

Detroit Seen

Fifth Estate Collective

1996

FE Celebrates 30 Years

The FE staff and friends celebrated our 30th anniversary at the Cass Café in April, not only bringing in people from as far away as California, Maryland and Philadelphia, but even a picket by two very entertaining old-fashioned stillborn-again Jesus freaks who drew even more irreverent Cass Corridor types into our vortex of sin. Favorite FE covers and FE memorabilia were displayed, including a judge's gavel that some enterprising '60s staff member stole from a courtroom and turned into a hash pipe. People danced to the music of Detroit's Ghost Band, and enough money was raised to keep this ship afloat. Thanks to Chuck Roy and the Cass Café staff, to the Ghost Band, to David Furer for the music mix, to Julie Herrada, and to unnamed others for their help in making it a success.

A great number of people also responded generously by mail after reading our appeal for funds in the last issue. This brought us back from the brink of insolvency. Many thanks.

The following anecdote is found in Hans Peter Duerr's book *Dreamtime*: "When a young comrade once asked an old Spanish anarchist whether he would not agree that the ideals of anarchism were beautiful but unrealizable, the latter answered, 'Of course it is impossible to realize them. But don't you see that everything that is possible today, is worthless?'"

Similarly, demanding the impossible has been at the core of the *Fifth Estate* project since it became explicitly antiauthoritarian in 1975. In a sense, there was as much continuity as change in that transition; from the beginning, as a starry-eyed liberal underground paper, the FE questioned authority and conformist assumptions, consciously working to establish a new social practice rooted in an authentic ethical relationship with the world. That basic desire remains the same as it was when the FBI once reported, the FE "supports the cause of revolution everywhere."

Our definition of revolution has evolved with the years, from new left through ultra-left to post-left, to a perspective difficult to sum up in a few words. But the commitment to social transformation, ecological regeneration, and the possibility for redeemed human community and solidarity remain intact. Our ideas have become more complex, and in some cases our certainties and uncertainties have exchanged positions, but our radical will has deepened.

Thanks to all the following (all pseudonyms, except for one actual name—guess it and win a prize): Panda Bear, Polar Bear, A. Shady Character, Rob Rifles, Ruby Lips, Ana Coluthon, Lynne Clive, George Bradford, Mr. Venom, Miguel Xolotl, Buster Brown, Revca, Algirdas Ratnikas, Rob Regular, Paul E. Morfis, Mary Wildwood, Alice Detroit, E.B. Maple, W.B. Jeffries, Dogbane Champion, Ratticus, Coquilles St. Jacques, Karen Elliot, Tal Fulano, Primitivo Solis, Max Cafard, Bert Wirkes-Butuar, Beth Frage, Larry Talbot, Sonny Tufts, Dora Kaplan, Sarah Loosestrife, Lewis Cannon.

Also, to associated projects, collaborators and friends in Detroit: the Eat the Rich Gang, the Workers Revenge Party, Black & Red, the Detroit Print Coop, Fli-Back: A Journal of Cheap Shots, Modern Citizen, The Daily Barbarian, Babyfish Lost Its Mama, Bad Attitude, the Trumbullplex, the Marquis de Sade Brigade, the Second Street Players, the Uncooperative, the Grinning Duck Club, the Easy Space, the Freezer Theater, the Friends of Benjamin Mendoza

y Amor, Protest and Survive, A Group of Friends, the Layabouts, the Blanks, the Evergreen Alliance, WEAVE, the Freeway Five, the Evergreen 19,404... and the many other projects and people we've probably missed.



You experienced the war...

"You experienced the war; I experienced the revolution!" With these words our *companero*, Federico Arcos, confronted three veterans of the communist-dominated International Brigades as part of a panel invited to comment on Ken Loach's film about the Spanish revolution, "Land and Liberty," following an April 13 showing. The movie depicts revolutionary fervor in 1936 through 1937 Spain, concentrating particularly on a frontline workers' militia. They attempt to fight together without the social stratification of rank privilege, and the communist-dominated government endeavors to "militarize" them, to return them to hierarchy and the discipline of the barrack.

Sixty years ago, on July 18th, 1936, an attempted coup by fascist army officers in Spain sparked a revolution in that country, which became a three-year protracted civil war. "Land and Liberty" is the first major international film about the Spanish Civil War in the half-century since Gary Cooper starred in "For Whom the Bell Tolls." Federico saw revolution and counter-revolution firsthand in Catalonia, including innumerable instances of communists—supposed allies in the anti-fascist struggle—betraying the war effort and imprisoning or murdering anyone considered their rivals.

The Comintern, a council of world communist parties controlled by the Soviet Union, raised about 30,000 foreign volunteers to fight in Spain as part of the International Brigades. Over 3,000 of these were Americans, who served in the Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau battalions, and the John Brown artillery battery, or with assorted medical units. All the panelists at the film discussion besides Federico had been Brigades members.

One of the other panelists acknowledged that his duties in Spain in the late 1930s consisted of driving a truck, and that he had not seen any revolutionary ferment as depicted in the movie. Another, a Hungarian combatant in the Brigades and now an American academic, spoke with the confident authority of a Communist turned Scholar. He was outraged that the film would question the necessity for military victory to precede revolution. For the three Brigades panelists, winning the war was the obvious and necessary priority. They took as an assumption that militarization of the "people in arms" was an absolute necessity to accomplish this goal.

Contradicting this, Federico pointed out that the principal goal of military training is to establish hierarchical social relations. Although acknowledging his respect for the idealism and sacrifice of those who had gone to Spain to fight fascism, Federico defended the film's anarchist sympathies. Marching in ranks and learning to salute merely inculcate obedience, leading to a cult of discipline.

Long before the Brigades arrived, Spanish workers had armed themselves as best they could, despite efforts of Republican government politicians, and successfully fought trained regular soldiers of the fascists. In fact, armed workers saved many of Spain's major cities for the Republic, including Madrid and Barcelona, during the revolution's early weeks.

At one point during the discussion, Federico referred to executions carried out by the International Brigades of their own men, a point hotly disputed by the academic panelist. The other two Brigade veterans seemed confused by this information, and stated they were unaware of any executions in the American battalions.

Since 1937, histories of the Spanish revolution have chronicled the counter-revolutionary violence employed by Communists during the anti-fascist struggle. This work has been augmented by researchers sifting through the archival collections in the former Soviet Union for details from Spain. Documents seeping out of this long process have confirmed that American commissars in American Brigades units did carry out disciplinary executions. (See *The Secret World of American Communism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, for recently uncovered information.)

The climax of the panel discussion came when Federico, in a voice breaking with emotion, proclaimed how privileged he feels to have participated in an event where, "with one heart," the people of Barcelona rose to defend their city. The loudest outburst of applause that afternoon followed.

FE Note: See our next issue for an article on the militarization of the workers' militias during the Spanish revolution.

On the verge

Detroit is on the verge of getting clobbered with the obscene, tax-subsidized construction not only of a new baseball stadium, but a second stadium to entice the Lions football team back into the city. The current national stadium frenzy is only one more striking sign of imperial decline. Interestingly, Mike Ilitch, owner of the Detroit Tigers baseball team, also owns Little Caesar's Pizza, named appropriately for an infamous tyrant of the Roman Empire.) When global life conditions are disintegrating precipitously, and war, hunger and ecological devastation are rampant, why would anyone support public money to construct a stadium anywhere—especially when they already have one that could adequately host both teams?

Disgustingly, *The Detroit Sunday Journal*, the AFL-CIO financed weekly of the striking newspaper workers, endorsed both stadiums. Beholden to the AFL, including the Building Trades (who every insider knows have consistently scabbed on the strike by working inside the *Free Press* building), these former yuppie reporters cum-labor-functionaries provided a payback to labor elites when the time came. In doing so they didn't look so much like people fighting for social and economic justice as their former bosses might, as they stoop to their corporate masters. The Building Trades Council, which donated \$10,000 to a corporate campaign for a new stadium, would probably build anything if the contracts were offered—including crematoria to burn the proletariat.

It doesn't seem to matter to Journal editors and union porkchoppers that those "entrepreneurs" demanding vast sums to build their private fiefdoms are essentially the same powerful interests bulldozing newspaper workers into a ditch. By celebrating new stadiums, they squander what claim they have—paid for by the real adversities of people on the front line—to represent the interests of the whole community. More proof that unions will never contribute to genuine social transformation and a just society until they move from fighting in their own narrow interests, against other workers and even against the common good, to fighting for the whole community.



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