

Introduction to *Fifth Estate* Issue 374

Fifth Estate Collective

2007

Welcome to the New York City issue of *Fifth Estate*. The editorship of the magazine now rotates, and two of us in NYC have stepped in to give the peeps in Detroit and Tennessee a rest (making this the first issue in 41 years that has been produced in the northeast!). The people that put out this publication have a variety of views and backgrounds (we range in age from our 20s to 70s, and live across North America); this issue reflects our reality and issues here in NYC.

This is not a typical American city, but a semi-autonomous city-state and global cosmopolitan crossroads. This issue reflects the winds that blow in from Europe (Stevphen Shulkatis's article on the European concept of precarity and Sureyya Evren's overview of Turkish anarchism) and Latin America (Onto's look at immigration). The politics of "identity" don't exist as moral abstracts, but concrete elements of our lived experience in our neighborhoods and workplaces. Differences by class, race, ableness, and gender are very pronounced in a way that elsewhere have a tendency to be obscured.

The specific political perspective of this issue is also somewhat of a departure from *Fifth Estate's* usual fare. New York has a well-earned reputation for a very factionalized anarchist scene (possibly a simple reflection of the huge diversity found in the city in general), but also for being the intellectual center for radical thinkers. Many of the anarchist intellectuals here are involved in an engagement with poststructuralism, as well as with the autonomist marxist tradition (most commonly associated with Empire authors Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt). Several of the pieces in this magazine represent the influence of this. Autonomism has had crossover with american anarchist thought for decades. The influence of the Situationists are common ground for the two, but so is the 1970s "revolt against work"—as well as our common revolt against an economic left that is centered on a fetishized working class which is directed at taking over the means of production. *Fifth Estate* has criticized this notion for over 30 years.

But there is still an element of that in the autonomist critique. We should ask: why does all radical thought have to be based in a reading of Marx (no matter how innovative or heterodox, as the autonomist one is)? And, we need to continue to ask questions about the problematics of merely taking over industries and running them themselves. This is what the essence of the critique of technology really is: it is a question about the relationship between means, ends and structures (and not simply a rejection of something called 'technology', with a corresponding praise of something called the 'primitive').

The interest of autonomism in new forms of immaterial and symbolic labor, such as call centers and computer work, shows an active engagement with the changes going on in the globalized world as capitalism continues to run amok. And, it is admirable in its desire to link up different struggles—feminist, radical media, immigration—in a bottom-up fashion. But it's unclear whether it answers one basic question: is our vision of the future still restricted to worker-owned and administered call centers and Starbucks? Has capitalism so permeated all reality such that we can dispense with capitalist management altogether and have the workers themselves self-manage their own alienation? This was the basis of the discussions around Processed World in the 1980s, which sought to spread

similar ideas to the new section of office workers. We welcome further discussion and encourage letters on this subject and in response to the articles in this issue.

More generally, the articles in this issue reflect our sense of where it is productive for an anti-authoritarian politic to head. An anti-authoritarian critique of “identity issues” needs to be expanded upon. Immigration is and will continue to be a pressing issue in the U.S., and one in which anarchists need to become more deeply involved.

Anti-authoritarian radicals should look at movements that already reflect anarchist values and where we can have a productive and useful engagement in a way that does not insist that we check all our principles at the door as the price of admission for participation. The Spring to Action collective understands this, and in their essay “The Perma-Revolution” (available online) they recommend that radicals join the perma-culture and peak oil movements and spread our ideas there. (We would only add that such a linkage would require attention paid to the role of race and class.)

We also want to affirm the necessity of and link to cultural work, and to continue to insist that it is not just the relations of power that need to be changed. While we understand the necessity of confronting and redistributing power, what we want is actually far beyond that. We seek to overturn and transform the very structure of our way of living. We want to destroy the idea that natural objects are turned into commodities and have exchange values and prices. We want to uproot the tendency to establish hierarchical relationships in the first place. And we want to heal the disenchantment of the world by repairing our connections with the natural world around us.

Quite simply, we seek a revolution in everyday life, in all its aspects and for all people. This issue is our small contribution to this.

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