

Crash in, tune in, take over

Fifth Estate Collective

1968

NEW YORK, N.Y. June 25 (NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)—A group of about 40 hippie types, bearded, beaded and foul-mouthed, invaded the studio of WNDT-TV, Channel 13, last night and, within sight and sound of thousands of viewers, tried to take over the station.

Reality was performed on Channel 13, WNDT-TV, Tuesday night, June 25th, at 10:30 p.m. A live reenactment of chaos sent shock waves through the New York metropolitan area as thousands of viewers witnessed the first physical confrontation between the underground and the establishment media. What was happening in Paris, in Vietnam, in Berlin, in Tokyo, in practically every major city in the world was happening at that exact moment on the third eye of living room consciousness: REBELLION.

It was to be a calm discussion of "The Meaning of the Underground Press," with Jeff Shero from *The Rat*, Marvin Fishman from "Underground Newsreel," and "Yours truly" from the "East Village Other," along with Steve Roberts, *New York Times* correspondent, as M.C.

Roberts had just finished asking the first question after our introductions, and Jeff Shero was about to give the first answer, when loud banging on the studio's doors and muffled shouts merged into the studio and spilled into a pile of twenty five people among the three TV cameras and ten crewmen. In an instant the studio was transformed into a low budget "War and Peace" with a 50 x 30 foot area as a battlefield.

"The enemy" was dressed, as all media people from the underground are, with beards, books, beads, sandals, one Indian headband, cameras, motion picture cameras and tape-recorders. This was the meaning of the Underground Press.

All of a sudden, everyone started to speak at once:

"GET OUT. YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!"

"WE WERE INVITED."

"WHO ARE YOU?"

"WE'RE THE UNDERGROUND PRESS!"

Tower of Babel was suddenly reenacted before the TV camera's eyes. The establishment media in the guise of Steve Roberts asked reasons and the underground media in the guise of Marvin Fishman echoed back questions.

"Why can't they do this?" shouted Fishman. "They have every right to be here. They're the Underground Press!" pointing at the twenty odd people actively standing around taking pictures, tape recording, letting the cameras roll and asking their questions:

"WHY DOES TV HAVE TO BE YOUR WAY?"

"WHY IS THE ESTABLISHMENT MEDIA ALWAYS LYING?"

"WHY CAN'T WE CHANGE THE FORM OF THE SHOW?"

The questions seemed to all fall on Roberts as he became the central focus of all their inquiries. He sat there, his jaw locked on twenty voices at the same time as mental sweat plainly visible rolled down his flushed face.

But in the underground media's haste to pinpoint the enemy they forgot to protect their rear as other establishment troops behind them had kept the TV cameras turned on them. Suddenly the battle turned into a battle of the cameras as underground newsreel people turned, reeled and shot footage at the TV cameramen shooting back.

Before anyone knew it, Marvin Fishman was saying "Why can't we say FUCK on the air?" And as if to answer his own rhetorical question, "FUCK THE ESTABLISHMENT." The battle cry sounded like every grade B movie about World War II—"Sighted sub, sank same"—"I shall return"—"NUTS!"

Suddenly the atmosphere changed as Marvin Fishman realized that Channel 13 had called the police. Everyone started to retreat to the studio doors. Jeff Shero stood up and announced, "If they leave, I must leave." I got up last and didn't say anything but remembered the old adage, The underground media may have its beliefs but the Establishment has the bullets."

We retreated through the studio door as the TV people, assistant director, director, programmer, script girl, janitor, private TV policeman, stalked our tracks out onto the main floor. When we exited out onto the streets, some fat middle-aged women with "yenta" voices, started shouting at us. "You bums you!" The police at that exact moment drove up and the women started shouting, "Here they are." We started walking fast and then faster. I suddenly resumed a normal pace and then stopped to watch a policeman pass me by. Another police car drove up to cut the others off as they turned the corner. The police caught about eight people as the rest just split into different directions and vanished without the police realizing there were more. I stood there and watched the police taking the eight back to the TV station to find out what was going on. I followed and entered the station with them. Jeff Shero, who was also among us, and I were excused from the arrest because, as the studio put it, "We were invited guests." The others were charged with assault (an assistant director claims he was punched and the private policeman claims he was knocked down), trespassing and various other sundries, including burglary and riot. Bob Ferrero, the planner of the show on underground newspapers asked me if I had known about it beforehand. I told him "NO." It turned out later that Jeff Shero had not known about it either. As for Marvin, we couldn't ask him as he was one of the swifter ones who had made it into the night.

The studio overacted like children when they should have known the children whom nobody leads are the children who know they are children. They overacted but we were only acting. The same war we waged in that studio Tuesday night was the same war the establishment wages in Vietnam. It's what, as Bob Dylan has stated, a matter of "Bringing It All Back Home."

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