

MAY DAY COLLECTIVE

The Mayday Video Collective was formed by eight video groups who came to Washington, D.C. to provide video services to the people participating in the spring offensive. After two weeks of living/working together a position toward network television evolved. Hopefully this statement will be helpful to other alternate television groups in their dealings with the commercial networks.

During our coverage/participation of the May Week events the establishment media approached us on many different occasions. At its inception, the Mayday Video Collective naively accepted \$500 from NBC in return for giving "First Tuesday" first viewing rights of the footage we selected as most politically beneficial to the movement. If any of these tapes were broadcast, we were to receive \$400/minute. "First Tuesday" usually runs 10 to 15-minute segments. In addition, we were approached by CBS who wanted to air a long news piece using tape we shot inside the prisons.

However, we want to develop an alternate information system that will work toward fundamental change. If the networks wish to relate to us let it be to

broadcast the existence of this alternate video system to the people. To encourage the networks to do this is our sole motive in dealing with them.

The Mayday Video Collective's tapes will be viewed at local video theaters around the country and neither NBC, CBS, nor any other establishment network will ever receive one half inch of our work. Video belongs to the people—not to the networks.

The Mayday Video Collective:
 Antioch—Washington/Baltimore Campus
 Clearing House (Amherst)
 Earthlight (Boston)
 Source Coalition (Washington)
 Videofreex (NYC)
 Roadarte
 Federal City College
 Goddard

MAY DAY VIDEO

A few short weeks before May Day, the idea of coordinated video involvement in the actions in Washington emerged from the video group at Antioch College. An announcement appeared in Radical Software urging people from other places to come here and work together. Many came and eventually recorded some 40 hours on the events during the two week sustained struggle to end the genocide in Indo-China and to raise consciousness of racism and sexism at home.

This collection of people hastily adopted the misnomer "May Day Video Collective". I say this because the group did not function as a collective as much as it pursued the aims and interests of its constituent parts. Except on the level of equipment repair and exchange where there was much sharing, very little resembling collective process occurred before it came time to discuss how the forty hours of tapes should be edited and distributed. And during this discussion the group revealed only a superficial understanding of collectivity as the term was bandied about in a power struggle in which men repeatedly shouted down women they disagreed with. In this context, the word Collective became jargon and in a strange way, a verbal talisman dangled about our meeting to prove the purity and correctness of both sides of the conflict. In retrospect, the word served only to disguise a fundamental divergence within the group, namely, political commitment as opposed to media commitment, or in plainer words, the difference between video workers at the service of the people and video workers at the service of the people and video artists working for themselves.

The fact that various people have 1/2 inch video equipment doesn't mean they are together. What brings people and keeps people together is the use of the machine, not the machine itself. An M-16 in the hands American forces is an imperialist weapon, but the M-16 in the hands of the Viet-Cong is a revolutionary weapon.

At the beginning of the May Day events most of us hoped to apply our expertise and equipment to meeting the information needs of the people. We understood that to serve the people means to be tied to them, to participate in their actions, and to follow their political direction. Our first goal was to set up a live feedback system in the encampment at West Potomac Park, better known as the LAND. Through this system we would attempt to focus attention on the political objectives of the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice and the May Day Tribe. We understood our major task was to connect people to the strategies of these two organizations and thus to help bring form and unity to an essentially amorphous gathering of people. The theme of Non-Violent Civil Disobedience was confusing to many people, does it mean sitting down and passively absorbing punishment from the police, does it allow for self-defense or offensive non-violent actions, such as barricading streets, trashing, or violence against property??? We hoped to be able to clarify such questions and help people to work together rather than against each other as a result of conflicting strategies.

Because of technical problems, but principally because of a lack of discipline and experience, we were forced to abandon this plan and to function as video reporters collecting impressions of the life on the "Land" and the actions in the streets. Except for

Watching TV Can Make Your Hair Fall Out, Specialist Warns



two days when we had a functioning field playback system, we served as reporters resigned to using our tapes in edited forms after May Day ended.

Because this shift to the role of reporters occurred very early there was never any discussion of politics among the video people until after May Day. The "Collective" continued in name alone as the group broke down into individuals doing their own things whose only dependence on the group stemmed from technical and logistical problems, such as fixing or replacing broken equipment in the first instance and getting bailed out of jail in the second.

After May Day when it was time to discuss the editing of our tapes and to make plans for distributing them, serious divisions emerged, which surely would have been apparent if we had discussed politics at the beginning. One group decided to give their tapes only for an edit to be distributed within the as yet unborn "alternative network", which if it does exist in fact, as some insist, does so on the level of \$2.00/ticket elitist Video Theatres, catering to the urban cogniscenti. Another group within the collective agreed to give their tapes to the people who needed to use them, whether for legal defense, or for informational purposes in any context they could be used; in a video theatre, in the network monster, or in a toilet (free) if it is useful.

This group accepted the principle that the final decision about the use of the tapes doesn't only belong to those who made the tape, but also to those who produced the idea or initiated the events. The idea of a sustained two weeks of non-violent civil disobedience in the nation's capitol to bring the People's Peace Treaty before government officials and the American public to get it ratified, was not originated by Video people. Therefore, video people should not consider themselves the sole owners of the tapes with privilege of restricting their usage. If we are allowed to work in a situation created by the May Day people, they have a right to use our tapes and to decide how they are distributed. If they feel that it is relevant to use them in the Network Monster to correct wrong information disseminated by the press and network news, we have to accept and serve their decision.

Have we chosen to work in video because Sony, et al, are so far out to have provided us with a highly practical 1/2" system or because most oppressed people in this country have a TV set and that we want to be connected to them thru these sets?

Such a connection will not occur in video theatres, but it can sometimes happen through the antenna of the Monster. What is important is to force "sometimes" to become "always", to obtain control of our programs.

The split in the May Day Video Collective can be seen in a positive light if we start to realize that as we work and decide how our tapes should be distributed, we must respond to political priorities, if we want to represent and serve the people. We have to fight the idea that video people have the sole right to decide how to edit and distribute tapes simply because they know the medium. Knowing the medium means nothing if we cannot help people to use it to serve their needs. Or are we to become like Egyptian scribes, who became an oppressing class because they knew how to write and the people didn't?

Regardless of the particular outlet our vision and purpose will not be compromised.

we're a traveling media/education project; stuck in NY trying to pull together a new bus; have been working a lot w/VTR; will soon have two tapes on life in the People's Republic of China; and about twelve tapes on women and health issues; not sure yet about distribution; but for more information, write to us at:

BLUE BUS % BURNS
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BLUE BUS ★

(Editor's Note: This part of the "collective", which submitted the above letter to us anonymously was paid \$1000 by NBC for preview of their tapes and for production of an edited tape on NBC equipment to boost the tape from 1/2" to 1". If the tape was then thought acceptable to NBC's "First Tuesday" for airing the group would receive

an additional \$9000. However, after much time spent by the group preparing the tape it was never used. Recently a group calling itself the "New York May Day Collective" showed its May Day tapes at a benefit at Global Village, NYC, and charged a \$2.00 admission fee.)