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Hazard, Ky.: Failure and Lessons

THE MEANING OF DEBSIAN SOCIALISM

Red Decade Intellectuals

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Our next issue will be largely devoted to a study of the origins and development of the New Left. Articles have been promised on the Student Peace Union and the Young People's Socialist League at their early 1960 heights, the ERAP community-organizing projects, the infancy of SDS and several other related topics. As usual, the contributors will be activists who were involved in the particular groups. The two following issues have been tentatively scheduled as "specials" on new interpretations of the American labor movement and the growth of the Black Power movement, respectively. Also in the future we plan an issue on radical theater in America. Those interested in writing about these particular subjects, as well as other subjects, are urged to contact us.

The growing potentialities of Radical America for aiding the ideolgical and tactical clarification

Hazard, Ky.: Document of the Struggle

HAMISH SINCLAIR

The Committee for Miners first considered the possibility of a Student Summer Project in Perry County, Kentucky late in '63. Berman Gibson, President of the unemployed miners' Appalachian Committee for Full Employment, and Hamish Sinclair, secretary of The Committee for Miners, toured campuses in New York City, Boston and Philadelphia in November of that year.

Their description of the jobless miner's lone fight against coal operators, their political friends, and the police in Hazard, Kentucky sparked the formation of student Committees for Miners' on many campuses. To support the miners in their organizing campaign for food, jobs and justice, the students first action was a Bring Christmas to Kentucky project.

What began as a simple humanitarian gesture of goodwill, whose only political content was its support of a particular group of impoverished people in their willingness to fight for better conditions, took a different course after Christmas.

Their total commitment to the miners' attempt to organize for political change in the area gave voice to the slogan "Relief is not Enough." Campaigns to gather food, clothes and money developed into activity to organize a student miners conference in Hazard over Easter. The agenda for the conference covered the important aspects and background of the miners' present plight; the history of the coal industry in the area; the role of the union, once militant and now in retreat; the rapid increase of mine mechanization; the migration of unemployed coalminers to midwest urban employment; the manipulation of those that remained and the coal operators tactics to gain advantage from their plight; the miners attempt in 1962 to halt the decline of an already desperate situation; and the introduction of Federal Programs through state and county political administrative channels, while at the same time federal authorities joined in the suppression of the miners movement (for JOBS) in the federal "conspiracy" prosecution of eight of the "Roving Picket" leaders.

Two elements in particular characterized the conference which took place in an unused United Mine Workers of America union hall. It featured speakers from the miners' movement, students, trade union officials, university faculty and government representatives, both local and federal, involved in programs to meet the needs of chronically unemployed workers. It was an effort to appreciate the fullest scope of the coalminers' problems. It was secondly an effort to inform both the miners and the students, as a backdrop to the planning of student assistance to the miners' action program.

Some previous preparation had been made among the miners' movement by the CFM field staff to introduce the idea of student participation. The conference provided the opportunity for formal introductions, and most importantly for the formation of the Appalachian Project. It was the title given to a purely administrative body, jointly sponsored by the Appalachian Committee for Full Employment, Students for a Democratic Society, who had given valuable help through their national campus facilities and union orientation to organize the Easter conference, and the Committee for Miners. Its function was to raise money and administer it, and to recruit students and select them for work with the miners during the summer.

WHAT WORK - WHAT STUDENTS?

From small beginnings, a series of appearances on campuses to raise money for a relief project, evolved a major conference involving Federal Government spokesmen, and a Committee for Miners' campaign to involve students in serious work among the unemployed coalminers.

After Easter this campaign produced a work Committee, The Appalachian Project; a campus organizer (George Goss). officially delegated by SDS for the job of student recruitment in Appalachia and campuses all over the country; and a promotional pamphlet which outlined Eastern Kentucky problems and detailed the logic in student involvement.

These accomplishments were evident and indisputable, but a program for student activity had not been clearly stated. Broad policy was outlined. The Committee for Miners characterized itself as a "service" operation. This assumed of course that they had found something to service. It was established that the students, although paid by the Appalachian Project, would work in Perry County at the behest and on the requests of the needs of the indigenous Appalachian Committee for Full Employment. They would essentially lend their literacy and formal education to those who lacked these advantages but who had developed organizing skills and political instincts in the process of articulating their hard felt social needs. From them the students had something to learn in return. Thus the concept of intellectual and artisan joining together in political concert to alleviate social blight and oppression was established. Emphasized, too, was the notion that it was now time for white students eager to be in the battle for civil rights, to understand the economic roots of discrimination. Working in Hazard with unemployed coalminers in a movement which in principal espoused the UMWA hangover of non-discrimination, was the step in the new logic of uniting black and white not on a purely moral basis, but on the practical assumption that neither had jobs and that both had a common cause, that of eliminating their identical separation from the social fabric. A belief in racial equality and their work with predominantly white unemployed workers would enable the students to become an active bridge for a kind of new Populist alliance, on the grounds of job discrimination against all workers black and white in the automated age.

Hazard was to be the Mississippi of the white unemployed because here there was already a movement, the militant "roving pickets". Here, possibly in response to such militance, the Federal government concentrated its greatest response to the problems of the unemployed. It was encumbent upon the unemployed to respond, to be the critic of the Federal Governments' program and to prove that it was too little, too late. Students, therefore, could find a challenge in demanding of the Federal Government a non-discrimination bill for the unemployed, and in all of the profound economic and political consequences it would entail.

Finally, in terms of general policy, it was clear that one of the major responsibilities of a movement of the unemployed was to involve union participation. For example, the logic behind the Committee for Miners' choice of SDS as a participating student body was that group's union orientation.

Briefly, then, the general policy of student participation in Hazard was to assist a predominantly white, but in principle integrated, movement of unemployed coalminers to establish their critique of Federal programs for the unemployed and to invoke the participation of the trade union and civil rights movements, to carry that critique into positive political programs, to be implemented by local political action. In this concept, there were several serious omissions which related to the practical problems of actually "doing" or carrying out the general policy outlined.

THE CFM

As a conscious public relations policy and also out of a fundamental interest, the Committee for Miners worked to establish the identity of Berman Gibson and the other picket leaders who were on trial. The CFM argument was as follows. The picket leaders were unemployed coalminers who in 1962 led a militant struggle for their industrial rights in the truck mines of Eastern Kentucky. Without the traditional support of their union, the UMWA, they conducted a traditional union fight. Without substantial support, they were institutionally outflanked by the coal operators and their political machine and the police. Jailed in order to frustrate their struggle, the miners came out fighting. Facing heavy fines and jail sentences, the roving pickets moved to put their house in order. They analyzed the real issues, and rejected the notion of better conditions in the mines on the basis that jobs did not in fact exist after automation. Instead, they wanted to attack the real issue learned from experience. They wanted to organize a movement for jobs to end their economic discrimination. They were prepared to join the civil rights movement in spirit, and demand union participation in their new struggle for the constitutional issues of human rights. Although Berman Gibson understood these issues and was ready to work on them, his breadth of understanding was not shared by many of the unemployed miners who had followed him in the militant picketing days. They did however understand the fundamental tenets of union solidarity. They concluded, therefore, that if this was the new line that would raise money and help to free them of their legal problems so that they could continue the struggle for union jobs in the mines, then this is what they would stand for.

The Committee for Miners, on the other hand, perhaps too readily accepted the pickets' acquiesence to a new line as evidence of the real potential for a jobless movement in Hazard. The Committee interpreted the reluctance of the pickets to understand the notion of a movement of the jobless as a legitimate organizing challenge. A union of the jobless was not distant in concept from a union of the employed, and it would be based on the real and evident needs that the men were feeling.

Nevertheless, the new concept essentially belonged to the Committee for Miners. In general, the miners would accept it only to the extent that it contributed to alleviating the legal problems which arose from the picket movement. The organizational principle of servicing immediate needs in order to build a constituency for a less obvious program was thus espoused at the outset by the CFM. In this sense, an organization with a program of jobs for the jobless and rights for the disenfranchised was an imposition which caused some confusion later to the uninitiated students.

For those on the scene, the miners, it also caused confusion. The picket movement had essentially been a one-man operation. The lack of democratic participation in decision making, characteristic of the entire United Mineworkers structure, was evident in the picket movement. Fooling with the self-ordained prerogatives of the coal operators, as John L. Lewis had discovered, was no occasion for diplomatic discussion or parliamentary procedure. Living by the sword, the coal operators would apparently have to die by the sword, and this meant war. There is nothing less democratic than a fighting army engaged in war, and John L's members were soldiers; the pickets no less so, and Gibson was their leader because he understood the fight. The more civilized pursuits of building a democratic society in periods of peace had been totally ignored by the union for reasons best ascribed to the perpetuation of its own internal power structure. (A membership sophisticated enough to demand local representation in local public government might also be sophisticated enough to demand local representation in its international union.) Whatever the reason, the unemployed had no real representation in local government. Without political expression, their needs went unmet.

It became fundamental to the Committee for Miners' interpretation of a program for the miners that they should organize to get this representation. Totally unprepared for the problems of formal decision-making and democratic procedures, the miners had to use their organizing work at least partly as the first lesson in democratic government. Gibson appreciated the need for this effort but his honest efforts fell short of achieving it. What is more, the effort and its imperfections thoroughly confused the pickets, and in turn their reactions added to Berman's own confusions and loyalty to his new role.

Frequently exhausted emotionally by this burden, and anxious about the outcome of the legal proceedings in which he faced a twenty year jail sentence for one charge and life imprisonment for another, his heart condition, a legacy of an earlier serious mine accident, was aggravated and his general health deteriorated to the point where he became a liability to the movement rather than an asset. Although there was no one else with as much organizational authority to take his place immediately, Berman was persuaded for reasons of health and organizational expediency to withdraw from day-to-day activities in the movement. He raised funds for the trials and made appearances at hearings in Washington, but came infrequently to the regular meetings in Hazard.

His absence had two related effects in particular. Without his dynamic focus in meetings, which used to silence everybody else on the executive committee of the Appalachian Committee for Full Employment, the committee members found themselves free to determine their own decisions. But without Berman's acute understanding of the Appalachian Committee's problems, the Committee for Miners and other observers noticed that the committee members could find little use for this freedom because they by themselves had found nothing to decide.

The imposition of the CFM program became embarrassing in the absence of discussion which suggested understanding and enthusiasm. The distribution of food and clothes became the only subject of animated discussion at meetings, which underlined two things, the paucity of participation of the members in constructive issues, and their lack of organizational skills to deal with the most fundamental of organizing tasks involving group action and administration of group decisions.

Clearly, then, unless the Committee for Miners regarded a movement of the unemployed in Hazard simply as a useful promotional gambit in its efforts to defend the miners on trial, it had a responsibility to develop new leadership of a calibre and character different from the UMWA prototype and to work with that leadership to clarify general grievances into political issues around which an articulate membership could be organized.

From the start then, the Appalachian Project which was designed to draw students into Perry County to work with the existing movement of unemployed miners, on furthering their program faced two tough problems. The existing movement had not yet developed an actual program and had only rudimentary political instincts. And new leadership had to be found to develop such a program.

Students therefore were asked to deal with problems complex and fundamental enough to tax the skills of experienced organizers.

THE STUDENTS

By the time of the student-miner's conference at Easter, there were already three CFM staff people in Hazard. The one nonstudent, a former union machinist, had considerable knowledge of the sterile intellectual acrobatics of the American left but had little experience in organizing, and was given few organizing directives from the Committee for Miners.

There were two students, neither of whom had any experience in organizing working people. One of them had no campus organizing experience either. Both from southern campuses, they adhered to the notion encouraged by SNCC at the time, that the civil rights movement had to develop its own cadre of Negro organizers and that white southern students could best work to organize white southern support for the movement. Both were interested in the Committee for Miners proposition that this white southern constituency might come from the white unemployed and that they had to be organized to preempt destruction of the civil rights movement by elements of whites morally supporting integration, but jealous of the assumed Negro threat to their jobs.

Neither of these two students had a command of left wing politics or union history. Apart from one student's basic sympathy to the Wobblies, neither were cognizant of the power of deeply felt union loyalty and the effects of its betrayal. Pecularialy unemcumbered, therefore, they were quick to join in the nonstudent's cynicism about the rhetoric of another left wing flasco when they discovered the discrepancy between the facts in Hazard outlined in the previous chapter, and the fiction in the Committee for Miners' promotional material. Disappointing for them, too, must have been their intrusion at the birth of a very sickly child, the progeny of the romantic, virile and idealistically dashing militant strike movement of 1962. The confusion of this child and its parents, the Committee for Miners and the Roving Pickets, was not encouraging compared to their experience with the comparative maturity of the strident civil rights movement venturing into its adolescence. Unaware of anything that had gone before to establish this much, they reacted to what they found. The Appalachian Committee for Full Employment was not a movement that could stand by itself with its own program and leadership. It had no direction and there seemed little likelihood of its finding any.

This very practical assessment of the Hazard movement of unemployed miners became a serious threat to its long term future. Fired with personal commitment, the new staff was incensed by the harsh realization of the facts. Without the experience of organizational perspective or discipline, their honest accounts became the tools of division both among the miners and their families with whom they were working, and among their friends outside of Perry County who sometimes were all too close to the Committee for Miners fund raising sources.

Less dangerous, but equally devoid of perspective, was their conclusion that "manipulative" influences from the outside had little place in the committee's development and that this foundling child would fare better if it found its own way and voice in the world. These observations and conclusions were indications of what might be expected from general participation by students in what was essentially an exploratory attempt to organize the unemployed. They threw light on the serious lack of political education and organizational discipline of the average student coming straight out of school to do political field work. (In the absence of these attributes it is due a student's credit that he comes out of school with a notion to do field work at all!)

Possibly not wanting to be embarrassed among other students if they too discovered the conflict of fact and fancy, and probably concerned about the survival of the infant committee at the hands of predatory campus agitators with whom they were familiar, the three organizers strenuously opposed the Easter conference. They considered it untimely and felt that it would only cause resentment among the miners and their families and also among the local opposition. In the few weeks they had worked in the area - in the absence of Berman and myself who were fund raising,- they had developed their own following which was loyal enough to agree with them that the CFM's organizational need for an Easter conference was an intrusion inconsistent with the effort to develop the democratic determination of the indigenous committee. However, there was little overt show of this feeling on the miners' part when the conference did actually materialize. On the contrary, they were pleased with the status it gave them. Promises of the adverse affects of the excesses of a body of liberal students abroad in a strange morally and intellectually proscribed community never materialized.

However, the field staff was expressing real fears. It is probably more to the credit of the conference organizers and the hospitality of the miners and their families that the students presence at the conference did not justify the field staff's predilections. Their real fears were based on fact, however, even if their expression was organizationally naive. The Appalachian Committee was weak and undefined.

The important point though is that the field staff's lack of organizational experience did not afford a constructive organizing response to their realistic analysis. In addition, there was nobody on the CFM staff present (or experienced enough to give priority to being present) to handle this distinctive conflict which arose out of perfectly foreseeable but intolerable inexperience.

This was the dilemma of the Appalachian project. Students, in fact, were being asked to serve for the summer the needs of an ongoing movement with an organizational voice and a program, when in fact there was nothing but a 'beginning' for a movement and a 'hope' for a program. Added to that was the almost certain knowledge that even the best students were going to be without political understanding of their role and would have little experience of organizational discipline.

THE PROJECT

In the time between the Easter Conference and the beginning of the Appalachian Summer Project, a major change in attitude took place toward the kind of work students could do in Hazard in one summer and the kind of work that the Appalachian Committee required. This change materialized from a more realistic evaluation of the state of affairs in Hazard and of student participation there to date, discussed in the last chapter. The movement, with or without Gibson, was in an extremely embryonic state, and the commitment of the two students working there already outreached their political and organizational maturity.

From estimates of forty or fifty made at the conference, the number of students actually recruited to work in Hazard during the summer was reduced drastically to three. Two others, one from Lexington and one from a town nearer Hazard, did not materialize.

Somewhat better prepared during the recruiting stages for what they would find in Hazard, the three project students were initially less frustrated. They came prepared for a movement which had more form than content, and were warned of the existing staff's deep alienation and distrust of the Committee for Miners and what it had so far achieved. They came ready to tackle the problems of finding new leadership in the community, and to make the effort toward an orderly transfer of the committee's business from the old hands to new ones that they might find. They were cognizant of the sophistication of defining grievances for their political significance, and of the transformation and presentation of them into organizational issues.

Despite all of this, however, only one out of the three had sufficient personal discipline and political maturity to be able to put the frustrations and chaos that they found in Hazard into any real organizing perspective. There was always the nagging question that premised each of their efforts in the face of day-to-day organizing disappointments, and in the absence of immediate responses by the miners to their efforts. They wondered: what is all this work for?

In the major prototype of student political action, the civil rights movement, it is easy to answer because black equality does not need a political answer of any subtlety. There is, possibly, an escape for the white student in his hidden paternalism toward Negroes that when organizational frustrations mount up, reminds him that Negroes could not possibly react better because they have been the underdog too long. But when your own white people don't react to your organizing efforts, there is no escape to paternalistic nor emotional reason, there is only politics and that is more subtle and more demanding.

At first, these kinds of problems were accentuated by the project director's unwillingness, partly through time commitments to the preparation for trial work and partly through his inability to take on the job, to tackle the students' political orientation problems. In this respect, it would have been better to have a student for a project director, picked because of demonstrated campus action organizing abilities and political clarity. Primarily, though, it became clear that the most important difficulty arose from the relationship between the students and the miners' movement. The students role of servicing an ongoing movement was phoney. Without leadership from the miners and without leadership in the field from CFM staff, the students, if they were to do any work at all, had to provide the leadership also. It is a credit to them that this did not tax their willingness nor their skills. It did, however, tax them at their weakest point. What was all this work for? In the absence of a clear answer to that question lay the source of the student constant confusion about the context of their efforts, their ability to motivate action on a longer term perspective, and their understanding of day-to-day frustrations. It was the source of a readiness to accept and encourage an arbitrary display of power by the movement in public places without accepting the burden of meticulous and patient preparation for it. It was only the miners' own timidity that prevented a major catastrophe on this score.

More important, perhaps, is the conclusion that students without organizing experience and without political maturity have doubtful value in the delicate and painfully slow process of developing local autonomous movements when the issues are not clear, and the leadership has not already been developed. It is too tempting in a vacuum to assume the role of leadership in violation of the principle that it is the people themselves who have to lead and to come to understand their own issues. The dangers of succumbing to this temptation were noticeable when the dollar an hour men lodged a complaint about their work conditions. They were subjected to a "kangaroo court" type of inquiry in response to their complaint. Insufficient preparatory work was done with the men and under cross-questioning by the 'court' their response was weak. Half of the men who signed the complaint finked out under questioning, and the other half could not articulate their demands after the Project field worker had been ejected from the hearing. Another instance of this was the inability of all but the student fieldworkers to respond to the intimidating presence and questions of the school superintendent and county sheriff at a public meeting called to discuss the issues of poor schools. Public meetings, however satisfying as evidence of organizing success, are devastating failures if no one but the organizer can respond to the challenges of the opponents. The students on the project were apt enough to learn by experience, but it was callous to have them learn at the expense of those they were leading. At least one or two, or a small number of the people themselves, must be advanced enough and prepared enough to accept the challenge of confrontation.

It is in the preparation of this rudimentary stage of organizing, working with one or two local people intensively, that the doubtful value of the role of students in a short period of a summer vacation became apparent. On the other hand there is another question. If the situation had not produced these few local people already, it might have been asked if the notion of organizing in Hazard had any merit. The premise on which the Committee for Miners and the students worked was that the picket movement in the past had produced just such people. What the students in the summer project accomplished was to confront the local committee with a real estimate of the magnitude of the task that they had assumed, and they forced some of the already prominent leadership people to a real assessment of their abilities. This was not a useless accomplishment. Rather, it now provided the Committee for Miners, in the past too preoccupied with its responsibilities to prepare and manage the miners' trials, with useful practical evidence on which to base a proper estimate of the organizing potential in Perry County among the unemployed.

THE PROJECT DID WHAT

At the outset, there was an arrangement that a member of ERAP would come down to be acting Project Director during the time of the trial in Lexington. This was pretty close to the beginning of the Project and the arrival of the students. There was a difficulty about his transportation, and he arrived a couple of weeks late. So there was little chance to sit down with him, to tap his extensive experience, and to apply it, not just for his short stay in Hazard but to set up a program of activities that would be useful to carry out during the rest of the summer. Thanks to his talents this turned out to be less of a disadvantage than expected, and in fact led to our realizing one of the most important things about Hazard.

The fact is that the students on their arrival a few weeks prior to the ERAP person set about quite successfully, though with much confusion, to find the new leadership prior to his arrival. They lived in coalminers' homes and tended to generate activity in the precinct in which they lived. Through past community service type work, they soon found that the main issues that people complained about were school lunches, bad schools and bad educational facilities for their kids, inadequate medical care, particularly at the former Miners' Hospital, inadequate school bus facilities invariably brought on by inadequate roads up and down their hollows, and a whole host of individual problems over Public Assistance, Social Security and Workman's compensation type claims.

They confirmed our earlier opinion that the weekly meeting at a local union hall, attended by a hundred or more people, was mainly a 'Food and Clothes" gambit, and that apart from a regular show of strength, its value was limited. It attracted mainly women and older men. They came to [illegible] that [illegible] [illegible] were [illegible] [illegible] not say anything [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] not [illegible] desire to [illegible]. [illegible] the ACF Executive Committee members used their attendance at these meetings for various personal reasons irrelevant to the Committee's work, and sometimes even contrary to the Committee's interest. These committeemen were the least useful in designing and administering the committee's business.

This conflict of interest became a devisive issue, and the arguments over who should get food and clothes and who was offended because they did not get them for their friends, took much of the committee's time that should have been spent on organizing the community around issues more relevant on a long term basis.

Those members of the executive committee who were serious about the organizing job, people whom the students had established good contact with, urged the students into precinct work where they could organize the people around the local issues of that precinct. Precinct meetings, therefore, became the major activity of the students. A variety of issues closest to each precinct were discussed, and as a result, several delegations were sent into town to demand concessions for various precincts. When the ERAP representative arrived, he was able to determine that the most politically relevant work should center around the elections of three school board members in November. For eleven years, Dennis Wootton had been school superintendent. There are five board members elected on a rotation of three one year, two the next. It happened that one of the two members not being elected this year opposed Wootton. Therefore to depose Wootton, it was necessary to nominate and elect only two of the three to be elected on an anti-Wootton ticket, by thus gaining a 3 to 2 anti-Wootton majority on the new board.

It was through discussion with the executive board that this notion developed and they began work on it immediately. At the same time, Brack Hensley, a comparatively young fellow with a large family, came in to ask for help to write a protest letter to the Governor about conditions on the dollar an hour gang. He wrote a letter complaining about the Federal Program to aid the Children of Fathers who were unemployed. Three things had been promised the men when the program started: free tools, free lunch, and free transportation to the job. None of these had been effected. In addition, he complained about unsafe working conditions, and demanded a federal minimum wage of $1.25, since the dollar an hour was not enough of a grant to live on and it had the effect of depressing other wage standards in the community in actual jobs that did exist.

On his gang of thirty, eighteen people signed the letter, and the Governor sent an investigator from nearby Jackson to investigate. The investigation turned out to be a "kangaroo court". It was held in the county court room presided over by Babe Noplis, the County Judge. The entire gang except Brack were summoned by their straw boss, the magistrate, and appeared in the courthouse like criminals. Present at the hearing, along with the investigator from Jackson and Babe Noplis, were Sheriff Charlie Combs of Perry County, the notorious truck mine operator, his deputies, Sgt. Mitchell of the State police, and other state police officers, the local FBI agent, the railroad detective, and one or two other coal operators. Under this impressive police line up, all but a few of the men finked out. A student went with them, but was ejected after a session of acid interrogation by Babe Noplis.

The lack of organizational preparation for this eventuality was disastrous, but the situation was not entirely lost. Brack became furious and wrote a second letter to the Governor, demanding that he, the author of the original letter, should be heard and not under police court circumstances. The investigator from Jackson returned quickly, heard Brack alone, and the gang received free tools and a promise of transportation.

There are roughly fourteen gangs comprised of thirty men each on the dollar an hour program in Perry County. The program extends to nine Southeastern Kentucky counties. To organize the fourteen gangs around his demands, Brack asked a student to go with him to talk with the other gangs during the day. The other gangs had been forewarned and were openly offensive. Individual members, however, came to Brack at night to encourage him and tell him that their gang had been warned to have nothing to do with these Communists or they would lose their grants. Some magistrates had gone further, and promised personal violence by way of repercussion.

Meanwhile, the students were calling open meetings in about seven different precincts. Leaflets and posters were produced to advertise each meeting - there were about for our five every week. Each one drew from twenty to one hundred people, and on the invitation of the Executive Committee Members, the attendees became interested in their precinct's particular problems. Precinct committees were beginning to shape up, when one night at one of the meetings in Grapevine, Charlie Combs, the High Sherriff and three uniformed deputies turned up and surrounded the meeting with the aid of about three car-loads of armed gun thugs. Not wishing to invoke the violence they knew Combs was looking for, the meeting fell silent until the chairman had to adjourn it. The word spread around the county, and further public meetings were poorly attended.

The success of Sherriff Combs' intimidation in both instances dictated the terms of the committee's new strategy. The public voice of the committee's work would be a newsletter produced once a week by the executive committee, with aid from the students in production and editing. If people were not confident enough to come out into the open and face authority, but preferred to meet individually, then that is the way the committee would do it. At the same time, the attempt was made to organize an election-organizing committee with representation from each school board district concerned and a dollar an hour organizing committee with representation from each of the fourteen gangs.

The base of opposition to organizing in these two areas - dollar an hour and education board - is obvious. Both handle large sums of federal money and are an integral part of the party political patronage system in the county around which both the republican and democratic county dynasties revolve. There is little difference to the recipients of the monies which party is nominally in power.

The students' work organizing in these two areas with the Appalachian Committee demonstrated the following to the Committee members: there was a political, not just rhetorical, need to expose the administration by the local officials of the federal program. The effect of this exposure would be severe harrassment, smearing and the threat of violence and possibly violence itself. (In their minds this equated political organizing with union organizing - an advantage.) If they were to continue after the students left, this reaction would fall on them and they would have to face it and deal with it. The political machine was well organized - this they knew - but it would take more work and thought from a larger number of people in the county to fight the machine effectively than they had mobilized up until now. Most important, the best members of the committee, about five out of fourteen, realized that there was a real organizational difference between arguments over food and clothes and discussion and planning of tactics and strategy.

In this sense then, the student project defined two important facts by its action in two nerve centers of the Perry County political machine. Opposition to political organizing would be intense, ruthless and immediate. Secondly, there was a serious lack of leadership among the unemployed miners and their families to cope with the complexities of formal planning and consistent administration and initiation of the committee's business.

If the students were confused and frustrated by the apparent lack of direction and absence of a concrete program and tangible results, this was a sophisticated luxury. The members of the Appalachian Committee were not yet aware that these things might be the subject of confusion and frustration. They are still not aware that direction of program and results are interrelated.

This is a serious shortcoming, which could determine the CFM's future program for work with the unemployed in the Perry County area.

WHERE WAS THE SMOKE

President Kennedy was pretty sharp. It might be ambitious to claim that the militant picket movement was the smoke that meant fire to the Democratic Party national machine. If not, it is nice to think so anyway. Whatever the effects of that crisis year in mountain labor history on the national administration, Appalachia is the place that Kennedy drew the line. Like an underdeveloped country in the tradition of the Alliance for Progress, Appalachia got its American ambassador, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. and its Economic Advisor, John Whisman. There was a lot of earnest handshaking and solemnizing about the plight of the peasants. It was evident from official press release pictures that the poor were a good bunch at heart. With a touch of the "American Way" and the leaven of a few federal dollars, they would rise in the image of free enterprise and fall gracefully into the affluence that hitherto by odd coincidence had escaped them.

In 1964 there were five hundred unemployed coalminers in Perry County working for the government on the Aid to Dependent Children of Unemployed Fathers Program for a dollar an hour. Those are the ones that were left after the Federal retraining programs had skimmed off the best at a cool $32.00 a week and no job guaranteed after a year of training. And they were the best of what? They were left over from those who saw the writing on the wall as the picket movement declined. With this last hope for unionism fast disappearing, they left. They were the younger men,

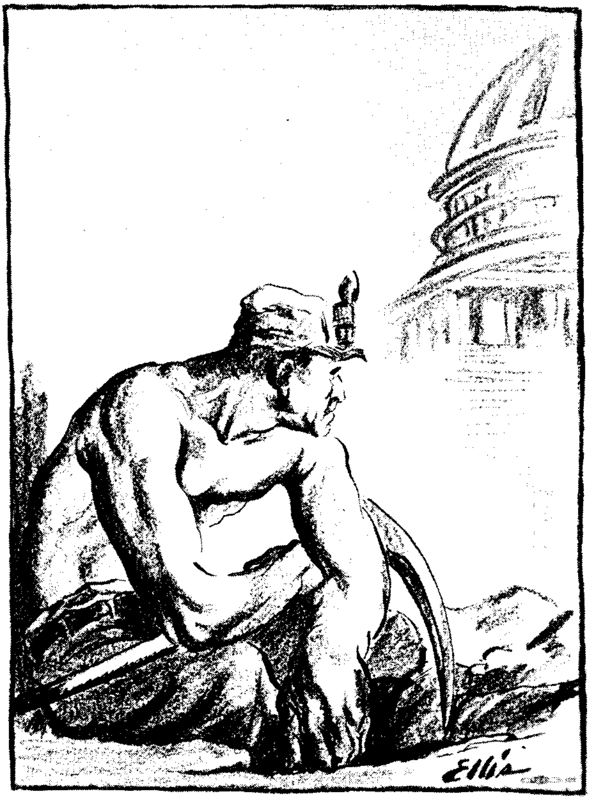
men who still had the vitality and small enough families to lift their roots and seek a substandard fortune (by union standards) in the competitive labor markets of midwestern urban areas.

I don't know if this could be called the second migration. I doubt it. Since the union mines began closing down in 1948 in the wake of automation's first major onslaught, migration has been pretty constant. But the details of the migration are important. Take Leatherwood Number Two, employing 350 men in 1962. When it terminated contracts, the official union picket line lasted until unemployment benefits ran out. The strike coincided with the unofficial "roving pickets," and although the UMWA was pained to maintain that there was no institutional connection, it is a fact that the Number Two men, still well disciplined and knit together by the ties of their local, unofficially and as individuals, gave impetus to the wider, sweeping roving pickets in support in their own strike. This was true in other counties, with other Locals strike-bound or in similar trouble as Number Two. In each case, the organizational calibre and character of the men in the strikebound locals was superior to the disenfranchised men in the roving pickets, with the exception of its leadership.

While there was still focus to the organized strikes by the UMWA there was still a point to and support for the roving pickets. When the situation changed, and the UMWA capitulated to the Southern Labor Union and therefore to the Blue Diamond Number Two bosses, the guerilla-type field force was no longer useful. In fact, it lacked truthfully independent backing and, more important, organizational logic as an autonomous force. What would have happened if the young, vigorous men in the Number Two Blue Diamond local had then joined the pickets openly in defiance of the UMWA's directives is a matter for conjecture. The fact is they did not. Because they were union militants, they were excluded from reemployment in Blue Diamond Number Two, either by management or because they would not accept substandard terms under the Southern Labor

Union. They apparently saw no reason to join the picket line - this might be an indication of their sophistication - and left the area altogether. According to a rough estimate, hardly a survey, out of the 350 men working in Blue Diamond Number Two mine in 1962, there were only four or five still in Perry County in 1964, two years later.

President Kennedy's statistics mongers were as sharp as Kennedy. They estimated how many men could escape from Appalachia into the job market elsewhere, much of it buoyed by Federal/State Public Works Projects. They estimated how many would be left slightly too old to believe that they had transferable skills. And they estimated how many would just be left. For the second and third categories, in Perry County at least, they set up re-training programs and the Aid to Dependent Children of Unemployed Fathers program to absorb them.



THE BITTER END

When Stanley Aronowitz, founding chairman of the Committee for Miners and I went down to Hazard in February of '63, and again in July to meet Berman, we had a hunch: the militant unofficial strike did not mean that the workers were initiating a revolution at last, as some leftists romantically concluded. The coalminers had been deserted by their union because in this one industrial area the inept response of the trade union movement to automation prematurely burst at its weakest seam. It burst into uncontrolled rebellion because the men were trapped in large numbers. They were trapped in a jobless economy. The automation that had been taking place without social mercy in the mines over the last ten years, losing the UMWA two thirds of its membership in the process, was now taking place in the traditional urban areas where unemployed coalminers had previously found economic salvation. With no jobs there and none at home, the tide of despair rose, and burst in a torrent of spontaneous protest. It was a protest entirely along traditional lines, a protest that did not take into account the new situation of total joblessness after automation. Therefore, as a mere labor dispute it could never win and the valiant and self sacrificial efforts were being spent in vain from the outset. Berman, as previously stated, was quick to understand this, probably because his recent period in jail waiting for bond had given him peace to think.

When Berman and one or two other leaders became convinced that their struggle could continue with new direction and using their victimization in the federal courts for fundraising, all that remained to be done was to mobilize the old guard again. During the rest of that summer of '63, while Stanley was in New York setting up the CFM, there was plenty of evidence that the old guard was still there. Berman and I had meetings every night in the seven counties of Southeastern Kentucky. They were well attended and enthusiastic meetings. Two thousand signatures were attached to a petition to Washington demanding jobs. A well-signed petition and well-attended meetings do not in themselves constitute an organized political force. Without Berman, the men in the various counties did not have the impetus to call meetings themselves. In addition, the CFM did not have the staff or the resources to cover each county in the detail required to promote local leadership. Berman's health began deteriorating under this continuous load. The UMWA, once again embarrassed by a "second coming" announced phoney plans for county-wide meetings, and in two or three meetings drained off our support. At the end of the summer, I returned to New York to spend full time raising money. Thereafter, almost by default, but certainly dictated by our resources, activities became concentrated in Perry County.

It was at this time that the notion of student help in a summer work project first established itself. It was at this time, too, that FDR, Jr. was appointed special attache to Appalachia, and the job programs began to roll. Vocational training centers sprouted like coal camps once had. In January of '64, the Aid to Dependent Children of Unemployed Fathers program began. In a very short period, though nothing looked different, the out-migration of the most able and the Federal program's job security or a persuading facsimile thereof denuded the area of its discontent. Sharp cookies in Washington warmed their hands in the glow of the fire that had once been too close to their ass for comfort.

Hazard: Socialism and Community Organizing

PETER WILEY

The new left appears to be developing according to its own peculiar laws. In the summer of 1964 while Johnson and Co. were carrying out their plans to bomb North Vietnam, the movement was at the height of its populist phase. Hundreds of students flocked to the South to participate in the civil rights struggle. Within a little more than a year the momentum of the civil rights drives in the rural South had expended themselves.[1] The development of the ghetto rebellions and the idea of black power shifted the focus of politics to the city and understandably excluded white students.

The next phase brought the development of a university-based student movement. At first a moral protest aimed at the seemingly isolated issue of United States' intervention in the Vietnamese civil war, the movement gradually began to relate the situation in Vietnam to the immediate environment of the university. First the inequities of the draft were attacked and then with the exposure of Michigan State's role in the establishment of the neocolonial Diem regime, students directed their attack against university complicity with the government's counter-revolutionary strategy and the domination of both the university and U.S. foreign policy by giant corporations.

Now the movement calls itself anti-imperialist, as yet a vaguely defined term. And Student Power is

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1. For an interesting evaluation of a civil rights project in Tennessee, see Bob and Vicki Gabriner, "Fayette County, Seven Years After," The Movement, III (October, 1967).

counterposed to Corporate Control. Tactical escalation which reached its peak in Oakland, Washington, and Madison has accompanied, and more often has superseded, the escalation of political rhetoric.

These advances are accompanied, however, by a sense of uneasiness. Because of factors peculiar to their respective situations, black militants and students face isolation and repression. The ghetto is vulnerable because it can be cut off physically from the outside world by means of massive military repression, a move which would meet little opposition from white America. Black exploitation has resulted in the relegation of Afro-Americans to a socially and economically marginal status thereby effectively excluding them from economic centers of power.

Students are in a similar situation since they have not as yet entered the work force. Moreover, the great majority who eventually will will more then likely prove to be politically docile. Many students are aware that their politics take place in and, in a sense, are a product of a privileged environment. Their revolutionary posture seems to put them in a vanguard position, but a position defined by students' isolation, a potentially dangerous situation because of the ability of ruling groups, locally and nationally, to mobilize an alarmed populace against what is being made to appear to many as an alien threat.

This situation has led to renewed interest in the movement's earlier populist phase of community organizing. It is argued that the movement must broaden its base by working with "poor people" and adapting a "working class perspective," in order to focus again on the essential economic issues and to prevent the repression of the black liberation struggle.[2] The JOIN project in Chicago and the

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[2] Les Coleman, "Finding Our Direction from Our History," New Left Notes, II (December 11, 1967); Rennie Davis and Staughton Lynd, "New Politics and the Movement," National Guardian, XIX (August 26 and September 2, 1967); Thad Marty (pseud.), "On Resistance Strategy," New Left Notes, II (November 20, 1967); Mike James, "Putting White Radicals to Work. . .," New Left Notes, II (October 9, 1967).

Newark Community Union Project are the two prototypes to which we are usually referred. They both have managed to weather a period of relative neglect by the rest of the movement. Now it is urged that similar projects be set up in other cities.

It is imperative that the base of the movement be broadened, but there is a real danger that we will not profit from our past mistakes, that instead we will return to our original level of development and repeat our earlier experiences. With the problem in mind, I want to make a few comments on one organizing project that did not weather the storm.

HAZARD

The Hazard Project was conceived in 1963 at about the same time as JOIN. The original intent was to broaden and sharpen the civil rights struggle by giving it a class base through emphasizing the essential problems, particularly unemployment, which underlay segregation. Political consciousness would be built through organizing around local issues such as the school system, welfare, etc. But the essential questions - consciousness of what and for what and how organizing around local issues was going to help attain whatever the objective was - were not dealt with.[3]

The central problem in Hazard grew out of the confrontation between the ideological predispositions of the miners and the students. The miners viewed their situation from the perspective of a broad social awareness, much broader and in most cases more realistic than the students. They understood the particularly intense class conflict peculiar to the underdeveloped coal mining regions. They knew that the coal operators were top dog and that within eastern Kentucky the local, county, and state governments were their chosen instrument.[4]

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[3] Project Director Hamish Sinclair in the report printed above and in an interview with Studies on the Left, V (Summer, 1965), 87-107, tends to focus on the operational problems which plagued the project. In addition he tends to exaggerate the differences in political perspective between the students and the older members of the project. In fact the problem was a basic failure of conception and strategy on the part of all elements in the project.

Their perspective, however, was circumscribed by two flaws which were closely related. Both flaws were a product of their social environment and their history of class conflict. As good trade unionists they had been taught that economic struggle for limited demands would alleviate their conditions. They need only belong to and remain loyal to the union; it would direct the struggle for them - from its headquarters in Washington.

Ultimately to the detriment of the miners, the union pursued a policy of collaboration with the operators at all costs on the one hand and ruthless suppression of the democratic aspirations of the rank and file on the other. The union encouraged a mechanization which finally led to the dissolution of its strength in the area and unemployment for the miners.

Thus because of the clearly authoritarian nature of the union and the narrow version of struggle it promoted, the miners found it difficult to take the initiative. And once they had, as roving pickets, they continued to carry out a strict union action, for wages and hours, even when many of them were unemployed. They were of course militant practicing armed self-defense and a semi-guerrilla form of

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4. It should not be necessary to make this rather obvious point. There is a school, however, influenced rightly or wrongly by Herbert Marcuse and/or contemporary consensus sociologists and by their own backgrounds that argues that somehow class consciousness has been obliterated by the amenities of modern "welfare" capitalism. We believe that class consciousness has been channelled and confused, but not obliterated.

struggle. But this was the last desperate struggle for a dying movement not, as some romantics (non-miners) thought, the beginning of the social revolution.

The other important aspect of their outlook was their attitude toward the government, an attitude which was ambivalent but tended strongly toward acceptance of one of the dominant themes of neo-capitalism, the neutral benevolence of the federal government. Factors operating against this attitude were the attempt of the government to smash the U.M.W. after World War II, the role of local FBI agents as assistants to the coal operators, the obvious use of welfare money to force miners into nonunion mines and to control their picket movement, and the use of War on Poverty funds to build a local Democratic party machine loyal to the national leadership. But still the government had played a neutral role through the National Labor Relations Board in the union struggle. And when the mines closed down, the federal government did provide food and some jobs. There was, moreover, the impressive but unfulfilled rhetoric of Appalachian Development through the War on Poverty. Finally Washington was a long way off and most miners were unfamiliar with the machinations of the federal government even though they understood its operation on the local level. As we shall see the fact that the miners were ambivalent about the role of the federal government was a crucial problem which was complicated by the confusion of the essentially middle class cadres of the New York based Committee for Miners.

TWO STEPS BACK

The students, imbued with the democratic elan of the civil rights movement, were convinced of the virtues of building a movement for participatory democracy. They were aware of the fraudulent nature of federal reform programs like the War on Poverty and employed the correct strategy of broadening the tactical approach of the miners by encouraging them to supplement their trade union activities with political action. But in actuality a gap soon appeared between the students' political perspective and their organizing activities.

The students decided that political action should be directed at exposing for the miners the token nature of the welfare system, something both groups were at least partially aware of. In place of the existing welfare system they proposed to put a real War on Poverty. Never mind if this was not possible, nor desirable for that matter, within the framework of corporate capitalism; that wasn't the point. If you could get the people moving on reform issues, somehow, the movement would naturally evolve in the direction of the "radical structural changes" sought by the students. On the surface this strategy has all the appearances of a typical pragmatic reform movement: the kind of movement that would integrate into the existing system a potentially disruptive social group, like the unemployed miners, through a combination of token programs, glowing rhetoric, and a pinch or more of repression if necessary. Such a program would repeat the traditional delineation of what was politically legitimate and what was not, at the same time perpetuating the ideological myth of a neutral and benevolent state. In other words it appears that the students were assisting the forces which they theoretically opposed to bring the movement under control by promoting just those illusions to which the miners were most susceptible.

Among themselves the students argued that in the long run, since they were radical, they would be able to outmaneuver the government. But their perspective was both private - that is not discussed with the people they were organizing - and ill-defined. At meetings the possibilities of redress from the federal government were discussed with great optimism. In private with their peers the organizers exchanged harsh appraisals of the "reformism of corporate liberals." All the elements of self-deception, manipulation, and opportunism were present due to the disparity between the public stance of the organizers and their private evaluation of the shortcomings of their own work.

The question is not why the Hazard Project failed. It was bound to sooner or later, perhaps due to its very success. The question is: was there an alternative to the strategy employed in Hazard? In general can community organizing become a means of mobilizing the forces necessary for total transformation of the capitalist political economy?

As Ronald Aronson has pointed out, community organizing raises difficult problems because of the characteristics of the community's inhabitants. They are quite often unemployed and are being organized where they live not where they work.[5] Since this type of person is only marginally in touch with the economic centers of power, a community union could only be one element in a larger class movement which can contest power in the factory where it is located. Nevertheless these marginal communities - marginal from the point of view of employment - can become an important component of a socialist movement.

The prerequisite, however, for any movement is first a conception of that movement's objective, and second an idea of the strategy necessary to attain the objective. The left obviously lacks a clear idea of both at this point although such an idea is presently evolving. My concluding remarks can only sketch a possible alternative.

It is now admitted that the idea of participatory democracy, because of its vagueness, is deficient as an expression of an alternative to modern capitalism. In its place we must develop an alternative which is concrete enough to give the movement a specific goal and to help shape its strategy.

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5. See Ronald Aronson, "The Movement and Its Critics," Studies On the Left, VI (January-February, 1966), 3-19.

AN ALTERNATIVE

Socialism provides us with a more concise definition of what we wish to attain. With some thoughtful planning, and a minimum of phrase-mongering and dogmatism, our organizing efforts on campus and in the community can be related to a modern, democratic version of socialism. And with a clear conception of our goal, we can deal with the inevitable tension between the day-to-day struggle and our final objective.

In relation to eastern Kentucky, the problem was the exportation of an economic surplus by absentee coal operators which was realized through the exploitation of the miners' labor power. This fact, which was obvious to all, meant that a means existed for the social transformation of Appalachia. But because of unemployment a method had to be devised to redirect the surplus into the region. The miners can no longer seize the mines; they have to be part of a national movement which sees as its objective democratic control through socialization of industry.

I am not arguing that the seizure of power should become the next objective of the movement. That is our long-run objective and the culmination of what will be a long and bitter process. Nor am I suggesting an incremental seizure of power through a series of reforms. This social democratic approach, which has proved an important means for rationalizing capitalism, has nothing to do with the struggle for socialism. Rather I am suggesting that the local reform issues can be selected in such a way as to move us progressively toward socialism, that there can be a series of confrontations over a prolonged period of time which will eventually provoke a social crisis, the necessary condition for a revolutionary seizure of power. Thus we must disabuse ourselves of romantic notions of the immediately impending revolution and initiate the process of struggle with a revolutionary transformation as our guiding objective.

Again with regard to Hazard, a union of public works employees became one of the objectives of the project. The demands of the union were a federal minimum wage and that the men should be allowed to work on useful jobs in the communities where they lived. Asking for the federal minimum - a raise of 25 cents an hour - meant that we were defining our organizational work from the perspective of the welfare system: that is, asking for a larger dole. But useful work had some potential as a demand which we did tentatively explore.

The communities of eastern Kentucky are devoid of the most rudimentary social services such as decent roads, schools, sewage systems, housing, etc. Useful work could mean that funds would be made available for the elimination of these deficiencies. Again this proposal sounds like asking for a more elaborate dole. In a sense it is because it is calling for a reform within the framework of capitalism. But this reform proposal can be used to initiate the process leading to a revolutionary transformation.

A program for community reconstruction must recognize that the funds are not available in the community. They must come from elsewhere. This fact means that community people must struggle for control of the economic surplus. They must recognize in their reform program that the resources are available only at the expense of profits, in this case the profits of the coal operators. This realization which is a key to the fruition of a revolutionary process becomes an integral aspect of the union's demands for useful work. The coal industry has exploited our community; we demand that the profits be used for reconstruction of the community which the industry has blighted.

Super-welfarism is avoided, moreover, by defining the terms under which funds will be accepted. Control must be local and it must be democratic, not in the hands of the local political machine and its capitalist allies. At this point an organizer will frequently run into trouble. The process of exploitation and the division of labor has left many workers with a sense of their own inadequacy. Authoritarian unions have added the finishing touch. When we asked miners why they didn't try to take over the mines, they often answered that

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_ Please send introductory information on the Radical Education Project the mines were too complicated for them to run alone. In the same way they might reply that the problems of community planning were too complex for them. Specialization - for example as a coal loader - has limited the skills of most of the miners to one atomized part of the production process. But a thoughtful program could deal with this difficulty too.

There are many professionals who consider themselves radical. One assisted the Appalachian Committee to draw up a proposal for a federal grant. If they can break with the limitations placed on the application of their skills by the requirements of the existing social environment, they can provide useful assistance. A city planner, for example, can provide a substitute for the skills which members of an urban community lack while employing himself in a socially useful manner, a prologue to his role in a rational society. A community person's awareness of his deficiencies can be a further political incentive. Education in techniques of modern social planning could become yet another part of the union's program.

Thus through the constant linking of immediate demands to the final necessary objective, socialization of productive enterprise, the day to day political process results in the consciousness of being able to transcend existing economic relationships. The struggle itself evokes a new social system where the individual democratically controls the decisions which shape his life.

In turn this kind of dialectical political process challenges a basic ideological infirmity. The relationship of a reform program to a more complete vision of a socialist society forces one to discard the idea that redress must come focm the intervention of a benevolent state. Instead the delineation of a program which challenges the foundations of capitalism reveals the true role of the state and ultimately forces the political constituency to mount a struggle for power. It becomes aware that it is the only force capable of carrying out the necessary changes.

This kind of process could have been initiated in Hazard. But then as now the necessary prerequisites did not exist. There was no clear conception of what the movement was ultimately seeking. And without this a pragmatic strategy emerged as a disjointed and defensive response to a situation which our maneuvers could not challenge.

The problem of Hazard was and still is the problem of the movement. It is imperative that new organizing activities take account of these experiences. We now have sufficient knowledge and experience to be able to derive a concrete vision of socialism from the process of struggle in any community. Our new strategies must be formulated in light of the new social order which we are building within the womb of the old.

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6. "The international movement of the proletariat toward its complete emancipation is a process peculiar in the following respect. For the first time in the history of civilization, the people are expressing their will consciously and in opposition to all ruling classes. But this will can only be satisfied beyond the limits of the existing system.

"Now the mass can only acquire and strengthen this will in the course of the day-to-day struggle against the existing social order--that is, within the limits of capitalist society.

"On the one hand, we have the mass; on the other, its historic goal, located outside of existing society. On one hand, we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectical contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way.

It follows that this movement can best advance by tacking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its mass character; the other, the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect; the other, the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform."

Rosa Luxemburg, The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism? (Ann Arbor, 1961), p. 105.

A REPLY: A REVOLUTIONARY RENT-STRIKE STRATEGY

MARK NAISON

When I began this piece, I was tempted to write a point-by-point reply to Mr. Gabriner's comments. He misunderstood my reasons for writing about the rent strike, my definition of the subject matter,[1] and my political perspective. But it was not his fault that he misread my intentions. The article that appeared in the last issue expressed the harsh marks of an editor's pen as much as my own struggles with a historical problem. My original paper was 120 pages in length -- it was condensed into an article by the board of _Studies on the Left_. Many of my conclusions (which provoked controversy among members of the board) were removed in the process. The resulting piece, as Gabriner perceived so well, was a narrative cut off from its political commitments, an ambiguous compilation of facts with a slightly negative tone. This was not the image of the subject that I wished to convey. The best reply I can make to Gabriner's criticisms is to restate my conclusions about rent strike strategy,

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1. Gabriner seemed to think that I was writing about the Harlem Rent Strike alone, an impression perhaps suggested by the edited version. But the rent strike movement which I was analyzing was the city-wide movement, in which the Community Council on Housing was only one of over 20 groups organizing. Jesse Gray had only a small percentage of the buildings on rent strike around the city -- although he was certainly the movement's center of initiative. The story of the rent stike involved far more than the de-radicalization of the Community Council on Housing.

adapted to changes in my own political thought in the past two years. I hope it provokes some discussion of a tactic which might still be made an effective weapon for the left.

REVOLUTION IN THE REVOLUTION?

To the radical analyst, the New York Rent Strike must appear as a complete failure in political strategy. A movement aimed at massive slum rehabilitation, it won ritual affirmation of the slum dweller's rights and reforms in an unenforceable buildings code. An energetic drive to radicalize the poor, it yielded new recruits for the poverty program and genteel experiments in independent politics. The local political elite "handled and channelled" the protest, turning it into reforms which presented no threat to the patterns of ownership and control by which slums are maintained. The great themes of the strike, like those of its radical predecessors, were thwarted hopes and massive cooptation.

From this image of failure, however, one can draw signs of optimism for the radical strategist. The ghetto population showed a remarkable willingness to participate in the movement considering the quality of leadership they were offered. With the majority of the organizing done by white students unfamiliar with housing work, over 500 buildings went out on strike around the city, testimony to a feeling of exploitation that can be truly revolutionary when combined with appeals to race consciousness. The city administration, moreover, showed considerable insecurity before its final victory. Faced with the remotest possibility of a mass movement in the ghetto, it fumbled frantically for all manner of non-structural reforms in its liberal bag. This propensity to panic provides a great opportunity for the radical organizer. With some kind of disciplined organization at his disposal, he can create a crisis for the city which no traditional reforms can be used to appease.

The creation of a crisis, however, must not be the limit of the organizer's vision. While the rent strike should seek to provoke the diversion of funds into slum rehabilitation, it should make rehabilitation the adjunct of more important tasks of political education and community development. This implies two demands -- that rehabilitation be controlled and designed by the striking communities, and that it be financed by tax-drains upon corporate wealth rather than lower-class incomes. Without attention to such matters, rehabilitation (which the power structure grants grudgingly becomes a mode of social control, a way of supervising the lives of the poor without increasing their power.

Nothing could do more to undermine the ghetto's quest for economic strength and cultural integrity. A radical rent strike must use disruption and transcend it at the same time.

Such a movement is much more possible today than it was four years ago. With the exception of a few workers for the Community Council on Housing, none of the rent strike organizers saw the pitfalls of "liberal reform." Their ideological vision was that of the old Civil Rights Movement, a cluster of sentiments and images which provided very little understanding of the structure of slum ownership and control. The few principled radicals in the movement, moreover, had very little belief in the relevance of their own political perspective. When Jesse Gray and Ted Velez came under the glare of publicity, they abandoned their emphasis upon structural alternatives. Four years later, black and white radicals can act differently. They have lost their residual faith in liberalism and can predict the type of responses the political system will make. Most important they have a clearly defined program for change different from that of the liberal establishment, one stressing local control, community development, and cultural and economic independence. With this kind of philosophic base, radicals can organize a rent strike which combines militancy with ideological consistency. It is an opportunity which they should consider seriously.

NOTES ON A PROGRAM

The specific program for a radical rent strike is not something which one can spell out at his typewriter, nor is it something one broadcasts to the public. But certain basic guidelines for the use of the tactic can be presented on the basis of our examination of the rent strike's history. Here are six principles which I think that organizers should follow if they wish to make the strike an effective weapon for the left.

1) Rent Strikes should be organized on a citywide basis when they are organized at all. Neither the political power nor the organizational stability needed to bring structural reform can develop when the strike is highly localized. Tenants hesitate to join and disruption is difficult to organize. The movement will be unable to use non-legal means effectively unless it is large enough to protect the tenants.
2) The strike should boycott the courts and prepare to resist evictions by force (non-violent or violent). Not only do court procedures fail to bring repairs, but they tie up the organizers' energy in paperwork instead of agitation and political education. An emphasis upon resistance increases both the political impact of the strike and its contribution to community solidarity. Authorities find violence is the price of stagnation, while the community develops a sense of its own power. Resistance to eviction was one of the most dramatic tactics of the earlier rent strikes -- and it was usually effective. In neighborhoods where the authorities fear a riot, there is no better way of conferring a sense of urgency upon the rent strike's demands.[2]

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2. This type of resistance must be very carefully planned. It requires a careful coordination of street rallies with programmed action. In some early test cases, it might be wise to have a few empty apartments reserved as an incentive for tenants to risk eviction, although I find it hard to believe that most city administrations would dare to evict a tenant in ghetto neighborhoods that have been politically prepared for the contingency.

3) The rent strike should see rehabilitation in terms of the need of particular neighborhoods. Though the movement should develop on a citywide basis to maximize its political impact, each striking locale should demand the right to administer its own rehabilitation program--take over buildings, hire employees, make and enforce standards of health and safety. This gives the strike maximum resonance with demands for community power and self-determination. It connects the movement naturally with issues such as consumer rights, police protection, and school decentralization.
4) Organizers should have some kind of permanent commitment to the community in which they work. In the last rent strike, "disinterested" students workers made terrible organizers. The kind of energy needed to lead a successful radical movement comes only from a concrete personal interest in the changes one advocates. The rent strike organizers should envision themselves as eventual leaders of the local rehabilitation programs, spokesman for the rejuvenation of a neighborhood *they want to live in*. The tactic should be avoided unless there are large numbers of organizers who have such an outlook.
5) Planning and organizational work for the strike would begin at least a year in advance. For a protest dealing with issues this complex, spontaneity is disastrous -- it leads directly into reformism. Several of the tasks imposed by a militant rent strike require careful preparation: developing the trust of the community, politically educating tenants, preparing the community to resist evictions, and preventing concessions from splitting the movement. A clearly successful rent strike movement also requires a sound philosophic and tactical base.
6) Some emphasis should be placed upon publicity work and organization among white-collar and working-class tenants outside the ghetto. The political success of the rent strike may well depend upon how it is received by these groups. Emphasizing that rehabilitation be financed from property taxes

rather than personal income tax will bring out the common interests of middle class and lower class tenants--linkages which are often veiled by militant agitation. Discussions of rent control, building maintenance, and tenant grievance machinery serve the same purpose. The focus of the rent strike must be in the ghetto, but its program should be of more general relevance. To other groups in the center city it should be presented as a potential alliance rather than a challenge, a force which can aid all tenants suffering from expensive and inadequate housing.

IN CONCLUSION

As this hasty tactical sketch makes clear, a successful rent strike requires considerable professionalism from its advocates. Organizers must be willing to devote years of work to the movement and must bear an awesome load of responsibility for the tactics they choose. The radical rent strike commands powerful weapons -- resistance, violence, and illegality. It is inconceivable that they be wielded without great self-discipline and respect for human life.

But if the risks and burdens are great, so are the opportunities. As a means of provoking crises for urban governments, as a way of challenging corporate control of the slum, and as a device for political education on a massive scale the rent strike has few parallels. Freed from the restraints of reformist sentiments, it can be our most effective weapon against corporate domination of urban life.

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3. Some pioneering rent strike work among working class and lower middle class tenants is now being done by a group called The West Side Tenants Union. Many of the thoughts that have appeared in these pieces have been stimulated by discussions with its leaders.

The Meaning of Debsian Socialism

PAUL BUHLE

James Weinstein, The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925. Monthly Review Press, 1967. 367 pp. with charts. $10.

As American radicals young and old grapple for organizational forms and tactics to best combat imperialism and capitalism in this country, they often forget that the battle for ideas has been fought before, that at least seventy years of success and failure in the revolutionary movement have demonstrated lessons that must be learned. In this light, the importance of James Weinstein's recent work cannot be overestimated. By implication when not by actual statement Weinstein confronts the analysis common to American radicals from 1920 to 1956. His challenge to all of us to restudy the Socialist Party of Eugene V. Debs cannot be ignored regardless of our differences of interpretation. Whether the present generations of radicals accept or reject his characterizations we must deal with them, for to do so is study the seeds and roots of the movement we now call our own.

The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925 is first of all an important work of radical historiography. For example, Weinstein's analysis of the Debsian Socialist Party from 1912 to 1917 lays bare such internal problems as the Party's relations with women, Negroes, and middle-class intellectuals. The author's studies of socialist periodicals and elected socialist officials, supplemented by charts, are of particular importance. Difficult as it is for us now to believe, the Socialist Party at its height maintained officially and privately some 323 English and foreign-language daily, weekly, and monthly publications. The

Appeal to Reason alone had a weekly circulation of over 750,000, and it was followed by at least six periodicals of over 25,000 circulation. The Party was able to elect in 1911 some seventy-four mayors or other municipal office-holders and as late as 1917 still maintained seventeen.

Weinstein casts much new light on the internal dynamics of the Party's disintegration, 1919-1921, and the socialist influenced farmer-labor parties which followed in the 1920's.

Weinstein makes a serious assault on the old Leninist conception of the Socialist Party's internal structure. Whereas it has been frequently held that Left (revolutionist), Right (revisionist) and Center factions were clear and coherent, the author demonstrates that such distinctions were, indeed, dubious. Whereas Milwaukee politician Victor Berger, for instance, held a more "Marxian" view of the land problem than the "left-wing" rural socialists, "Big Bill' Haywood of the I.W.W. looked more to the "practical" value of electoral politics than Debs who believed it had only educational worth. There were indeed important issues over which a real "Left" and "Right" divided but such factionalizing deserves reevaluation that goes beyond traditional epithets.

Although socialist writers have followed the Socialist Party Left in regarding the Party's official Wartime stance as pacifistic and non-class oriented, in fact ex-leftists as well as right wingers split from the Party because it refused (along with a very few other socialist parties in the world) to support the war. And it is difficult to reconcile traditional conceptions of Victor Berger with his 1918 election billboards in Milwaukee: 'WAR IS HELL CAUSED BY CAPITALISM. SOCIALISTS DEMAND PEACE. READ THE PEOPLE'S SIDE. MILWAUKEE LEADER. VICTOR L. BERGER, EDITOR.' Weinstein has reminded us that far from completely suffering from their anti-war stance, the socialists often gained electoral victories and new members during the war. And the ruling class well understood the threat: vigilante committees, indictments, suppression of mailing permits, all this and more was directed against outspoken socialists.

Weinstein's failure to study the thought of even popular socialist leaders in a systematic way casts some doubt upon his meaning. The fact that the Socialist Party did not produce any outstanding theorists and only a few competent ones still begs for explanation. Moreover, a close examination of local and regional socialist papers might show a greater degree of disagreement than Weinstein has revealed. The Decline of Socialism in America is also to some extent ahistorical in that it covers several periods in a sociological manner and appears sometimes like a series of essays rather than a coherent work.

S.P. AND THE I.W.W.

More important in my understanding are certain serious distortions. In his effort to prove the value of the Socialist Party, he is altogether unfair to the Industrial Workers of the World. "Big Bill Haywood's constituents, he feels, "existed on the edges of society where conditions were more barbarous" and created an antipathy for reforms. But from Haywood's point of view the constituents of the I.W.W. were not only the lumberworkers in Washington and the migrant fruit-pickers of the Southwest, they were also the unorganized, foreign-language workers who were a majority of the industrial working class. The American Federation of Labor leaders in the Socialist Party, Weinstein says, were more antagonized by Haywood's attempts to win away the workers from organized mining unions than by his advocacy of sabotage. But a careful reading of socialist periodicals reveals that such A.F. of L. socialists as Max Hayes were bitterly hostile toward the I.W.W. from the day of its birth and were, I suspect, only too happy to have another "charge to discredit revolutionary industrial unionism. The meaning of the I.W.W.'s errors can be ascertained only by a discussion of the Socialist Party unionists' abdication of their role in organizing the unorganized. Whatever faults revolutionary dual unionism possessed can be laid at the door of those socialists who worked with middle-class and skilled workers because they voted instead of with foreign-language and poor laborers who either could not or would not depend upon the ballot box for salvation.

Weinstein hits hardest at those foreign-language socialists who, he believes, did not understand American conditions. According to his theory, these groups responded only to the call of the Russian Revolution and falsely condemned the American Socialist Party as "centrist" and reformist. He blames these American Bolsheviks for concentrating their attention on European instead of American affairs and for calling for a split in the party when no such split was necessary. In doing so Weinstein has, in fact, forgotten the subjective conditions which made the ideas of the foreign-speaking socialists popular. When Europe appeared to be going up in revolution how could one *not* concentrate analysis on those impending revolutions? Weinstein's hindsight may of course be tactically correct, but is in this case essentially unfair.

The Socialist Party Left's tradition, or lack of tradition, is one key issue. If there were no real tradition of opposition to the Socialist Party leaders then the leftists who called for a split in the Party were indeed responding only to Russian events. But, in fact, opposition to Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit was deep in the roots of American socialism. The I.W.W., and before its birth the Socialist Labor Party, consistently opposed the parliamentarism and opportunism of some Socialist Party segments. The opposition did not consistently manifest itself inside the Socialist Party because it was scarcely tolerated. Weinstein says almost nothing of "Big Bill" Haywood's recall from the National Executive Committee of the Party in 1912, though in fact the implications of that act were decisive. Clearly, the leading lights of the S.P. tolerated *anti-parliamentary* dissent only if the dissenters were too weak to be threatening. The rapidity with which thousands of revolutionists were expelled in 1919 indicates a state of mind in the Party's ruling circles that was apparently well understood at the time.

PARLIAMENTARY SOCIALISM

Weinstein sometimes approaches an entirely uncritical position toward Victor Berger and the parliamentary style of socialism. He tells an anecdote about the president of General Electric who vigorously opposed all attempts to discredit the Socialist mayor of Schenectedy and in fact revealed his desire to work "hand in glove" with the socialist. But what to make of it? Weinstein's position is that there was no alternative for an elected socialist official but to make the best of the situation and impose a stable, efficient climate in which local merchants could prosper. As long as socialists used an elected position to produce effective propaganda and education for workers, no true compromise was made. But Weinstein offers only one example of a Socialist mayor's "neutrality" in a strike (i.e., letting strikers and scabs fight without police interference), and it seems altogether likely that most Socialist officials tried to keep the boat from rocking by attempts to bring a general moratorium on real militancy. More critically, a Socialist mayor might please the middle-class and even skilled workers with his municipal reforms and paternalism, but he was hardly likely to win the hearts of the unskilled worker whose position had been in no essential way bettered through casting a socialist ballot. Being told to wait for the millenium is cold comfort for the hungry and overworked. And strategic conceptions of the Left like Mass Action, which Weinstein refuses to take seriously, must have seemed more realistic than waiting for the next election.

The Socialist Party's disinterest in reaching, organizing and revolutionizing the unorganized workers is both cause and symbol of the Party's faults that Weinstein ignores. To counteract the historical myth that the revolutionary rank-and-file of the Party was duped by reformist leaders Hillquit and Berger, Weinstein shows that the leaders' control was by no means absolute and that internal factioning was generally tolerated. But the leadership of the Socialist Party is unfortunately not the most important point. The vast majority of the Party apparently shared the debilitating misconception that small social reforms would inevitably lead to socialism.

VICTOR BERGER

In the long run, this misconception was as deadly to the power of American Socialism as the interpretations of the events in Russia. The seed of middle-class parliamentarism, which fell upon the fertile ground of an American tradition of optimism and successful third-party experiments may have predetermined both the vast successes of socialist agitation and the Party's terrible failure to operate in a world of Bolshevism and modern liberalism. Certainly, a majority of the Socialists elected to public office were workers; but they were also generally members of the Aristocracy of Labor whose ideals were reflections of currents above and not below them. Certainly, a mass socialist consciousness, the likes of which this country has not seen again, was created; but it was a peculiarly optimistic and unrevolutionary socialist consciousness.

By looking to parliamentary solutions, the socialists ill prepared themselves for the government and private terrorism of the World War I period. More important, they also ill prepared themselves for the rejuvenation of the Socialist Party through the massive growth of the foreign-language federations.

As Gabriel Kolko has noted, the Socialist Party of 1912 was not the Party of 1919: percentage of membership in the foreign-language federations had shifted from 13% to 53% with a concurrent shift from rural areas to major industrial areas. The Socialism of the Debsian period had already begun to dissipate; the belief in conventional democratic processes which underpinned the socialist electoral successes was destroyed in 1917-1920 not by the American Bolsheviks but by the government and its henchmen.

Clearly, the 1919 split in the Socialist Party which reduced the number of open socialists from over 100,000 to less than 10,000 in two years is the major tragedy of the American Left. As Weinstein has shown of the 1920's, the split did not revolutionize Marxist tactics: after a few years the Communists ran election campaigns, worked in unions, and carried on generally as had the Socialists before them. The vulgarized version of Leninism which led to a preoccupation with factional splits and the problems of Soviet economic reconstruction was no more theoretically correct, and apparently far less practically effective, than the earlier democratic perspective of Debs, Hillquit and Berger. But the problem for us is not to assess blame for the 1919 split or to judge the politics of Debs, Browder and Foster on a scale of absolute merit.

DRAWING LESSONS

Rather, our job as radicals is to put the whole past of American radicalism in context and try to draw meaningful lessons. The true significance of The Decline of Socialism in America is that it gives us most of the record for one period and thereby provides a basis upon which to begin our evaluations. One may hope that within five years such a record of the radical activities in the 1930's, particularly, is also available. Until then, Weinstein's work is in a sense a casebook for our study. Through careful examination of the premises and practical effectiveness of electoral socialism through a multi-tendency, decentralized party we may judge our own efforts.

The time is rapidly approaching when we must turn our dreams of an American revolutionary party into a reality. Single-issue campaigns are by their very nature limited in value and if radicals hope to prevent the destruction of our forces by the Kennedys and their cohorts, they must seriously begin to discuss the nature, strategy and tactics of a projected party. The implications of The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925 go a long way in explaining one possible model. Another model, not yet fully understood, is contained in the tradition of anti-parliamentary revolutionism which has long run as an undercurrent to the dominant forms of socialism. Still more models are contained in the various forms of Leninism. We must dissect these designs and compare them with our own alternatives, striving for a new synthesis of day-to-day agitation, our vision of a socialist U.S.A., and our plan to destroy the existing power. Otherwise we will soon be forced to give up our hopes for the future of the New Left.

A REPLY

JAMES WEINSTEIN

Paul Buhle's review of my book (The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925) is fair and generous. I appreciate his estimate of the value of the book, and I agree with his major structural criticism. I completed the book five years ago; if I were writing it now I would deal much more systematically with the thought of the Party leaders.

Buhle's substantive criticisms are wide ranging. I think they are mostly in error, but will not reply to them directly because they all flow from a difference of opinion over the relative usefulness of the experience of the old Socialist party and of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). I examined the old Socialist party because it was a mass movement that created a widespread consciousness of socialism as an alternative social order for the United States. As a result of the Party's activity from 1900 to 1919, no well-informed person in this country could escape knowing that capitalism was not the only possible basis of social organization. Socialists and socialist ideas permeated all social movements and millions of persons sympathized with or supported the Party and its press. The old Socialist party had revolutionary potential because it understood that its most essential job was to create (first in thought) a new way of life and a popular consciousness of its necessity and possibility. Of course, the Party also had many potentially fatal weaknesses and limitations, but it did not survive long enough for us to determine whether the shortcomings would, in fact, have proven fatal.

In comparison, the IWW was marginal and non-revolutionary. Buhle argues that it was not marginal because Haywood viewed all industrial workers as part of the IWW constituency. But it doesn't matter what Haywood thought about this. In fact, the IWW could rely only on migratory lumber workers, miners, and harvest hands. Only such workers remained IWW members for significant periods of time. Only they could be counted upon to respond to a call for assistance published in the Industrial Worker. The style of operation of the IWW, its refusal to bargain collectively or to sign contracts for set periods of time, its disdain for stability, made it impossible for workers with families -- those living in cities and tied to their homes -- to remain members. IWW members were free men both in spirit and in their way of life (which is why the IWW is so appealing to the new left). But in a highly integrated capitalist society only marginal men can be free. Indeed, the experience of the Wobblies proved that even their [illegible] of freedom could not long survive the triumph of the [illegible] corporations. In the urban indus- [illegible] have been [illegible]

[illegible] revolutionary -- [illegible] But unions [illegible] Their function is [illegible] the interests of their [illegible]. Unions (including the IWW), are defensive bodies, organized in response to conditions imposed by the capitalist relations of production. They cannot transcend the existing social relations. They fight for higher wages, for job security, for regular work (reforms). A successful union enables its members to be healthy, intelligent, stable family men, which is exactly what the employer wants them to be.

Part of the task of the revolutionary is to accelerate social disintegration; but the more successful a union is in winning its demands, the more firmly it integrates the lives of workers into the corporation economy. True, unions use disruptive tactics to gain their demands, and since the IWW was militant and skilled in such tactics it was able to lead strikes in urban industries (as at Lawrence). But unions cannot exist in a permanent climate of disruption because the businesses upon which they depend for their existence cannot function without stability in the work force. That is why the IWW could lead strikes but could not organize permanent locals.

When a revolutionary moment arrives disruption is necessary in industry, but when the job is the long one of building a revolutionary consciousness among workers disruption and sabotage are inadequate.

If a union were to become revolutionary (and none has anywhere that I know of) it would not be from its function in the scheme of things. To be revolutionary the union would have to embody a consciousness that workers can have a better life than that of being workers. Such a consciousness cannot arise out of unionism, *per se*, but only from an organization that embodies an autonomous world view. The revolution -- socialism -- means an end to exchanging a lifetime of labor in return for subsistence. It means that life will be organized around individual and collective work that is creative and self-fulfilling. Haywood and the IWW had no such understanding. To them the revolution simply meant a transfer of control of the factories from capitalist to workers. Society after the revolution would be organized around the factories and mines, controlled by the industrial proletariat. But what of a society in which the necessary industrial work force will be very small? Already in the United States there is a large class of permanent non-workers, both in the ghetto and in the middle class, while millions more are engaged in wasteful work that will be eliminated under socialism. In a socialist United States the kind of labor that Haywood saw as the focal point of post-revolutionary society will be marginal. His model of a society organized around factory life is of little use to us.

There are things to learn from the IWW experience. It championed the most oppressed groups of workers, it was uncompromisingly opposed to racism and discrimination. It had a proper contempt for the state and for capitalist legality. But many Socialists had these too.

Buhle implies that it was the duty of the Socialist party to organize unions. The Socialists knew better: their relative detachment from the unions enabled them to oppose the war without destroying their organization. In Europe, where the unions were closely tied to the party, bureaucratic self-interest in holding onto their organizations was stronger than the principles of internationalism. In the United States many Socialists in top union offices chose to remain "effective" by staying with their unions. But the unions, as the IWW learned, had to support the war or be destroyed. Such trade union Socialists dropped out of the party and became patriots, yet the Party, because of its autonomy, was saved from the fate of its European counterparts. It was able to oppose the war and to agitate among the rank and file despite the loss of high-ranking union leaders.

In arguing implicitly for the IWW in preference to the old Socialist party, Buhle centers his attack of the parliamentarism of the Socialists. I am, of course, not arguing for parliamentarism. But neither am I arguing against participation in elections. That was a necessity for the old Party, just as it will be for a new one. The fault is not in using elections as an educational device, but in seeing the electoral process as the road to power. That was a debilitating illusion, as was shown in the ease with which so many Socialists (left as well as right) moved on in 1919 to farmer-labor politics. They did so in the quest for a bigger vote through coalition, and rationalized their action by thinking that farmer-labor principles were inherently socialist, or would lead to socialism. But the change was from a party that had the potential of developing a comprehensive critique of capitalism and an alternative way of life to one that had in it only the potential of gaining acceptance in the pluralist democracy of a corporate state, of being integrated.

Many Socialists did not have the illusion that power (much less socialism) could be won simply by gaining a majority. Even as early as 1908 Victor Berger insisted that a peaceful transition through elections was possible only with a fully armed population. If every worker had a gun and knew how to use it, he argued, then a Socialist takeover through an electoral majority was a possibility. The experience of wartime repression demonstrated the overwhelming obstacles to gaining an electoral majority. In the light of that experience the Party might have been able to change its perspective on the long range prospects of electoral work, had it not been torn apart by the split in 1919. Certainly there was a tradition, with Debs at the center of it, of viewing electoral work primarily as a means of teaching social consciousness. The emergence of the Soviets might have led a united American party to develop its own form of parallel government structures.

One thing about Buhle's approach is very disturbing. That is his retention of the old cult of proletarianism. A few years ago, prior to the predominance of nationalism among young black militants, the new left was victim to a modern version of the cult: ghetto organizing. But now that SNCC has told white activists where to go (among their own people, where they always belonged), there is no longer an excuse for even this modern version. Yet Buhle puts down the old SP for working among skilled workers (in fact, mostly among miners, garment workers, brewers, and machinists) and in the middle class, while ignoring the foreign born. But as Buhle admits, 53 percent of the party was in the foreign language federations in 1919, and 35 percent were in 1917. There were many more foreign language Socialists than IWW's throughout the history of both organizations. But more important, white radicals should have learned, certainly in the last year or two, not to be ashamed of who they are. As Carl Davidson said at the Guardian meeting a few weeks ago, the difference between being a liberal and a radical (socialist) is the difference between feeling guilty about the oppression of others and desiring one's own freedom. What makes a revolutionary is not the degree of oppression but the degree of consciousness of unfreedom. That is why the core of white radicals is found among students rather than among workers. A revolutionary class consciousness, one that can absorb and transcend the culture and technology of the present, is more important in the initial stages of building a revolutionary party than the social composition of the party. In the long run, if we are to make our revolution, we will have to win the industrial workers, as well as the ghetto dwellers. So would the old Socialist party have had to do that, and it was moving in that direction during World War I.

Of course, the old Socialist party is no model for the party that we must create. But we have more to learn from its strengths and weaknesses than from any other organization in our past. To learn we must first clear away the ideological fog that has enshrouded our socialist past. I hope my book will help dispel existing myths and uncover a partially useful heritage.

Rejoinder

In part James Weinstein's disagreements with my review of his book, The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925, seem to stem from a misunderstanding of my meaning, fostered perhaps by my use of historical example to prove my point. In part, our differences are a reflection of our different notions of organizational principles and particularly the validity of electoral campaigns.

Weinstein takes me to task historically for my comparison of the I.W.W. and the Socialist Party: the former he believes was doomed, despite its revolutionary rhetoric; and the latter was in the process of transformation when it was destroyed. Weinstein believes I fail to understand the conservative nature of unionism, and the potentially revolutionary nature of a party with an autonomous world view. These distortions, he holds, are the basis of my "retention of the old cult of proletarianism," and my damnation of the Socialist Party.

But my point was not at all to glorify the I.W.W. Rather, I intended to demonstrate the critical failures of a Socialist Party from which we draw negative and positive lessons today. The Socialist Party of 1900-1919 is blameworthy not because it failed to organize the unskilled workers into unions, but because it failed to organize them at all. The problem of that movement was primarily not that it moved a little too slow to get to the unskilled, foreign-language world, but that it too often thought in a different mentality than them, a mentality characteristic of traditional American reformism and legalism. What should we make of the shift in the wartime Socialist Party from the rural areas to the city and from English-language to foreign speaking workers? In his reply to my review Weinstein states that the Socialist Party was catching up with the class struggle. But party growth came precisely in those foreign-language federations (like the Russian Federation) which, Weinstein held in his book, had little understanding of American reality. Weinstein comments that a united Socialist Party might have moved from parliamentarism to developing "its own form of parallel government structures" -- but in fact those who advanced theories other than traditional electoral politics were damned by the Socialist Party leaders as unrealistic. In short, there is little to indicate that the Socialist Party as constituted could have changed the basis of its initial strength: its members' belief in inevitable revolution through continual peaceful propaganda.

I share with Weinstein the belief that "revolutionary class consciousness. . .is more important in the initial stages of building a revolutionary party than the social composition of the party." My complaint is that altogether too often the Socialist Party did not build class-consciousness, but rather only a social consciousness of (to quote Weinstein) "socialism as an alternative order for the United States." This social consciousness was, I believe, a manifestation of middle-class idealism, an unworthy basis now as then for the construction of a revolutionary party.

My fear is not simply that people will misunderstand the radical tradition in America, but that in not heeding its lessons they will repeat the same errors again and again. Weinstein believes unionism is inherently conservative, but thinks electoral politics need not be so. It seems to me that, especially in the period we are now facing, electoral politics can have a far more deadening conservatism than, say, militant strike action. For the problem is clarifying our radical message in whatever acts we engage in. And today we face an American people who, in large numbers, display no particular interest in voting for a meaningless choice. Our task is not to make that electoral choice a little less meaningless and to provide new illusions about parliamentary power; rather, we must discover new means (or rediscover old means) of agitation within a framework of growing self-consciousness and mass initiative toward social revolution.

SOCIALIST PARTY
S.P.J.

The Wayward Intellectual

LEE LOWENFISH

Matthew Josephson, Infidel in the Temple: A Memoir of the Nineteen Thirties (New York: Knopf, 1967).

It is more than a generation since Franklin D. Roosevelt captured the Presidency of the United States. His New Deal program proved inadequate in meeting the social problems of America. But FDR's experimental zeal managed to attract an inordinately large number of intellectuals and social planners to Washington, especially during his first term. A legend has widely circulated about this period in American history, that it was "a red decade," a time when many men of good will unwarily engaged in "a flirtation with communism". It is no accident that the term "red decade" first appeared in 1941, after the New Deal reforms had been safely absorbed and another world war crusade was in the offing, no coincidence that Daniel Bell, the high priest of Cold War liberalism, dismissed the generation of the Thirties in his famous The End of Ideology as "intense, hortatory, naive, simplistic, and passionate, but, after the Moscow Trials and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, disenchanted and reflective."

Fortunately, many memoirs of actors and spectators in the 1930's are regularly being published now, which more than refute the official versions of history that Cold Warriors like to disseminate. Eric Goldman has tried to convince us that the first ten years of the Cold War were the "crucial decade". Not the least value of Matthew Josephson's new book Infidel in the Temple: A Memoir of the Nineteen Thirties is his implicit declaration that the Thirties were really the vital years of the recent past. While Josephson's politics never exceeded that of an angry bourgeois artist hopeful about Roosevelt's seemingly committed contrast to Hoover, his descriptions of his fellow writers and intellectuals in the 1930's are perceptive and important. They are summed up explicitly when Josephson declares, "American intellectuals were never busier or happier." By 1940, however, intellectuals not to mention other people despairingly awaited another war. "Specialists in violence," people Josephson identifies as "former corporation presidents in uniform", were firmly in political control. Unfortunately, Matthew Josephson hardly analyzes how and why this disastrous course of events occurred.

When the Great Depression struck, Matthew Josephson did not materially suffer. He had worked for long enough in the stock market during the mid-1920's to accumulate enough savings for his biographies and works of criticism. In fact, his stock market experience - the result of his father's contacts on Wall Street- moved him to write his famous study of the rise of big businessmen The Robber Barons (Harcourt, Brace, 1934). The depression did not depress him personally, but as the drifting under Hoover and the consequent breadlines increased he grew more and more angry. He speculated about possible reforms with his neighbors in Connecticut farm country, Charles and Mary Beard. The stimulating Sunday afternoon luncheon-discussions with the Beards and famous world figures are fondly recalled by Josephson. By 1932, it was a time when not only political intellectuals like Beard were growing restive, but literary people too began to protest. Josephson compared himself to Zola who "had felt himself overcome with anger every morning when he read his newspaper."

THE C.P.

Josephson served as the independent literary radical on the committee which the Communist Party created in 1932 to draft its manifesto for the election campaign, "Culture and Crisis". In perhaps the most useful chapter in Infidel, "Commitments," Josephson recalls how the Party insisted on inserting such phrases as "struggling masses" and "revolutionary proletarians" into the manifesto. But the tone of the attack remained more Veblenian than Marxist or Leninist. The wastefulness of the capitalist machinery and the need for radical experts to capture and transform it were stressed. Even more revealing about the nature of literary radicalism in 1932 is Josephson's stress on the novelty of so much of the protest. As one of his friends put it, "For many of those writers, who were by temperament highly egotistical, it was practically the first time they ever thought about anyone but themselves." Some normally bookish people were so moved by guilt for their previous inaction that they consented to some previously unimagined activities in the name of the revolution. One friend of Josephson regularly arose at dawn to leaflet a nearby factory, "a dreary, fatiguing routine, yet one that he mentioned with a smile radiant as if he were an Early Christian."

Josephson did not commit himself to the class struggle in any activist, or for that matter, intellectual form. His signing of the manifesto in 1932 was to mark the high point of his radical activity, like that of so many of the fifty-one writers who signed it. Perhaps the most notable example is Edmund Wilson, whom Josephson remembers in 1932 as occasionally sounding like Marat and as agreeing with the then militant Sidney Hook that civil liberties were exclusively a bourgeois privilege. Why men like Wilson and Josephson so quickly de-activated themselves is a fascinating question that neither Infidel nor Wilson's invaluable journalism of the time (most notably, The American Earthquake) explores. Josephson expresses a warmer admiration for the New Dealers than Wilson ever did, but since both looked deeply into a culture for their insights, we must look beyond mere domestic amelioration for the reasons for their declining radicalism.

A large clue comes in the reactions to foreign travel. It is no coincidence that in 1933 and 1935, respectively Matthew Josephson and Edmund Wilson spent considerable time in the Soviet Union. While neither went with overwhelmingly sentimental biases, Wilson has noted in his much neglected Travels In Two Democracies (Harcourt Brace, 1935) that only the experience of seeing Russia could fully dispel the notion that the Soviet Union was "the United States plus one's ideal of socialism". Josephson records very subtly his first-hand disillusionment with the results of the Russian Revolution. Never did Josephson resort to a blind anti-Stalinism as a long list of ex-radicals like Sidney Hook. He saw "a picture of violent contrasts" which Russia during the Five-Year Plans surely presented. But as an artist, Josephson could not forget the fate of the creative man. Josephson left Russia with more respect for what Max Eastman was branding in the mid-1930s as "artists in uniform". But he does note Eisenstein's defense of the artist's allegiance to the state, which like many things in these memoirs goes tantalizingly uninterpreted. For Eisenstein felt his situation "parallel to that of the early Italian artists who were obliged to paint New Testament subjects, crucifixion scenes, or portraits of the Virgin Mary, over and over again as propaganda for the church, yet performed their tasks with effects of infinite beauty and variety."

ANTI-FASCISM

En route home, Josephson stopped off in Western Europe and was shocked by the indifference to the rise of fascism. Whereas Russia was observed to be almost free of widespread poverty - a nearly universal impression of American travelers - the contrasts of life could be seen in the "West", from Poland to France. Josephson found few souls to communicate with, and Marinetti was now glorifying Fascist Italy with such rhetoric as "War is beautiful because it creates new architectures, such as the heavy tank... the airplane, the spiral smoke of burning villages, the passion-orchids of machine-gun fire." Anti-Fascism became the basic article faith of Josephson's politics, but it is not a revolutionary commitment. I would suggest that the mild disillusionment that socialism didn't really work so well in Russia had its effect in keeping intelligent men like Josephson from a fundamental radical commitment at home. It certainly can explain the rather routine reactions of Josephson to the New Deal at home and the standard denunciation of Huey Long's native fascism which comprise the uninspired sections of Infidel following his return from Europe. Only with the last two chapters did this reviewer's interest revive. Again it is less the deep insight that Josephson offers than the suggestiveness of his points and how they can be used to formulate a useful radical critique of the American drift into world war again.

Unlike Daniel Bell's neat formulation, Josephson and many others did not become "reflective and disenchanted" after the Moscow Trials of 1935-37. If anything, American intellectual life became more virulent as the New Deal began to wane and the depression of 1937 dictated a militarization of the economy as the only way to prevent recurrent recession. Josephson very rightly sees the late 1930's as the beginning of the dominance of the military-industrial complex in American life. He sees Roosevelt as vainly but gallantly trying to maintain progressive reforms by attempting to purge the conservative opposition within his party in 1938. He does not explain, however, what he openly admits: that by this time, many of the New Deal corporate regulators had returned to work in the very corporations they had once sought to control. Josephson's description of the new men in Washington betrays both his concern but also his growing tiredness. They were "excellent fellows ... but in range of ideas and understanding of human and political relationships they seemed to me far beneath the former leaders of the New Deal."

It is perhaps a tribute to Josephson's charm that he at least kept this reviewer reading despite that shallow description of some of the early Dr. Strangeloves in our history (although he did wait until the end to make that amazing statement). What is important about his concluding chapters are the keen observations about how the controversy about isolation or intervention in the European war was effecting some of his fellow intellectuals. Josephson himself had favored intervention for the Spanish Loyalists in 1936. But he could not decide the merits of another world war, especially since he was monumentally unimpressed by the moral weight of the British Empire. His long-time friend Lewis Mumford had made up his mind, as had Waldo Frank and Archibald MacLeish, to enlist others who actively espoused intervention by 1938. But Mumford's call for rearmament and the prohibition of cosmetics in the interests of both efficiency and morality struck Josephson as ludicrous. MacLeish's call for poets to write war songs also disturbed him, especially since the mercurial patrician aesthete had only a few years before seemingly unfurled the revolutionary banner. In perhaps as graphic a symbol Josephson's "billiant" decade could produce, he drafted a letter to his friend Mumford, criticizing his means of attacking the fascist menace. "I feel you have taken the method and spirit of the enemy." But he never mailed it, perhaps out of fear of lost friendship but more likely because Josephson did not have the faith that America could exist as 'an island in a totalitarian sea'.

Did the Liberals Go Left?

PAUL BUHLE

Think Back On Us: a Contemporary Chronicle of the 1930's by Malcolm Cowley. Edited by Henry Dan Piper
Carbondale (Ill.): Southern Illinois University Press, 1966.

At a time when few if any genuinely good full-length studies exist on the Left in the 1930's, and memoirs like Matthew Josephson's have only begun to appear, collections of contemporary writings assume a fundamental importance in providing raw material for reevaluations. One such collection, Cowley's Think Back On Us, offers invaluable insights into one aspect of 1930's radicalism, almost entirely through the medium of book reviews (which Cowley acknowledged were not a "major form" of art but "nevertheless. . . my form) published originally in the New Republic.

Malcolm Cowley was one of the most significant liberal intellectuals who came close to Popular Front "causes" in the Red Decade. Cowley had no pretentions of being a proletarianized revolutionist; he candidly told the first American Writers' Congress in 1935 that "I might be described as a highly class-conscious petty-bourgeois critic" who believed that "the interests of my class lie in close alliance with the proletariat." The chronological placement of his essays makes his evolution in the decade clear. In 1936 he called Lenin "the archetype of the modern hero." In 1940 he accused Lenin's successors of "errors far worse than those they condemned in Kautsky or Plekhanov." Or again, in 1934 Cowley called H. G. Wells "like a survivor of a prehistoric time, a warm, ponderous, innocent creature ill adapted to the Ice Age in which we live"; in 1940 he likened Mike Gold, Norman Thomas, Henry Ford, Oswald Garrison Villard, Robert Taft and General Leonard Wood to archaic "sauriens" who "at the beginning of a colder and dryer age. . .lost their power of adaptation" and now existed only as part of a Lost World of old-time capitalists, liberals and communists.

But Cowley's evolution is not important for him alone. As he notes in an epilogue, perhaps his story "might stand for many others." It is the story of a generation of left-liberals, somehow alike but also very different from those of our time. As Cowley noted in a 1933 criticism of Trotsky, it was not the promise of the permanent revolution that brought liberals into the leftist camp but rather "the influence on the middle classes of the Russian experiment, the success of 'socialism in one country.'" The liberals were angered not so much by the class structure as by the continuing "spirit of pioneering individualism" in America which "butchered the timber north and south...killed off the game, wasted the coal, crippled the men who mined it, poisoned the streams, exhausted and eroded the rich farmland" and "ended by laying our country waste." Abroad, they were symbolized by Cowley who tried to adopt a Spanish war-orphan; their proof of American inhumanity was the stupid and vicious prevention of that adoption. And their ideal in art was not so much a revolutionary art as a truthful one. Therefore it seems natural that when the Soviet experiment was deemed a failure, when America seemed engaged in social planning brought about by a crusade against fascism, when novelists by the score turned away from Communism, so would the vast bulk of liberals.

This is not to say that the evolution on the part of Cowley and others was simple or even fully conscious. Discovering the real nature of the process and refining its meaning and lessons for today will be a most difficult task. But books like Cowley's collection make available the rudiments of the problem to those who would not ordinarily look through primary materials and thus create the possibility that the necessary learning will develop not only among a coterie of Movement "intellectuals" but rather among all those radical activists willing to utilize some of their spare time by reading.

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of the Left can only, we feel, be realized with a growing circulation. Unfortunately our advertising and production costs continue to rise, and especially in the early stages we must rely upon the generosity of our readers to see us through. We hope to raise the circulation of our March-April issue to 2,500. a first step toward 5,000. But we cannot do so without your help. Readers anxious to aid us but unable to contribute money can help by soliciting subscriptions, for which purpose a cover letter and sample copies will be provided.

The illustrations in this issue appear courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison. Sketches in the last issue were contributed by Nick Torkleson.

Our Contributors

HAMISH SINCLAIR was a founder and director of the Committee For Miners. His article was written in the Fall of 1965 and circulated privately, but never before published.
PETER WILEY, on the field staff of CFM, is leaving graduate work to establish a bi-weekly socialist newspaper of national scope in San Francisco next Fall. MARK D. NAISON, a graduate student at Columbia University, has just become an Associate of Radical America. JAMES WEINSTEIN's new book, on the nature of corporate liberalism, will appear this Spring from Beacon Press. PAUL BUHLE and LEE LOWENFISH are graduate students at the University of Wisconsin.