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Guerrilla War: Fit to Print?

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

October issue

The November issue of Scanlan's Monthly won't appear. The forthcoming December and January numbers of this entertaining and creatively cheeky magazine are also in doubt. The publication is solvent and has many thousands of readers who want to buy it, but the Amalgamated Lithographers Union refuses to print it. The contents of Scanlan's have become, in trade-union parlance, "hot cargo," for the editors report that attempts to place the printing order with more than 20 companies in five different states have failed.

In an apologetic letter to their subscribers, Scanlan's editors quote Benjamin Franklin, America's most famous printer, the patron saint of the trade, as saying if printers printed only what they agreed with, "an end would thereby be put to free writing, and the world would afterwards have nothing to read but what happened to be the opinion of printers."

Whatever might be the defense of Local 1 of the Amalgamated Lithographers Union, the group that decided to censor Scanlan's, isn't known at this writing because the president of the union is unavailable. Perhaps he's unavailable because there's nothing he can say.

Certainly the act itself explains the folly of letting any group determine the public expression. What the union objected to is a long piece entitled, "Guerrilla War in the USA." This article, more than seven months in preparation, doesn't advocate guerrilla warfare, here or abroad, but attempts to bring together in one place as much information on the subject as can be collected. You might think that, with all the talk about bombing, terrorism and mob action, this would be a useful public service.

Indeed the only people who'd have a valid and sane reason to object would be the terrorists and the guerrilla soldiers who might not want their *modus operandi* so widely explained and displayed. It makes you wonder what the lithographers are into.

The major thesis of "Guerrilla War in the USA" is that it's far more extensive than either the media or the authorities have led us to believe. ". . . The now quite visible wave of bombings is not the work of some isolated terrorist nuts, but part of an overall guerrilla war which has been waged in hot pursuit of American institutions for at least the last three years without anyone, most of all Attorney General John Mitchell, declaring or recognizing it as such," says Scanlan's which adds:

"Guerrilla war is a radically different political reality from anything the United States has experienced. It would be a tragedy for it to be misunderstood—either by those who would wish to crush it, or by those who would attempt reasonably to cope with it—as old-fashioned terrorism or simplistic hooliganism. . . . To understand guerrilla war is not to endorse it; not to understand it is to make it inevitable."

This is the tone and the message of this very long piece; this is the article which the union feels is awful for its members to print and for us to read.

The article contains a 24-page enumeration of every bombing, arson and sniping of an apparently left-wing political nature from 1965 to Sept., 1970. Some of the items seem to be a little dubious as with an entry from St. Louis that tells of two boys, ages 8 and 10, setting fire to their grammar school, but most are graver and more likely to be political.

"March, 1970," Scanlan's tells us, "was a typical month without any major civil unrest or ghetto riots. During March, there were 62 left-wing guerrilla actions against targets in 17 states, among them:

"Selective Service Headquarters in Urbana, Ill., Colorado Springs and Boulder, Colo., were firebombed. The Minnesota Selective Service Headquarters in St. Paul was heavily damaged when sprayed with black paint in a freak sneak attack.

"Time bombs were discovered at Army installations in Oakland, Brooklyn and Portland. A Post Office was dynamited in Seattle, the Federal Building was firebombed in Champaign, Ill., and a courthouse was blown up in Cambridge, Md.

"Firebombings and arson attacks caused light-to-extensive damage at eight colleges, and physical attacks on buildings and security guards took place at the University of Puerto Rico and Loop City College in Chicago. During the same period, six high schools were bombed and two damaged by arson.

"Guerrilla attacks against police took place in Richmond, Calif.; Chicago; Billings, Mont.; Detroit; Boulder, Colo.; and Cleveland. Dynamite, firebombs and sniper fire were employed in the actions.

"In Manhattan, the IBM, General Telephone and Mobil Oil buildings were bombed . . . during the month there were 17 bombing attacks against corporations and banks in eight states."

It's the magazine's contention that, "The geometric progression of such actions tells the story: the 62 guerrilla actions in March, 1970, were roughly double those of March the previous year when 39 attacks took place . . . In March of 1968 there were only 14 attacks; in 1967 there were four; and two such instances occurred in March of 1966 and 1965."

Scanlan's investigators of necessity had to work with old newspaper clips and couldn't investigate all of these hundreds of occurrences. It's possible that the rate of these political *attentats* hasn't quickened but that police and media are reporting them with greater care than they were a few years ago. This isn't very likely but even if it's true, Scanlan's has still assembled more information on this painful and crucial topic than anyone else heretofore, and we're not allowed to study it and make up our own minds.

The magazine has gone farther than collating news dispatches. The article contains a great deal of secondary information on native American terrorism and the thinking and tactics of guerrillas. There are a number of interviews with people who do things at all levels of violence, ranging from the man who blew up a military police station or the soldier who participated in the murder of his commanding officer, all the way down to the street-fighting woman who said this is what it's like to her:

"The air is electric. You start runnin' down the street like a wild woman. Your body feels really good—there's a group consciousness. You feel like a People's Army. It's crazy 'cause all you have is rocks and bottles and maybe a few Molotovs, but you're fighting the pig and that's a rush."

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