

Exploding The Phone

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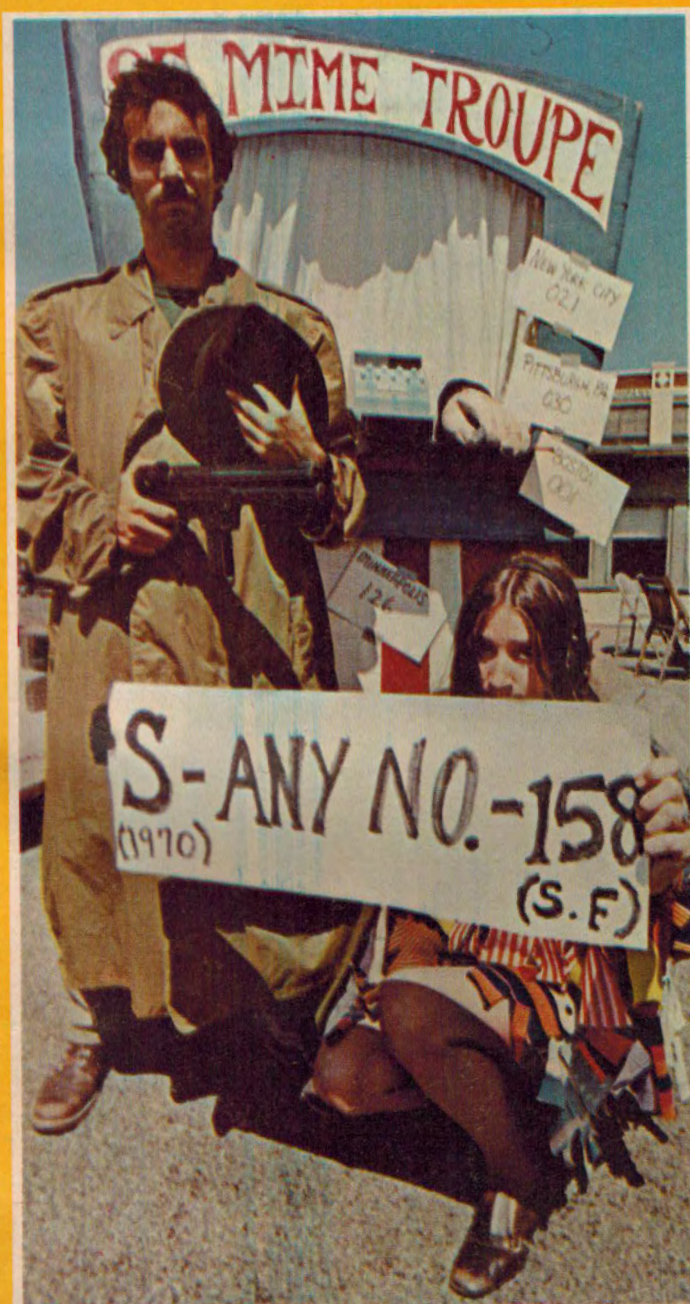
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August 1970

The Abortion Con; Cambodia Fights Back; Deutscher on Lenin
Jocks Against the War; Soledad Frame-up; Venceremos Brigade 75¢

Ramparts®

Ripping off Ma Bell—How to Make Phone Calls Free



SAN FRANCISCO MIME TROUPE:

Ripping off Ma Bell

THE SAN FRANCISCO MIME Troupe, with their Gutter Puppets and Gorilla Marching Band, seem to rove the countryside like a band of Happy Wanderers, putting on their pungent *actos* wherever there are people to watch them. Yet wherever they go—to parks, campuses and demonstrations around the country—their bawdy guerrilla theater runs into trouble with the local authorities. In 1965 the San Francisco Police Department busted the Mime Troupe for providing free entertainment in the public parks without a Ford Foundation grant. Over the years their road-show tours of jailhouses have included stops from Denver to Calgary.

The Mime Troupe is not one of those serious repertory theaters which torment us with such scathing satires of middle-class culture as *The Enemy of the People* and *Oh, Calcutta!* Instead, these theatrical loudmouths, refusing to retreat from the vanguard to the avant-garde, confine themselves to the cruder issues—the War in Vietnam, Racism, Male Chauvinism, Parking Meters and the Phone Company, adding new victims by the month.

The Mime Troupe has always skillfully employed the weapons of derision. With *Meter Maid*, first performed in 1968, the Troupe offered, in addition to Anti-Parking Meter propaganda (somewhat superfluous), a specific plan of attack: the Aluminum Tab-Top Strategy. The tear-shaped tab-tops are inserted in the meter in place of a coin, either priming the meter clock or rendering it out of order. Many manufacturers are still providing free parking along with their beer by fixing these handy meter tokens as a promotional gift on top of their flip-top aluminum cans.

Following their parking meter offensive, the Mime Troupe escalated their attack. They were not unreasonable about it. They had demanded the immediate, unilateral and non-negotiable withdrawal of all parking meters from the streets of the U.S.; or the establishment of aluminum tab-

tops as legal currency for all debts, public and private. The first demand was rejected as posing a serious solid-waste disposal problem—unless the meters could be reconverted for peaceful uses (none of which was found). The second demand was turned down as potentially inflationary. Kaiser Industries, however, offered to recycle the tab-tops and will buy them from the public at 50 cents a bushel.

REBUFFED BY THE AUTHORITIES, the Mime Troupe struck back. *Meter Maid* was small potatoes. The Troupe's new play, staged on these pages for our readers, raised the ante from pennies-a-day to dollars-a-minute. The target of course is The (Bell) Telephone Company. Public opinion polls indicate that the general popularity of the phone company is somewhat less than that of the parking-meter industry. The new Mime Troupe entertainment, thus assured a good, hostile audience, is essentially educational. It describes a method for making up do-it-yourself telephone credit cards for use on station-to-station calls from phone booths. Telephone credit cards contain no styrofoam, being composed entirely of numbers, which you have seen nationally advertised on Sesame Street.

The phone company evidently surmised that this knowledge about their credit cards might be used to deny the company the rightful fruits of initiative, competence and financial risks. They hit the Mime Troupe for a couple of hundred dollars on somebody else's unauthorized credit card calls; they even threatened to remove the phone. When you go to jail, you are promised a phone call, but when the phone company goes after you, you are out of luck.

Currently, the company has rescinded its bill for want of plausible grounds to sustain it. And the Mime Troupe's phone, ominously numbered 431-1984, remains intact.

—DAVID KOLODNEY

The Mime Troupe is available for bookings in the Bay Area during the summer, and elsewhere during the winter.

They may be contacted at 450 Alabama St., San Francisco 94110, phone (415) 431-1984 (no credit card calls accepted).



[Man dials Operator]

May I help you?

Yes, operator, I'd like to place a long-distance call to Zap, North Dakota, station-to-station.

Please deposit three dollars and 95 cents.

Three dollars and 95 cents?

Yes, sir, for the first three minutes, sir.

But operator, I'm calling my Guru!

Your Guru, sir?

Yes, operator, he's very sick. And I don't have that kind of change.

Perhaps you could place the call from your home phone, sir.

I don't have a "home phone sir."

Would you care to reverse the charges?

That might kill him!

Oh, sir, don't you have a credit card?

A—credit card?

Yes, sir. With a credit card you could place the call at your employer's expense.

I could?

Yes, sir. Suppose for example you

worked for the Bank of America here in San Francisco. When the operator came on the line you would simply say, "Operator, I wish to make a credit card call. My credit card number is S-756-0400-158." And the call would go through without any further ado.

What was that code again, operator?

S as in Sabotage, 756-0400-158.

Thank you, and you are out of service.

This is a recording?

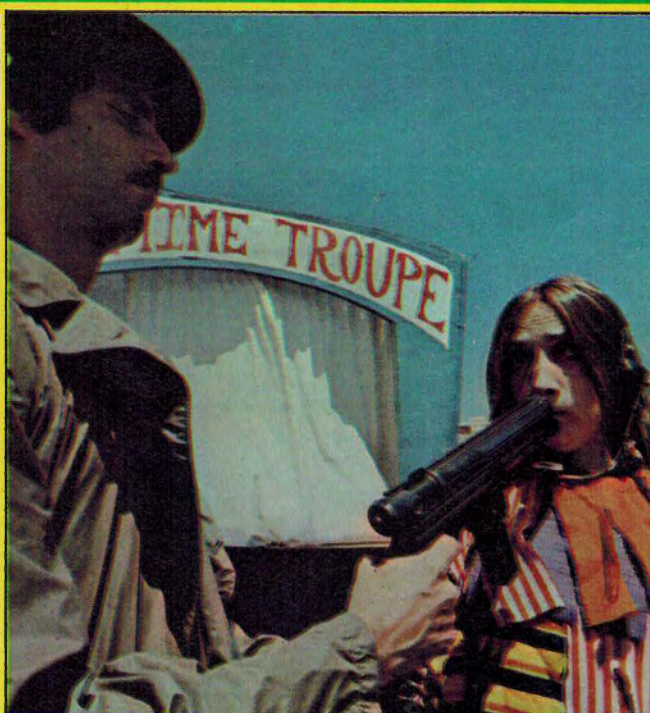
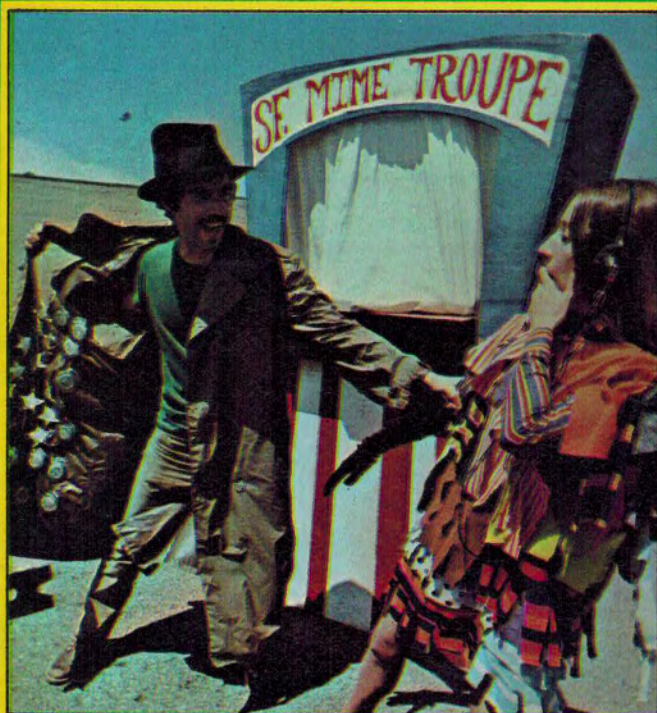
It's no use, Babs, we gotcha.

But how? . . . How?

We've had our eye on you for a long time, Babs—first it was just a bit of grass in the ladies' room on your breaks—now it's the big time, isn't it, Babs? The old story. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

All right, I don't care, I hate Pacific Telephone! Why do they get away with being a monopoly? Why don't they lower their rates instead of printing all those glossy brochures to send out with the phone bills? Who for God's sake needs a Princess Phone?

[Pulls gun on her] You're going to the Big House, Babs, for a long, long stretch.



[Gives Man karate chop and runs into audience] OK, everybody, the phone code goes like this: The credit cards are renewed annually and S is the code for 1970. The second part can be any number in the San Francisco phone book. I just picked Bank of America because they're such a big company — they'll never notice a little extra padding on their phone bill. Did you know that more than 10,000 false credit card calls were charged last year to the Dow Chemical Company alone?

All right, Babs, one more word and I'll blow your goddam head off.

The last part, 158, is the city code of San Francisco. So the code is really S — any number in the San Francisco phone book — 158. Always call from a pay phone — and always call station-to-station.

All right, Babs, take that [fires gun at her]. These goddam M-16s.

Because that way even if they catch on, there's nothing they can do — if the person you call is cool and just denies receiving the call. It's a bug in the system — and brothers and sisters, they can afford it.

OK, Babs, it's all over. There's only one problem with your little scheme. Why take it out on the innocent public-spirited companies like Dow, United Fruit, Levi-Strauss?

Because they're imperialist lackey running dogs and we should screw them whenever we get the chance!

Hey, wait a minute, you're not gonna claim to be one of those political prisoners, are you?

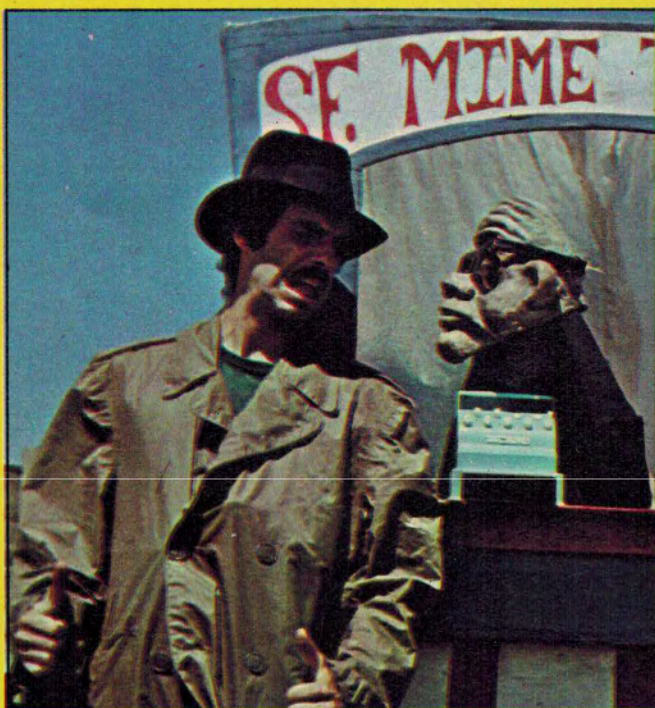
Sure, why not? In Cuba the phones are free. All of them!

OK, Babs, seeing as how you have all these weird opinions and all, we're going to have to throw the book at you. [Takes out small book and throws it at her.] It'll be a swift and speedy trial, so let's pay a little call on the JUDGE-O-MAT.

The what?

The JUDGE-O-MAT—instant justice! The latest device in the war against crime and overcrowded courtrooms. Let's take a little mosey. [Operator and Man cross to puppet box.]

JUDGE: Order in the court! Charge, please!



Misdemeanor, your honor-mat.

Offense, please.

Telephones, your honor-mat.

Oh, you must mean the old stamp dodge.

The old stamp dodge, what's that?

The old stamp dodge — you know — not putting a six-cent stamp on your phone bill, so the phone company has to pay the postage.

Oh no, it's worse than that, sir.

Then you mean the old spindle swindle.

The old spindle swindle?

The old spindle swindle — that's punching an extra hole in your phone bill so the computers freak out.

No, your honor-mat, this is credit cards.

Oh — you mean the old S — any number in the SF phone book — dodge.

Hey — you're hip to the phone code — you musta been talking to some of my friends.

Felony! Felony!

No, no, it's a misdemeanor, your honor-mat.

Talking is conspiracy; conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor is a felony. Please deposit an additional ten cents. [Man does so] Sentence! Six months suspended, three weeks Santa Rita, one semester [name of school]. Lock her up.

Fascist scum, your days are numbered!

OPERATOR OF JUDGE PUP-PET: [emerging barefaced] Come on, lady, I'm just trying to do my job!

[to tune of "Yellow Submarine," dancing] Call your friends, it's just a dime/ from California/ on company time/ say my cre-e-e-dit card is S/ any nu-u-umber 158.

[in rhythm] you're under arrest.

BOTH [Dancing together chorus-line fashion]: Call your friends on the People's Telephone, People's Telephone, Call your friends, [etc.]. [Dance off.]