

# Detroit Seen

Fifth Estate Collective

1999

Welcome to the Winter 1999 issue of the *Fifth Estate*, #352. This edition follows our Summer issue by about six months. Maybe, like *Anarchy* has in its recently published issue, we should stop any pretense of quarterly publication, and openly state that we are publishing twice yearly for the time being. One problem with that is the Post Office demands a four time yearly schedule for us to remain eligible for our special mailing status. This issue was delayed even longer than normal due to the great Blizzard of '99 which hit Detroit.

Thanks to our writers, artists, and photographers who have produced our usual quality publication, and to our subscribers and Sustainers who continue to keep us financially solvent

There was a minor theft at our office a few months ago in which the only thing taken was several endorsed checks. If you sent in a remittance for a subscription, donation, or books which was never cashed, please contact us. Also, we have a large book order that got separated from its envelope containing the address and, unfortunately, we cannot read the signature on the letter.

**Minor errata for last issue:** Martin of @ Distribution in London writes us that the accents we identified as being Midlands English in our article on Chumbawamba [FE #351, Summer 1998] are actually Northern; and in the same piece, Sunfrog wrote from Tennessee to remind us that the Detroit show at 404 where the band played was in October 1992 as part of an anti-Columbus Day weekend which featured the Icemakers of the Revolution the night before.

**In July, we wrote to Ted Kaczynski, the confessed Unabomber,** offering him an opportunity to respond to our critiques and criticisms of his acts and ideas which have appeared in these pages. We included the previous four Fifth Estate issues containing articles about him and his bombing campaign against industrial society.

We ran afoul, however, of the stupid and arbitrary rules which govern prisons; specifically, that federal penal inmates may only receive three publications in a single mailing. Our letter was passed on to him, but the papers were returned. We reshipped them in two packages, but to date, Kaczynski has not responded to our offer for space in our paper nor for a free prisoner's subscription.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons form letter accompanying the returned issues informing us of our mailing rules infraction was an extremely odd piece. Along with the many reasons listed on the one page sheet for returning items (such as "sexually explicit personal photos"), there also were other contraband categories titled "body hair" and another, "plant shavings."

Is there a problem of such frequency in federal pens with people sending body hair and plant shavings that it necessitates a printed category? Who would send body hair? Exactly what are plant shavings? Are we living such a sheltered life that we are missing the erotic or elicit purposes these items play in prison life? Someone please give us a clue.

By the way, you can join the thousands penning everything to Ted from marriage proposals to fan letters by writing him at Theodore Kaczynski, 04475-46, PO Box 8500, Florence CO 81226.

**Dept. of Unconscious (or is it conscious?) Racism:** We rarely get a look at the scab papers in the city since the newspaper strike is dragging on toward its fourth year (see below), but one of our staff members found a recent

issue of note at a local restaurant. The December 11 *Detroit Free Press* ran a *New York Times* reprint describing the efforts of the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, John Conyers of Detroit, on behalf of President Clinton during the impeachment proceedings.

The headline the louts on Lafayette came up with for the story was “Conyers true to role as Clinton’s spear carrier.” Although the term has legitimate usage, the application of it to an African-American can only make one wince. Color blind and insensitive, or an oh-too-hip, double entendre from a post-modern scab?

**As we write, the newspaper strike is continuing** with no end in sight even though the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled unanimously earlier this year in favor of the strikers, charging the papers with causing the strike, refusing to bargain in good faith, and numerous other violations of the federal labor law.

It ordered the *Detroit News* and *Free Press* to hire back the remaining one thousand locked-out workers and begin bargaining. Still counting on Detroit Newspapers CEO Frank Vega’s prediction that before the strike was settled everyone involved will be dead or gone, company lawyers announced another round of appeals which should push any final decision years into the future.

In the meantime, subscriptions to the two papers continue to decline while striker action remains relentless with teams of workers chasing down scabs and management from their downtown headquarters to numerous out-of-town forays.

**During the newspaper strike and lockout**, *Detroit Free Press* and *News* strikers received a certain amount of support and sympathy from the weekly *Metro Times*, a self-described alternative paper that mixes a liberal slant on the news with entertainment listings, sexy personals and copious advertising.

While the *Metro Times* never issued a specific call to boycott the two scab papers, it did report on the companies’ gestapo-like tactics and inept replacement workers. Currently, its editor and managing editor are striking newspaper writers.

So, it came as a shocking surprise that Desiree Cooper, the *Metro Times* editor-at-large, was to begin at the *Free Press* in January as a scab columnist. Cooper is taking the slot previously held by Susan Watson, an inspirational striker, who, alone among the paper’s big-shot columnists refused to cross the picket line. Cooper, who often writes about moral issues and teaching children lessons, is advancing her career by stabbing Watson in the back. Great role model.

**Results from the recent Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) election** showed mixed results for incumbents. Current General Secretary Fred Chase turned back a challenge from Alix Buss from the Philadelphia branch, but the IWW membership voted overwhelmingly to oust Industrial Worker editor, Jon Bekken, in favor of a Detroit-based collective. The paper will be produced in this city while the IWW general headquarters remains in Ypsilanti, a city 30 miles to the west of us.

**Each day, metro Detroit gobbles up** acres of woods and meadows on its edges as builders throw up subdivisions, commercial sites and industrial parks where once there had been only nature. It’s nothing new. At mid-century, people began to notice that Detroit’s insatiable sprawl had consumed once-distant towns like Mt. Clemens and Pontiac.

By the 1980s, it was clear suburban Detroit had merged with Ann Arbor and Brighton. It seems inevitable that before too many years, Flint and Port Huron will simply be appendages of a huge urban blob that starts at Toledo and spreads north and west from the water for 100 miles or more.

Urbanization got a serious boost in November when the Mother of all Malls, Great Lakes Crossing, opened on metro Detroit’s northern edge in Oakland County. This mall is pathetic on several levels. Local officials crowed about its size—thousands of acres alone devoted to parking; hundreds of stores; a so-called rain forest-theme restaurant, and “a food court as big as Utah,” as the adverts boast.

Boosters whipped area shoppers into such a frenzy that a few dozen pilgrims spent the cold night before opening day bivouacked outside this cathedral of commodities so they could be first inside to worship. Oakland County now has seven enclosed malls where consumers can enter a hermetically sealed environment to shop until they drop.

Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer in late 1998 told one of the city’s most famous artists to take his objets d’art and get the hell out of town. Archer, a longtime member of the Founders Society, which runs the Detroit Institute of

Arts, began attacking Tyree Guyton, who has attracted international attention by turning a couple of blocks on Heidelberg Street on the near east side into a living folk art installation.

Guyton decorates abandoned homes, vehicles and vacant lots with tens of thousands of found items ranging from tennis shoes to toys to street signs to lunch boxes. He also loves polka dots, pink and green ones especially, and they show up on the pavement and on the old doors and tires he has stationed on nearby vacant property.

The effect on one of Detroit's poorest and most blighted neighborhoods is startling. It enlivens the dreary streetscape and poses questions about cities, abandonment and art. A few years ago, during an epidemic of school-girl rapes and murders in abandoned houses, Guyton affixed dozens of naked baby dolls to a tumbling down, three-story home. The image of innocents being slaughtered was stark and unsettling.

The former mayor, Coleman Young, bulldozed that house and some other Guyton works. But Guyton continued to decorate. Archer, who was once a member of the Michigan Supreme Court, filed a lawsuit against Guyton. The artist's supporters reacted by painting polka dots on dozens of city buildings, statues and streets.

At this writing, the suit is still in the courts and the fate of the Heidelberg Project still in doubt.



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