

# ***Fifth Estate* Censored by Prison Authorities**

**All issues blocked to Pennsylvania prisoners**

Fifth Estate Collective

2020

Incarcerated subscribers to this magazine are being subjected to increasing censorship from prison authorities.

The worst has been Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections which refused to allow delivery of the Summer 2019 issue of the *Fifth Estate* to subscribers in their prison system.

Pennsylvania initiated a policy last year that requires letters and periodicals to be sent to a central address rather than being delivered directly to individual prisoners in state lockups.

This policy hits prisoners receiving personal mail the hardest. Letters now must be sent to Smart Communications in St. Petersburg, Florida which scans them, stores them electronically, and inmates receive printout copies.

That means those locked up don't get to touch the letter a loved one wrote. Also, digital copies can be retained for law enforcement investigative purposes.

Periodicals, such as ours, books, calendars, photo albums and other printed items are required to be sent to a Security Processing Center in Bellefonte, Penn. It is here that a censor decided that no prison subscriber will receive the *Fifth Estate*.

Pennsylvania authorities say they began Smart Communication's Mail-Guard system after letters were found soaked in drugs. The MailGuard site brags that it "finally eliminates one of corrections longest running problems and security loopholes—contraband and secret communications in inmate postal mail. MailGuard completely cuts off the last conduits of drugs and undocumented inmate communications with the outside world."

The refusal of subscriptions paid for by *Fifth Estate* supporters for our Prisoner Fund is completely arbitrary. In fact, no reason was given whatsoever. Just a Post Office form of a Xeroxed address label returned to us with REFUSED stamped on it.

Although this is not shocking given the brutal nature of prisons, it is disheartening for Pennsylvania prisoners, This arbitrariness of censorship is more the rule than the exception.

In something like the old Catholic Church's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (List of Prohibited Books), the Texas prison system bans over 10,000 titles of 250,000 which are approved.

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is OK with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice as are two books by former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke. *Harry Potter* books are banned as is Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. One wonders, who went through over a quarter of a million titles to choose which were allowed?

Most recently, a California prison (we withhold which specific one to avoid more censorship) refused our Summer 2019 issue [FE #404] because a graphic displayed "frontal nudity." Since the prison offered us an appeal on behalf of our prisoner subscriber, we informed the jail officials that painting in question was



"La Jeunesse de Bacchus" William Bouguereau 1884

William Bouguereau's "La Jeunesse de Bacchus," a famous 19<sup>th</sup> century painting going at a Sotheby auction for up to \$35 million.

We also wrote, "We considered sending notice of this ban to California media outlets figuring they would have a field day with 'Prison Bans \$35M Art' as a headline, but we would rather have our subscribers receive their issues."

Somehow, this worked! We were notified that the prisoner would receive the issue.

The Winter 2019 issue was refused at a prison because of our use of Delacroix's 1830 painting, "Liberty Leading the People," where the Liberty figure shows one bare breast (which actually is a little weird. Sort of like Janet Jackson's Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction" of a few years ago).

When the prison officials were notified of its origins, even though the 19 century Parisians depicted were wearing yellow vests, they relented and delivered the issue.

The Pennsylvania situation has not been remedied. We thank NYC Anarchist Black Cross who helped us by writing each prisoner explaining the situation. They do important work to "free all U.S.-held political prisoners and prisoners of war!" as their web site states.

Contact them at NYC ABC, PO Box 110034, Brooklyn, New York 11211, **nycabc [at] riseup [dot] net**, [instagram.com/nycabc](https://www.instagram.com/nycabc), and [facebook.com/nycabc](https://www.facebook.com/nycabc).

# **fifth Estate**

Fifth Estate Collective  
*Fifth Estate* Censored by Prison Authorities  
All issues blocked to Pennsylvania prisoners  
2020

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/405-winter-2020/fifth-estate-censored-by-prison-authorities>  
Fifth Estate #405, Winter, 2020

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**