehouse (also a popular '60s item) named The Fifth Estate.

But the name connotes more than that which is why it has been appropriated by other media ventures—a Washington-based muckraking magazine of a few years ago and a Canadian TV series. The term "estate" harkens back to the era of the French Revolution when society was declared as being divided into the three estates of the royalty, clergy and common people. By the 1920s, the power of the U.S. press was so, formidable that it could make and break politicians, foster wars, create drug hysteria, etc., and so was dubbed the "Fourth Estate" by some wag. So, the fifth is one up on the fourth. Dumb, huh?

Well, that's what we've been saddled with for the last 25 years, a name that connotes power and invokes the abstraction of number. Fortunately, it has evolved into an imprecise, rather meaningless name, but, oh, that we could change it. Too bad Anarchy is already taken. Any suggestions for a new one?

**The March 1977 *Fifth Estate*** contained a story ["Red Squad Files to be Opened," FE #281, March, 1977] which began, "The law suit seeking to stop Detroit and State Police political spy units and open up secret police files may be drawing to its final stages." Although the State files were released in 1984 to those who were spied upon, final authority to proceed with release of the Detroit red squad files was just granted in April 1990.

The Detroit unit spied on more than a million people from the 1940s to the mid-1970s and that information is now available to those who were the subjects of the illegal investigations. Targets included not only radicals, but labor, peace, arts, civil rights and consumer groups. Both individuals and organizations are eligible to receive their files, including defunct groups and the estates or heirs of deceased persons.

The release is being coordinated through a special project independent of the police as mandated by the court settlement and is staffed by people sympathetic to basic civil liberties. All inquiries are confidential and applications for release are available from The Distribution Compliance Program, 800 Palms Building, 2111 Woodward Ave., Detroit MI 48201; phone: (313) 961-7010.

# fifth Estate

Fifth Estate Collective  
Detroit Seen  
1990

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/334-summer-1990/detroit-seen>  
Fifth Estate #334, Summer, 1990

**[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)**