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The New Left, 1965-67

James P. O'Brien

This is the second part of what has now become a three-part essay, with bibliography, on the American New Left. The first segment appeared in the May-June issue and it dealt with the period from the early civil rights sit-ins of 1960 to the beginning of large-scale Vietnam war protests in 1965. It was during this earlier period, in my opinion, that various strains of political activism and cultural independence came together to form what could genuinely be called a New Left. As for the two years which followed that early period, there is much less justification for treating them as a coherent unit. Space limitations are the only reason that the present installment stops in the spring of 1967 instead of continuing to the present.

The bibliographical notes, incidentally, are nothing more than that. I have placed them as footnotes solely for convenience, and they do not--as scholarly footnotes ought to do--provide full backing for statements made in the article itself. The article is based in large part on conversations with friends and on my own observations. The materials cited are ones which seem to me to convey a good sense of particular aspects of the New Left.

SDS AND SNCC

By the fall of 1965, the two organizations which more than any others have defined the New Left --Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee--had undergone marked changes which did a great deal to shape their subsequent histories. For SDS, the Johnson administration's decision to begin systematic bombing of

North Vietnam in February, 1965, was extremely important. Previous to this step-up in the war, Vietnam protests in the U.S. had been few and had attracted little interest. When, in December 1964, the SDS national council had scheduled a protest march in Washington for April, no one had anticipated a large turnout. Yet more than 15,000 people came, most of them students. The march gave a tremendous boost to anti-war sentiment, and at the same time it made SDS widely known for the first time. The number of SDS chapters grew from around 35 to over a hundred within three months, and membership multiplied to several thousand. At the same time, SDS' Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) voted in the spring of 1965 to disband itself as a nationally coordinated program; the national ERAP office in Ann Arbor was closed down, and director Rennie Davis went to work in the JOIN project in Chicago. This did not mean a retrenchment of the community organizing program, since the early death of a few ERAP projects was more than overbalanced by the burgeoning of JOIN and by the initiation of new projects in San Francisco, Oakland, and elsewhere. Nearly two hundred summer volunteers worked in the various projects in 1965. But the tendency in the most successful projects, such as those in Cleveland and Newark, was for the ERAP organizers to encourage indigenous leadership among the poor people themselves. The role of SDS in furnishing national coordination and leadership to the projects was correspondingly diminished.* Thus, although a welfare mother from Cleveland was among the speakers at the SDS Vietnam march, and although SDS president Paul Potter stressed in his speech that grass-roots organizing was the key to changing the system that produced Vietnam,** SDS

* Right now the best history of ERAP is by Richard Rothstein, "ERAP: Evolution of the Organizers," Radical America, March-April 1968. Todd Gitlin, an important leader of the New Left who worked with JOIN in Chicago and now writes for the San-Francisco Express-Times, is writing a book about community organizing efforts among the poor.

** Potter's speech, a very important statement of SDS thinking on the war, was later printed as a pamphlet and widely distributed by SDS.

was already coming to be characterized more by its anti-war stand than by its community organizing activities. It may be significant that Potter, who worked in the Cleveland project, was succeeded as SDS president in June by Carl Oglesby, one of the originators of the teach-in movement and best known as an eloquent speaker and writer against the war.*

SNCC, at this time, was also in a period of reorientation. Escalation in Vietnam had less immediate impact on SNCC than on SDS, partly because there were far more pressing issues in the South and partly because SNCC workers by 1965 had already become highly skeptical about the Democratic administration. SNCC co-sponsored the April 17 Vietnam protest, but during 1965 its skepticism was exacerbated more by its own direct experiences than by concern over the war. The Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), formed early in the year by persons close to SNCC, ran an imaginative Head Start program but had to fight for its life against a War on Poverty bureaucracy fearful of offending Mississippi politicians.** More important was the fate of the Mississippi Challenge, in which the SNCC-originated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party had hoped to unseat the state's congressional delegation. The challenge ran into quiet opposition from the White House as well as from the congressional leadership, and after nine months the MFDP was able to secure only 140-odd votes,

* See especially his The Vietnam War: World Revolution and American Containment, printed by SDS in April 1965, as well as his speech in November of that year, cited below.

**See Andrew Kopkind, "Bureaucracy's Long Arm: Too Heady a Start in Mississippi?", New Republic, August 21, 1965. For subsequent reports on the trials of CDGM, see Gerald Rosenfield's three-part article in The Movement, "What Happened to the Mississippi Child Development Group," March, April, and June 1966, and Pat Watters, "Mississippi: Children and Politics," Dissent, May-June 1967.

far short of a majority.* SNCC's impatience and unwillingness to work in harmony with the Johnson administration began to worry many liberals, and its image as one of the five "respectable" civil rights groups (along with the NAACP, Urban League, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and CORE) began to be eroded.**

This was also a time when the role of whites in the civil rights movement began to be reevaluated within SNCC. The experience of the Mississippi Summer project in 1964, when most of the summer volunteers went back to the comparative safety of the North after the summer was over, had created some resentment. No program on that scale was planned for 1965, though volunteers were welcomed in the SNCC projects (which operated at that time in Arkansas, southwest Georgia, and the Alabama black belt, as well as Mississippi).*** The summer of 1965 also saw the large-scale rioting in Watts, Los Angeles, in which over thirty Negroes were killed by police and national guardsmen. For many militants Watts must have seemed like the death knell of the nonviolent civil rights movement. Los Angeles already had all the civil rights laws which anyone had asked from the federal government, but black residents had still thought it necessary to rise up against the racism and poverty in which they lived.****

* There is an excellent article with a long title beginning "The MFDP Challenge..." in The Movement, July 1965. Andrew Kopkind, "Seat Belts for Mississippi's Five," New Republic, July 24, 1965, is also a good summary.

** The sorrow with which liberals viewed developments among young civil rights activists is ably expressed in Pat Watters, "Encounter with the Future," New South, May 1965.

*** See Elizabeth Sutherland, Mississippi: Summer of... Discontent, Nation, October 11, 1965, as well as numerous articles in The Movement for 1965. Over the last four years The Movement, published monthly in California, has been the best single source of information and commentary from the New Left.

**** For a sympathetic account of Watts by a SNCC worker (continued on page 5)

Outside of SDS and SNCC, there was a scattering of other New Left groups active in 1965. The Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC) was close to both SNCC and SDS. Founded in 1964, it worked mainly among southern white students. The Northern Student Movement continued small-scale organizing activities in northern cities, often in cooperation with SDS. The W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America, founded in California and under strong Communist party influence without being a classic "front group," attracted some following but did not seriously rival SDS anywhere but on the West Coast. Much less of a New Left group in orientation, but more important than the DuBois Clubs, was the Trotskyist-oriented Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). The YSA worked within local anti-war committees and campaigned to have the anti-war movement as a whole adopt a position favoring outright American withdrawal from Vietnam rather than negotiations. The May 2nd Movement, though largely controlled by the Maoist Progressive Labor Party, exercised an influence on the New Left that was out of proportion to its numbers, since it was the only group which put major stress on the Vietnam war as an example of a generalized American imperialism.*

****(continued from page 4) see Jimmy Garrett, "The Negro Revolt in LA--From the Inside," The Movement, September 1965.

*There has been little outside commentary on any of these groups, so that their own publications are the best sources of information on them. SSOC's New South Student has been consistently interesting, while May 2nd's Free Student published several issues of high quality--the paper kept up publication even after May 2nd itself had been dissolved. The Northern Student Movement put out Freedom North, YSA the Young Socialist, and the DuBois Clubs The Insurgent. Doug Jenness' well done pamphlet War and Revolution in Vietnam, printed in 1965, gives the YSA perspective on the war. (Continued on page 6.)

One of the most surprising aspects of the New Left as it stood in mid-1965 was that very little had been done in the way of building on the experience of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley. The FSM in late 1964 had laid bare the relationship of the modern American university to maintenance of discrimination and privilege in society. It had also brought out into the open the disgust which increasing numbers of students felt at the impersonal and purposeless routine of academic life. Moreover, during the 1964-65 school year the campuses had been shaken by numerous teach-ins and demonstrations against the war, as well as by protests centered around such issues as social regulations or the firing of popular teachers or student suspensions. Yet there was almost no organized response on the part of New Left groups. SNCC was off campus entirely at that point, except for fund raising and recruiting; SDS organized new chapters and distributed its Port Huron Statement but provided little in the way of organizational direction. A handful of free universities were established, some under impetus from SDS, but none really caught on. The Free University of New York, the biggest, was established

*(Continued from page 5).

Writers such as Jack Newfield, in A Prophetic Minority, and Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, in The New Radicals, have been quick to dismiss the DuBois Clubs, YSA, and May 2nd as being simply hereditary remnants of the Old Left. I am reluctant to do this. Granted that the rhetoric and style of these groups may in varying degrees be foreign to New Leftists, it is still true that the DuBois Clubs provided an organizational vehicle for many New Left activists, and that the YSA and May 2nd have influenced the thinking of thousands of young radicals outside their own ranks. YSA's work in building up anti-war committees has been important. May 2nd played a vanguard role for the New Left in some ways, by raising issues such as imperialism, the draft, and university involvement with the military in advance of their being pushed by SDS.

in the summer of 1965 and encouraged "passionate involvement, intellectual confrontation, and clash of ideas," but enrollment never got beyond a few hundred.* Nowhere on the Left was there a program for organizing students at regular universities around the quality of their education. By the fall of 1965 it was the war in Vietnam that was paramount.

NEW STAGE OF PROTESTS

Quaint though it may have been, the "Assembly of Unrepresented People" in early August of 1965 marked the beginning of the intensification of the anti-war Movement in the fall of that year. Led by Staughton Lynd, Liberation co-editor David Dellinger, and Robert Parris (who under the name of Robert Moses had headed the Mississippi Summer project), the August protest brought about two thousand demonstrators to Washington for the purpose of declaring peace with the people of Vietnam. More than 350 people were arrested for committing civil disobedience on the final day of the protest. Though supported by hardly any groups except the pacifist Committee for Non-Violent Action, the Washington action drew a wide variety of participants and had a strong effect on many of those involved in it. At one of the meetings held during the protest, attended mainly by non-pacifists, it was voted to establish a National Coordinating Committee to End the War, with headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin, and with the immediate goal of helping plan for anti-war demonstrations which SDS and the Vietnam Day Committee of Berkeley had called for October 15 and 16.

As it turned out, the mid-October protests, in which demonstrations of varying sizes were held in at least 93 cities throughout the country succeeded in bringing the anti-war movement

*A sympathetic treatment of the Free University of New York is Howard Junker, "The Free University: Academy for Mavericks," The Nation, August 16, 1965.

emphatically to the attention of the U.S. public.* It was the first real indication, since the Washington march and teach-ins the previous spring, that large numbers of people would refuse to be swept up into the war effort. Charges of "treason" were rife, SDS, which had already become cool to the idea of large demonstrations though its chapters provided most of the turnout at many of the local October 15-16 protests, soon found itself in the center of public attention. The SDS national council in September had voted for a national draft program, in which young men would be encouraged to apply for Conscientious Objector status in large numbers, in an effort to clog up the Selective Service System. Although this was to be submitted to a membership referendum (which ultimately defeated it) the press picked the story up in mid-October, and Attorney-General Nicholas Katzenbach announced he was having SDS investigated. This resulted in the second great spurt in SDS memberships, in which the number of chapters increased from around 100 to 180. This increase came without encouragement from the SDS national office, which was in a state of acute disorganization, and it primarily represented a show of solidarity among the student left. SDS's position was reaffirmed in November. The National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) had scheduled a Washington march for November 27, built around a series of approved slogans calling for "steps to peace" which specifically excluded American withdrawal. In order to prevent the march from having a disappointing turnout SANE was forced to allow SDS to issue a separate call, far more militant. Carl Oglesby's speech at this march, an eloquent attack on the liberal architects of American foreign policy,

*The October 23, 1965, National Guardian has several articles on the protests. There is a fine movie on the October anti-war march from Berkeley to Oakland. It is entitled "Sons and Daughters," and was written and directed by Jerry Stoll.

drew a standing ovation.*

The outcry against SDS' proposed anti-draft program (even the general board of the most liberal Protestant denomination, the United Church of Christ, denounced SDS' plan) showed clearly the sensitivity which was attached to the draft. When David Miller, a young Catholic pacifist, burned his draft card at the Whitehall Induction Station in New York, in violation of a law passed by Congress that summer, the clamor was equally great. Undoubtedly fear of legal repression was an important factor in the decisive vote which the SDS membership cast against the anti-draft program.

With more members than ever before, and with greater prestige within the anti-war movement than any other group, SDS was nevertheless in a state of confusion about its identity. Distrustful of large marches, which seemed chiefly to boost the morale of the already committed, and unwilling to confront the government directly on the draft issue, SDS was without a real program.** This, coupled with a breakdown in communication between the national office and the chapters during the crisis period of

* Oglesby's speech was printed in a number of liberal and radical journals, including Liberation, January 1966, and was also printed as an SDS pamphlet under the title Trapped in a System. See also Andrew Kopkind, "Radicals on the March," New Republic, Dec. 11, 1965.

**The closest thing to an "official" SDS program may have been a document which national secretary Paul Booth and former national secretary Lee Webb presented to an anti-war conference in November. Reprinted in Our Generation, May 1966, as "From Protest to Radical Politics," the paper argued that the anti-war movement had to build a broad social movement that would reach people on issues that affected them directly. This approach was nothing new to SDS.

late October and early November, lent greater urgency to a four-day membership conference scheduled for Christmas vacation at the University of Illinois. This meeting had been called at the request of Al Haber, who along with Tom Hayden and a handful of others had made SDS into a viable organization in 1961-62. It was hoped that the December Conference would help pull the organization together and enable it to discuss the basic issues involved in its organizing activities. Instead, the conference involved little more than a series of frustrating and sometimes acerbic discussions and a decision to replace the mimeographed monthly Bulletin with a printed weekly, New Left Notes.* It has been almost universally true of SDS national meetings, since the productive Pine Hill convention of 1963, that the only benefits have come from informal discussions outside the framework of the meeting itself. Be that as it may, SDS entered the new year, 1966, with no very clear idea of where it was going. The Progressive Labor Party's decision to dissolve the May 2nd Movement and send PL members into SDS could hardly have been much consolation.

BLACK POWER

In January 1966 SNCC took a further decisive step in its break with liberal respectability by denouncing the Vietnam war in terms that seemed to put it in the position of encouraging draft resistance. The statement, adopted at a SNCC conference in Atlanta, attacked the government for its hypocrisy in claiming to defend freedom in Vietnam. It went on to say that "We are in sympathy with, and support, the men in this country who are unwilling to respond to a military draft which would compel them to contribute

*See Todd Gitlin's perceptive "Notes on the Pathology of the N.C." in New Left Notes, February 4 and 11, 1966. Jonathan Eisen also had a critical article in The Activist, March 1966.

their lives to United States aggression in Vietnam in the name of the 'freedom' we find so false in this country."* Concrete response to this statement came within days, as the Georgia House of Representatives refused to seat Julian Bond, SNCC's communications director who had been elected to the House from a Negro district in Atlanta. Bond, excluded solely on the basis of the SNCC anti-war statement, appealed his case and eventually won a 9-0 verdict from the Supreme Court,** that the legislature had violated his freedom of speech.

At the same time, discussions were taking place within SNCC which led to its emergence in the summer of 1966 as a "Black Power" organization. At a conference in the spring, after long deliberation, Stokely Carmichael was elected SNCC chairman to replace John Lewis. Part of the issue was that Lewis insisted that he would attend a forthcoming White House Conference on racial problems, against the wishes of other SNCC members, but a more basic issue was the question of the role of whites within the civil rights movement. Carmichael was closely associated with the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which he had helped to found and which was attempting to elect an all-black slate of office-holders in Alabama's most dangerous county. The Lowndes County group's symbol was the black panther. Lewis was much more favorable to the idea of alliances with liberal white groups in order to win a share of power in the South, while Carmichael considered the basic problem to be one of organizing black people, with alliances merely being a hindrance at that point. In addition, Lewis was wedded much more closely to the idea of nonviolence, even under provocation, and Carmichael's election was widely interpreted as a break from that tradition by SNCC.

It was on the "Meredith March" in June that the changes in SNCC became crystallized, and the split

*SNCC's statement is printed in The Movement, January 1966.

**See Herbert Shapiro, "Julian Bond: Georgia's 'Uppity' Legislator," The Nation, Feb. 7, 1966.

between SNCC and other civil rights groups came into the open. James Meredith, the Air Force veteran who had integrated the University of Mississippi in 1962, had now announced his intention to walk alone through Mississippi to help encourage the state's Negroes to stand up against oppression. When Meredith was gunned down and hospitalized on the second day of his march, other civil rights leaders hastened to Mississippi to resume the walk where Meredith had been forced to leave off. The march from that point was marked by frequent instances of tension between Carmichael and other SNCC leaders and Martin Luther King and other leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was on this march that SNCC first popularized the slogan of "Black Power," a slogan which was deliberately counterposed to the old rallying cry of "Freedom."

From that point on, Black Power became a bone of contention within liberal and radical circles, as Martin Luther King and other moderates criticized the new course taken by SNCC. Carmichael defined the concept differently at different times, often refusing to give it any definition; if this was not a deliberate effort to make the white press look foolish as it tried to interpret "Black Power," it nevertheless had that effect. SDS and the Southern Student Organizing Committee accepted SNCC's new course as a challenge to them to step up their organizing efforts among whites. In programmatic terms, SNCC was banking heavily on the success of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in the November elections.* In the urban areas of the North, where black consciousness had already gone beyond the old civil rights formulas, SNCC's new militancy had a certain appeal, but SNCC had no real organizational base.

*There are several articles worth reading on the development of the Black Power concept within SNCC in 1966. Of special interest are "Interview with the Alabama Black Panther Party Organizer," The Movement, February and March 1966; Stokely Carmichael, "What We Want," New York Review of Books, Sept. 22, 1966; Black Power (a position paper for the SNCC Atlanta (continued on page 13)

At the end of the summer, SNCC got a taste of what its new program and its new image could mean in making it vulnerable to police harrassment. It had already experienced plenty of this in the Deep South, but now had to face it as a fact of life everywhere. A miniature riot in the Vine City area of Atlanta was blamed on SNCC workers by the mayor of that city, while in Philadelphia the police charged three SNCC workers with possession of dynamite. SNCC was not driven out of Vine City, where it had a solidly established organizing program, but in Philadelphia the dynamite accusations -- though they were subsequently dropped -- were enough to squash the organization.*

SDS VS SSS

For SDS in early 1966, the most important thing that happened was the Selective Service System's decision to give special standardized exams to male college students to help determine eligibility for

(Continued from page 12)

Project, now available as a pamphlet from SSOC); Andrew Kopkind, "The Future of Black Power," New Republic, Jan. 7, 1967; and "Stokely Carmichael," an interview, The Movement, February 1967. Harold Jacobs' later analytical article, "SNCC and Black Power," International Socialist Journal, August 1967, is certainly worth reading. Ed Clark, "Black Panther's Power," Progressive Labor, Oct.-Nov. 1966, is an extensive article on the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. On the Meredith march, see Paul Good, "The Meredith March," New South, Summer 1966. Bayard Rustin gave the moderate Negro leaders' case against SNCC in "'Black Power' and Coalition Politics," Commentary, September 1966. For the response of the white New Left to SNCC's new course, see "SDS Statement on SNCC," New Left Notes, May 27, 1966; Ed Hamlett, "Black Consciousness," New Left Notes, May 27, 1966; and Mike Miller, "Is There a Change in SNCC?" The Movement, July and August 1966. The best book on Black Power is, unfortunately, in Italian: Roberto Giammanco's anthology Potere Negro.

*(Footnote on page 14).

the draft. The SDS national office drew up its own "Vietnam Exam" with multiple-choice questions about the war and American policy. On the first examination date, in early May, these were distributed to students at nearly 800 colleges. SDS had considered a call for a boycott of the Selective Service exams, but had turned this down on the realistic grounds that few students would be likely to jeopardize their 2-S deferments to vindicate a moral principle. A more popular issue was that of class ranking, by which universities furnished draft boards with information about the class standing of male students. The idea was that local boards would be able to pick off students in the bottom one-third or one-quarter of their class. Late in the spring there were sit-ins against class rank at Roosevelt, Chicago, Stanford, the University of Wisconsin and several other schools. This was the first time that the issue of the Vietnam war had been tied up with the universities, and at places like Wisconsin the sit-ins attracted a much greater variety of students than had taken part in demonstrations in the past.**

Otherwise, things were relatively quiet among the white New Left. A second wave of nationally coordinated local Vietnam protests in late March drew more participants than in October but created much less of a stir. Student activists in Berkeley were drawn in large numbers into the campaign of Ramparts managing editor Robert Scheer to win the Democratic nomination for Congress. Running on a strong anti-war platform against a liberal incumbent, Scheer got 45 per cent of the vote including a majority in the Oakland ghetto. The local SDS group did not support

*(Footnote from page 13)

See Paul Good, "A Tale of Two Cities," The Nation, Nov. 21, 1966; Patricia Watters, "SNCC in Trouble: A Report from Atlanta," Dissent, Nov.-Dec. 1966; and Bill Wingell, "SNCC in Philadelphia: The Cops Declare War," National Guardian, August 27, 1966.

**See particularly Jack Kittredge's report on the Wisconsin sit-in, New Left Notes, May 27, 1966.

the Scheer campaign, on the grounds that long-term organizing and educational efforts were being sacrificed to electoral success.* In Massachusetts, SDS members did take part in the independent senatorial campaign of Thomas Boylston Adams; the Adams campaign was more radical than was Adams himself. Other electoral campaigns which attracted the energies of New Left activists included one waged in Manhattan's 19th Congressional District, in which the Committee for Independent Political Action ran James Weinstein of Studies on the Left, and a scattering of others.** Of the old ERAP projects, JOIN and the Newark Community Union Project (NCUP) continued to be quite active, while in Cleveland and to a lesser extent Boston former ERAP workers continued to play important organizing roles in the poor communities. One new program was initiated in the summer of 1966, the Minneapolis Community Union Project.***

The SDS national convention, held in late August at a religious camp near Clear Lake, Iowa, was the largest that had so far been held, and it was

* See Andrew Kopkind, "Anti-Vietnam Politics," New Republic, June 4, 1966, and Buddy Stein and David Wellman, "The Scheer Campaign," Studies on the Left, Jan.-Feb. 1967. The Stein-Wellman article, now available from the Radical Education Project, has been very influential in warning of the dangers in electoral politics.

** CIPA published an excellent biweekly newspaper in connection with Weinstein's campaign, entitled simply 19. It folded right after the November election, but in its five or so issues it achieved some of the best radical reportage and analysis, geared to a general community readership, that the Left has come up with in the '60s.

***See Mike James, "ERAP Report: JOIN," New Left Notes, August 24, 1966; "Cleveland to Build Democracy," NLN, April 24, 1966; "M-CUP," NLN, October 1, 1966.

certainly one of the most important. Coming after a summer in which SNCC had called on the black community to organize itself, and in which the proportion of SDS members engaged in community organizing among the poor was much smaller than a year earlier, the convention had to confront the fact that ERAP-type organizing no longer defined SDS. At the same time, the mood within SDS was hostile to large anti-war demonstrations and also, generally speaking, to anti-war electoral politics. What emerged at Clear Lake was a "return to the campus" as the focus for organizing. This turn had been presaged by the Vietnam exams and class-rank sit-ins the previous spring, but the national office under Paul Booth had been attracted to the idea of "new politics" campaigns such as Scheer's. At Clear Lake the most influential position paper was one authored by Carl Davidson, campus traveler in the Great Plains region, entitled "Student Syndicalism, or University Reform Revisited." Davidson, who was elected vice-president of SDS largely on the strength of this paper, argued in it that SDS chapters should initiate campus-wide movements to gain what later came to be called "student power." He held that society was dependent on a constant supply of pliable manpower in order to carry on activities like the Vietnam war, and that in loco parentis regulations were an important factor in enabling universities to turn out graduates who could fit uncritically into the system. Therefore, a fight for power within the university, in which students would demand the abolition of grades and of interference with their extracurricular lives, could be an important means of changing society. Davidson's paper was an important attempt to apply to a university environment the SDS-SNCC concept that people should have a meaningful voice in the "decisions that affect their lives," which had mainly been developed in organizing among the poor. There was recognition that the draft would be an important issue during the ensuing school year (hence, in part, Davidson's stress on abolishing grades, which would eliminate the basis for class rank) but the basic issue was held to be power within the university. SDS was not, at this stage, ready to go ahead with even the relatively mild

anti-draft program which it had turned down in the fall of 1965.*

What happened in late 1966, in a sense, was that the war sneaked up again on SDS. Although unsuccessful attempts were made at Penn State, Wisconsin, and elsewhere to put the ideas of "Student Syndicalism" into effect on a campus-wide basis, and although most SDS chapters probably were involved in one form or another of "student power" agitation, this did not become the main thrust of SDS as an organization. Instead, draft resistance -- in a much more radical form than previously contemplated -- became dominant. A secondary theme was a growing number of actions taken by SDS chapters to protest or disrupt campus appearances by representatives of the military or of war contractors. Thus, although SDS furnished some of the basic ideas behind the "student power" fight, as well as much of its campus leadership, SDS as an organization did not serve as any kind of national coordinating body in this respect.

DRAFT RESISTANCE

Draft resistance prior to the winter of 1966-67 had been almost entirely an individual matter. The stress had been on individual gestures of opposition to the war, and except for the abortive SDS program in the fall of 1965 there was no strategy for using anti-draft activity either to stop the war or to bring about basic changes in society. The May 2nd Movement as early as 1964 had circulated statements of refusal to fight in Vietnam, and had gotten

*Davidson's paper is printed in New Left Notes, Sept. 9, 1966. For a report on the Clear Lake Convention, see Jack A. Smith, "SDS Heads Back to the Grassroots," National Guardian, Sept. 17, 1966. Incidentally, Paul Booth's "National Secretary's Report" in New Left Notes, June 17, 1966, gives a good picture of where SDS stood in the summer of 1966.



signatures from over a thousand draft-age men. In the spring of 1965 a number of veteran leaders of the peace movement, including Bayard Rustin, had signed an advertisement in Liberation calling on men who were opposed to the war on grounds of conscience to refuse induction. Neither of these attracted much attention. A flurry of draft-card burnings in the summer of 1965 had led Congress to pass a law against this practice, and in the fall of that year David Miller and then a handful of others had defied the law by burning their draft cards. David Mitchell, a young New Yorker, refused induction in 1965 and then appealed his conviction on the grounds that the Vietnam war was illegal under the terms of the Nuremburg trials. Though Mitchell got short shrift from the federal courts, he used the publicity from his case to stir up opposition to the war and the draft. A group centered around him published a bulletin, Downdraft, which had news of

anti-draft activities as well as of Mitchell's own case. In the summer of 1966 three young soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas, refused orders for duty in Vietnam. The three -- James Johnson, Dennis Mora, and David Samas -- received considerable publicity within the anti-war movement as the "Fort Hood Three." By the end of 1966 there had been isolated instances of other soldiers refusing to go to Vietnam, as well as a growing number of court cases of men who refused to submit to induction. All the time, the number of American troops fighting in Vietnam continued to swell, despite optimistic reports by administration and military officials about the progress of the fighting. By the late fall of 1966 there were 350,000 American troops already in Vietnam, and monthly draft calls were running at about 40,000 per month.

In December 1966 the SDS national council, after nineteen hours of debate on a draft resolution, passed by 53-10-3 a radical version of it. The wording of the resolution was important, both because of the program it called for and the grounds it gave for opposition to the draft. It attacked the Vietnam war as being directed against the "Vietnamese people in their struggle for self-determination," and it went on to argue "that conscription in any form is coercive and anti-democratic, and that it is used by the United States Government to oppress people in the United States and around the world." It announced SDS' opposition to all attempts to reform the draft, such as by a lottery, since none of the proposed reforms would change the basic nature or purpose of the draft. It urged formation of anti-draft unions, composed of people pledged to resist conscription, with a program aimed at reaching out to the community as a whole. The resolution also pledged national SDS to assist all efforts to organize within the armed forces, but this was outside the main drift of the document as a whole.*

*Not much has been written about draft resistance efforts prior to 1967. "Make Love, Not War: The (Continued on page 20)

Although a few campus anti-draft groups had gotten started before the SDS program was adopted, such as a group of 32 who signed a "We Won't Go" statement at the University of Chicago, it was SDS which gave the resistance movement its greatest impetus. Jeff Segal, Dee Jacobson, and others from the SDS national office worked closely with local anti-draft groups, which picketed and leafletted at induction centers, offered draft counseling for local youths, and had members speaking wherever they could find an audience on "Why I Won't Go." At this time there was great uncertainty as to whether the federal government would prosecute people who signed "We Won't Go" statements or who urged others not to cooperate with the draft. There was an atmosphere of risk and determination in the anti-draft unions, as well as a hope that the war might be forced to a halt by the refusal of a sufficiently large number of men to submit to induction.** At the same time, SDS organizers

(Continued from page 19)

Campaign Against the Draft," in Liberation, December 1967, is worth reading, as are several articles in the National Guardian: Jack A. Smith, "Support Mounts for GI's Refusing to Fight in Vietnam," July 9; William A. Price, "Resist-Draft Cases Soar," August 20; Jack A. Smith, "War Foes Move Toward Confrontation on Draft," Nov. 5; and William A. Price, "Negroes Resist Fighting a 'White Man's War,'" Nov. 5. Bernard Weinraub wrote a warm account of one draft refuser in "Four Ways to Go: Tommy Rodd Went to Jail," Esquire, September 1966. Staughton Lynd's article "A Time for Compassionate Solidarity," National Guardian, August 6, 1966, was an important plea for the initiation of a draft resistance movement.

The SDS resolution is printed in New Left Notes, January 13, 1967. National Secretary Greg Calvert has an article in the same issue, "From Protest to Resistance," which expresses the romantic way in which many in SDS saw the new program.

**See "The Wisconsin Draft Resistance Union," an interview with Jody Chandler, in Connections, March 25, 1968, and the special issue of New Left Notes on Draft Resistance, March 27, 1967, especially the article on Cornell: "We Won't Go: A Case Study."

constantly pointed out the relation of the draft to the structure of society, and quoted the Selective Service System as boasting that the draft was a means of thrusting people into deferable jobs which were in the "national interest."*

The first sign that there was a divergence of viewpoints within the draft resistance movement came in April in connection with the "Spring Mobilization" against the war. The Mobilization itself had been viewed with a great deal of skepticism by SDS -- it was the largest of all the large Vietnam demonstrations, with more than 200,000 marching in New York and 65,000 in San Francisco -- but the national council meeting in early April had reluctantly endorsed it. The Cornell SDS group, which at that time was running the most extensive draft-resistance program in the country, put out a call for five hundred men to burn their draft cards at the New York march. The proposal ran into a great deal of opposition from other anti-draft groups, on the grounds that draft card burning was a symbolic gesture which was of no practical aid in day-to-day organizing, and that there was no point in confronting the law unnecessarily. This criticism expressed a viewpoint which was to become general within SDS. Although it received only a small response to its call, the Cornell group decided to go ahead with its plans, and something like 150 men burned their draft cards on the Sheep Meadow in Central Park on April 15. At the time, together with the large turnouts for the New York and San Francisco protests, the mass card burning probably was important in making the anti-war movement visible once again to the public.

Whereas the draft resistance movement was in large part nurtured by the national SDS leadership, another form of campus resistance to the war grew up with scarcely any national coordination at all. Beginning at Berkeley in December and continuing through the spring of 1967, there was a series of confrontations between students and recruiters for the armed services, the CIA, and the Dow Chemical

*See Peter Henig's excellent article, "On the Manpower Channelers," New Left Notes, January 20, 1967.

Company, makers of napalm. At Berkeley, students attempted to set up an anti-draft table next to a Navy recruiting table in the student union building. After police were called in and nine arrests made, over 10,000 students rallied and formulated demands for a strike, which went on for five days. Shortly before, Harvard SDS members had surrounded the car of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and forced him to engage in a hectic question-and-answer session, during which McNamara boasted that at their age he had been a lot tougher. Dow Chemical recruiters were confronted by students at a number of campuses during the winter and spring, beginning at Brown University in January. There were major sit-ins against Dow at the University of Wisconsin and at several California schools. Although Todd Gitlin wrote an article in New Left Notes in March calling for a national SDS program of severing universities' ties with the military, and although many of the local confrontations were reported in New Left Notes, they got little national publicity and were far from being part of any SDS strategy. They did, however, show anti-war sentiment on the campuses was stronger and more militant than before, and that issues which linked the universities to the war were capable of arousing a wide response.*

*On the Berkeley strike see James Petras, "The Politics of Bureaucracy," Liberation, Feb. 1967, and Jeff Lustig, "Berkeley Student Strike," The Movement, Jan. 1967. See also Robert M. Greenstein, "The McNamara Incident at Harvard," Dissent, March-April 1967; John Fuerst, "Columbia: How It Happened," New Left Notes, May 1, 1967; Todd Gitlin, "Resistance and the Movement," New Left Notes, Mar. 20, 1967.

My forgiveness is as big as any steel
 monolith--I'll kill you with forgiveness
 steel monolith

I am Chicago's last Abe Lincoln
 Sucking in the city thru my hollow eyes
 and forgiving it many times over for
 its crimes against Carl Sandburg and
 other children of delusion/
 At nights I can be seen hanging over bridges
 shouting down Subway tunnels,
 looking up the legs of statues
 giving cigarettes and nickels to panhandlers,
 laughing, weeping with the deaf queens of the
 bowery / all the time **forgiving**
 allatime forgiving
 forgiving the poor assassinated spirits
 with death in their eyes /
 forgiving the monolithic mountains of stone
 and steel / they are only monolithic mountains
 of stone and steel,
 but they still scare shit out of me /
 I forgive them though
 like Abe Lincoln might have done
 had he lived to see this blundering nightmare
 of bargainbasementbigness
 had he lived to puke into the Chicago River

*If you close your eyes at night you can hear
 the stars shuddering at all this bigness*

t. l. kryss
 Chicago, 1967



themselves to be transformed into the Samboes that whites imagined or wanted them to be obviously has great bearing on the black liberation movement today.

In a larger sense, however, Rawick's analysis of slave resistance, African cultural survivals, and the abolitionist movement is so inadequate and so unsound that he must be directly challenged. Though we disagree with him at many points, we will consider only two -- culture and the Underground Railroad.

In the first place, no serious student now doubts that enough African culture survived to prevent total deculturalization, nor that substantial numbers of slaves resisted their enslavement. Elkins has repeatedly been proven wrong on this point for the last decade, and Rawick seems only to be flailing away at an already dying cause.* The important question is how such resistance proceeded and how such culture endured. Though people choose their own forms of struggle, as C.L.R. James says, the historian's task is not only to describe these forms, but also to interpret whether they could be effective in the context of the time. Some modes of resistance and culture are reformist, leading only to more oppression; others are revolutionary, helping to overthrow the system. The distinction between these modes must always be made, and the most effective and politically conscious forms of struggle should be analyzed. To understand the "real historical roots of black power," the true revolutionary heroes should be identified, and the ineffectual ones exposed. In short, what was the potential for revolutionary transformation in those forms of self-activity which the slaves themselves chose, and could such activity lead to slave revolution?

Concerning slave culture, Rawick himself -- though he does not realize it -- provides the true key to understanding this problem. When he mentions that "one can never remove culture, although one can transform it," Rawick hints at the framework within which slaves had to operate. Slave culture was certainly African in its origins and traditions, but once transplanted to the South it became something

uniquely American and at the same time uniquely black -- an Afro-American product. Slave culture was not wholly imposed by whites, nor was it purely African. In order to survive it had to adapt to the conditions imposed upon it by the dominant white culture. LeRoi Jones' Blues People provides a good analysis of this process.

Moreover, the Br'er Rabbit stories mentioned by Rawick are excellent examples of this process of transformation. These stories, which originated in Africa, always concern a weak but clever creature who survives by outwitting his powerful animal neighbors -- a perfect analogy to life under slavery. Conspicuously absent from these tales, however, are those African stories in which strength and courage are the virtues of the warriors, or the pythons, crocodiles, and lions, which exist in the African context. The cultural forms tending to survive in the United States did not convey an image of power or merit, which might have allowed slaves to overcome their oppression. Rather, the stories that did survive conveyed the image of the slaves only as they could exist under bondage. Indeed, such culture seems defensive and adaptive when compared to the feeling of superiority found in those Haitians who swore, according to one song, "to destroy the whites and all that they possess; let us die rather than fail to keep this vow."

Concerning slave resistance, Rawick's explanation of why large-scale rebellions failed is much too simple. That "slaves in North America were in every respect far outnumbered by whites, who in any area could successfully hold off an attack until help came from elsewhere," to quote Rawick's ambiguous formulation, does not do justice to the objective reality. Slaves comprised fully one-third of the southern population, and in the plantation Black Belt they formed an overwhelming majority. In the South Carolina low-country -- to give but one example of conditions which obtained elsewhere -- slaves constituted the vast majority of most districts. Even in urban Charleston, blacks greatly outnumbered whites through the first half of the

nineteenth century. That an oppressed group has rarely had such an excellent potential base for revolutionary activity was surely indicated by Denmark Vesey's conspiracy in 1822, by John Brown's plans for guerrilla warfare in 1859, and by those slaves who actually seized their sea-island plantations during the Civil War. Unlike Rawick's, an adequate account of why large-scale rebellions failed would have to include such realities as the brutal and subtle mechanisms of white control as well as the problem of unifying the "black community."**

Related to this, Rawick's view of the abolitionist movement and the black's role in it is woefully lacking in analysis. There were in fact several distinct anti-slavery efforts, each of which was supported by blacks. One of these in which many free blacks engaged as William Lloyd Garrison's moral-religious crusade for "immediate emancipation." Keeping the slavery issue before the nation's "conscience" was the chief program of these agitators, who significantly were led by whites. Except for this program, the Garrisonians had little understanding of power, and their philosophical and tactical pacifism suggests their complete misunderstanding of how slavery would have to be abolished.

Strongly supported by northern Negroes was the Underground Railroad travel which Rawick so greatly admires. However, while the Underground Railroad did provide escape routes for thousands of slaves, it cannot objectively be considered as revolutionary activity. Though it hurt the South by draining off valuable slave capital, the railroad in effect operated as a safety-valve for slavery by releasing potential rebel leaders -- the artisans, industrial slaves, and those with initiative who comprised the bulk of the fugitives. Unless these fugitives themselves organized revolutionary activity among their black brothers still in bondage, or among northern or Canadian black communities, the thrust of the Underground Railroad was blunted. The day-to-day resistance, which Rawick mentions and which did permeate bondage, could never become a liberation movement without organization. But how many

Harriet Tubmans returned South time and again? And why did only a handful of free blacks join John Brown's band? The Underground Railroad experience merely proves that expatriates who do not return home do not make revolutions. In this sense, Rawick's assertion that building escape-routes was the most important black self-activity is a bit anti-climatic.

Finally, it is mysterious that Rawick fails to mention another abolitionist tendency that was supported by blacks whose consciousness was perhaps most advanced of all. This group was typified by David Walker, a southern black who in 1829 appealed to the "coloured citizens of the world" to overthrow slavery; by Henry Highland Garnet, another black who in 1843 reiterated the martyred Walker's revolutionary "appeal;" and by the black-and-white followers of John Brown who first helped stop the spread of slavery into Kansas and then attempted to attack and to organize against bondage within the South. Indeed, if today's black liberation must have historical "heroes," it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these revolutionaries -- along with the slave rebels Prosser, Turner, and especially Vesey, as well as their almost-forgotten slave co-conspirators -- are the most likely candidates.

FOOTNOTES:

- * For recent criticism of Elkins' hypothesis, see Eugene Genovese, et al., "The Legacy of Slavery and the Roots of Black Nationalism," Studies on the Left, November-December, 1966; Genovese also suggests that Elkins merely demonstrated the "limiting case," not the general one, of servile character in another article in Civil War History, December, 1967; in the same issue, George Frederickson and Christopher Lasch attempt to define "political" slave resistance.
- **On the question of disciplining slaves, see, for example, Robert Starobin's article in the Journal of Negro History, April, 1968. For disunity within the slave community see his forthcoming piece on the accommodationist role of slave drivers, and Dale Tomich's history honor's essay on house servants, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1968.

HOMAGE TO T-BONE SLIM

Think of the snow that could once have fallen on your grave
 even before you died
 Think of the highways laughing in and out of the empty eyes
 asleep in New York
 the bottles of words which you hurled through the silent glass
 of solitude
 the water too deep to touch
 the calendar too far away to mean anything
 the door that kept swinging open
 the dog that kept howling
 the roads that kept leading nowhere
 the world had no beginning for you
 but it ended all the time
 If I were you I'd have laughed at them
 set their horses free
 made them walk
 the white clown dead in the moonlit street
 a horse trampling a glass accordion
 midnight is something more than a razor slicing an owl in two
 something more than a blind man eating an orange
 You knew this you tried to tell us
 The helpless arson of your eyes
 sets fire to the past
 every word you wrote makes mirrors useless
 You lived on what you grew in your black garden of tomorrows
 The sleepwalker dies in the middle of the street
 The streetcar covers its lips with blood
 and says hello
 A passing girl
 her eyes closed
 throws away a glove
 without a word she speaks of tigers
 of darkness
 of a folding fan and a strawberry made of stone
 and she too dies
 In the violet rain that falls on the beckoning hands of shadows
 In lithographs of flame and canaries
 In the medieval wind that settles in cracked mirrors
 In the scarlet leaf of gold that nails laughter to a wooden fence
 You redefined the parts of speech
 in terms of cutlery and heat
 To be free
 You fled everything you could have been
 preferring to be free
 In jail the crocodiles slept in unopened envelopes
 You wandered across the verbal sand

tying red ribbons to oblivion
 Balancing rocks in the black velvet wind
 every word every promise shipwrecked on the shores of a dream
 too far away to reach without going mad
 You knew this too it is the risk one takes
 the closed gate the stupid smile the blue hair
 There are no wings on the enameled laughter
 of dead trees
 But in the quiet blood of deserted streets
 blind falcons close their speechless eyes
 wave their immovable hands
 surrender like paper pigeons die like iron fleas
 The rebel wheat of stone burns like a violin
 in the white and voiceless sea
 It is the night rocking to sleep its terrors
 with songs themselves too terrible to sing alone
 You rewrote the script of darkness to throw at the dismal light of day
 The red wreath of your laughter
 the black flowers of your scorn

Chicago,
fall, 1965

FRANKLIN ROSEMONT

VISUALIZED PRAYER TO THE AMERICAN GOD #2

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PLURIBUS UNUM
  
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AMEN

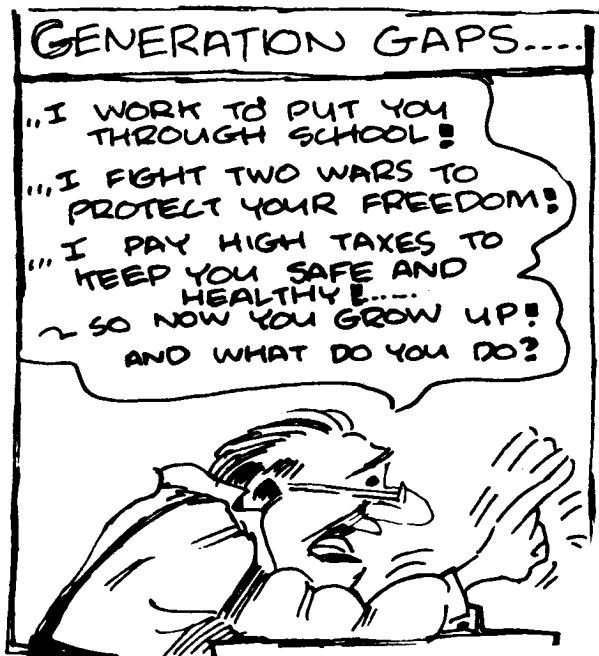
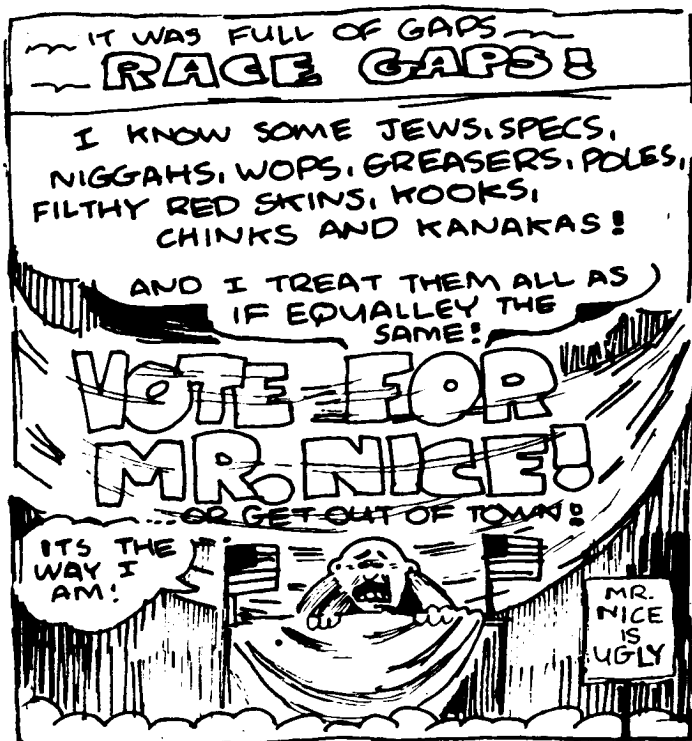
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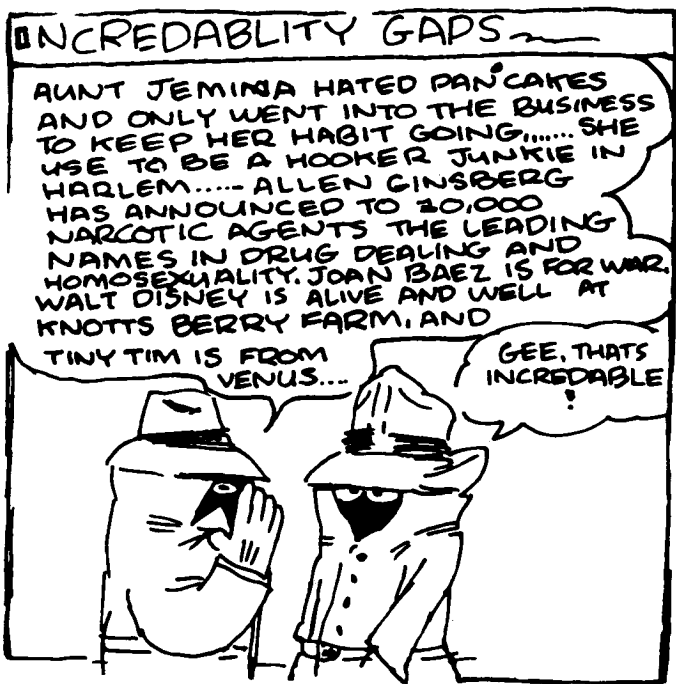
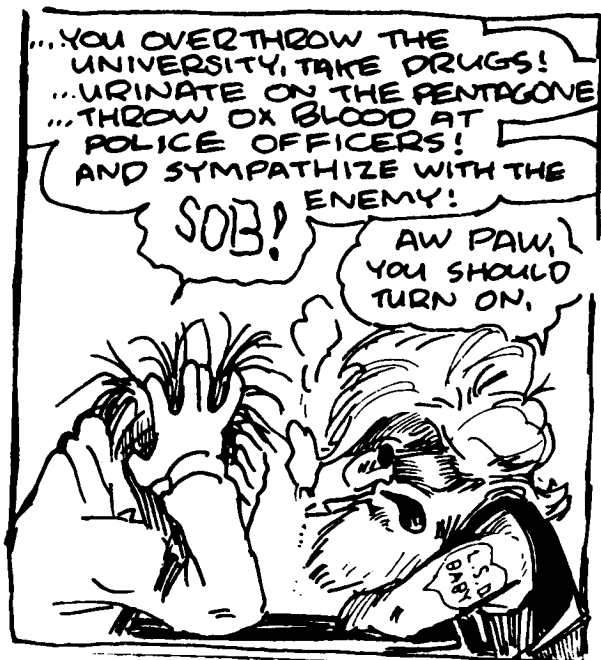
THE UNIVERSAL INCREDABLE GENERATION GAP STORY! BY JOEL BECK

ONCE UPON A TIME
THERE WAS A PLANET
THAT HAD ALL THE
TROUBLE IN THE WORLD.

.....WISH THE SUN
WOULD HURRY UP AND
EXPLODE!





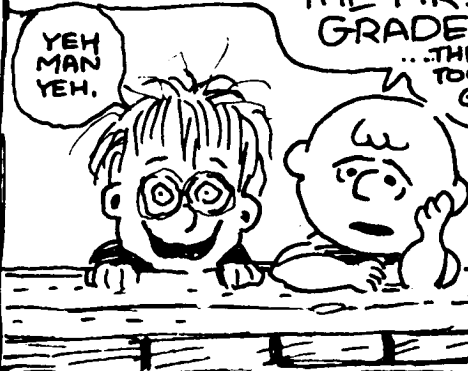


GAP GAPS.....

YOU KNOW, LINUS, I FIND IT DIFFICULT TALKING TO ANYONE WHO HASN'T BEEN TAKING L.S.D SENCE AT LEAST THE FIRST GRADE...

YEH MAN YEH.

...THEY'RE TOO FAR GONE!



THE WORLD COULD SLEEP WITHOUT HAVING PAINFUL "GAP" NIGHT MARES

AND SO.....

NOW IF ALL YOU LONG HAIR, SICKIE, PROTESTERS PEACE CREEPS, AND UNGRATEFUL NEGROE NUR AROUND DOING CHILDISH THINGS LIKE COM WE MORE MATURE OLDER FOLKS MIGHT FE COMPELD TO END THE WAR, END POVERTY END CANNED KNOWLEDGE, ETC. GET IT?....SO GROW UP



OK, KIDS ~ THINK OF AMERICAS REPUTATION

REMEMBER THE ALAMO?

YUK!

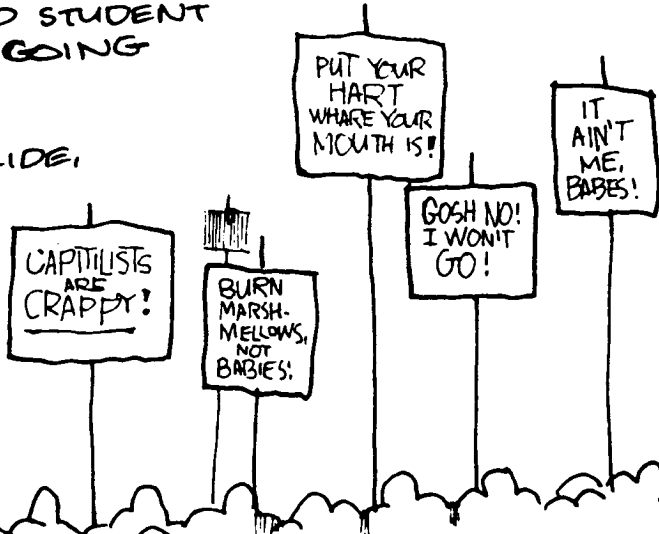




AND SPOILED STUDENT ROTICS STOP GOING COMPLAINING!
FEEL MORE Y, END GENOCIDE,

?

W!



THOUGHT FOR THE DAY!
WILL THE "SICKIE SIXTIES" BE FOLLOWED UP BY THE "HEAVENLY SEVENTIES"? TIME WILL TELL!

The Southern Tenants' Farmers' Union and the CIO

Mark D. Naison

The history of the Southern Tenants Farmers Union, an interracial organization of sharecropper and tenant farmers which rose to national prominence in the Depression, illuminates with striking clarity both the potentialities and the limitations of the radical organizing drives in the '30's. Brought together in 1934 by Socialist party workers in the Mississippi Delta, this union demonstrated the unique opportunities for radical organization which the depression had opened in the rural south, a section where class conflict had long been suppressed by racial divisions. Beginning as a critic of New Deal agricultural programs, the union grew into a mass movement which aimed at the reconstruction of southern agriculture along socialist lines and the elimination of the political and educational disabilities which made poor white and black passive observers of their own exploitation.

To many American radicals, the STFU symbolized the revival of the old populist dream of a black-white alliance which would convert the southern working class into a powerful force for radical change. But as the STFU reached out for aid from other radical groups to magnify its power, the dream turned into a nightmare. An alliance with the labor movement, which the union leaders hoped would provide a new energy and a new independence, imposed a bureaucratic burden upon the union's affairs which drained it of its revolutionary spirit. The most powerful mass organizations on a national sphere, the Communist Party and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, possessed a world view which made them unable to appreciate the union's contribution. Onto a movement which had developed a socialist consciousness with enormous popular appeal, they imposed an organizational

strategy which valued sound business practices above political appeal and financial stability above revolutionary militance. In the two years it fell under their influence, the STFU saw its ranks depleted by factional conflict, personality struggles, and racial strife.

GROWTH OF A MOVEMENT

To the eight million sharecropper and tenant farmers on southern cotton plantations, the depression signalled both unparalleled suffering and a first hope of liberation. The drastic decline in cotton prices which the crisis initiated drove the croppers' already depressed incomes far below subsistence. Starvation, evictions, and foreclosures were a common fate. But the same events dealt a heavy blow to the repressive, paternalistic system of labor control which had dominated the plantation system since the end of reconstruction. As bankruptcy overtook the planters, as farms reverted to the banks, the cohesiveness of the rural social order began to break. The merchant owners and their satellites, preoccupied with their own financial troubles, had little time to supervise the black and white tenants within their purview. Thousands of laborers roamed the highways of the south, seeking shelter, seeking work. For the first time since the 1890's, food riots became a common part of the southern scene.

The New Deal, strongly dependent upon southern support for its election, stepped in dramatically to restore order to the demoralized regional economy. By giving planter parity checks to remove acreage from production, it precipitated a rapid jump in cotton prices which restored the shaken confidence of the landowning class. But the crisis of the tenant was only intensified. The acreage reduction provisions offered a powerful incentive to rid the plantation of its excess labor supply. In the first two years of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, thousands of tenants were evicted from their homes, reduced in status to casual laborers, or forced to survive on intermittent and grudgingly administered relief grants. One

critic doubted if the Civil War had actually produced more suffering and pauperization in proportion to the population than the AAA had done in the few short years of its life.¹ Such was the meaning of New Deal liberalism to the southern sharecropper.

In the midst of this chaotic reorganization of the plantation economy, a movement arose to challenge both the old system of subordination and the rationalizing schemes of the New Deal reformers. In the cotton belt of Arkansas, two young socialists named H. L. Mitchell and Clay East, acting upon the advice of Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas, decided to organize a union of sharecropper and tenant farmers who had been evicted or reduced in status during the opening year of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Their political work among the sharecroppers had convinced them that the discontent cut wide and deep, and that black and white tenants might be willing to cooperate in the crisis. Socialist Party leaders, anxious to develop a mass base for their critique of the New Deal, promised unlimited aid and support. In the spring of 1934, Mitchell and East organized meetings throughout eastern Arkansas urging sharecroppers to unite and organize. Within a few months, they had developed a solid following of two to three thousand members and had launched a propaganda attack on the New Deal's cotton program that made government officials very uncomfortable.

The early activities of the union, following Socialist Party traditions, emphasized legal and educational work above mass action. On the advice of their Socialist patrons, the union leaders directed almost all of their organization's energy into a nationwide campaign to expose the brutality of the plantation system and the inequities of the New Deal's agricultural policies. Suits were launched in state and federal courts to test the legality of the cotton contract, speaking tours arranged to mobilize liberal and radical groups behind the union's effort, books and pamphlets written to dramatize the hardships of the sharecropper's life. Socialist in theory, the campaign tended to assume a tone that was paternalistic and reformist in character. Its exposure of injustice, divorced from organization,

became an appeal to conscience. The end result of Norman Thomas' speeches, eloquent though they were, was the development of a "Sharecropper's Lobby" to prosecute the union's cause in Washington.

This incipient paternalism, however, was rapidly destroyed by the enthusiastic, almost violent response to the union's organizing campaigns.



The earliest union meetings were organized quietly, often secretly, by the STFU's founder, who feared that a militant posture would bring down the repression of the planters and would divide the croppers by race. Legal, nonviolent methods were stressed. Croppers were advised to organize around existing federal programs, and to publicize their grievance through peaceful demonstrations. But at meeting after meeting, union leaders were surprised and stirred by the sight of long-humble croppers demanding the seizure of the plantations and the banishment of the owners who had so long oppressed them. Mitchell and East, southerners themselves

and the children of farmers, saw the potential for a revolutionary mass movement that could sweep through the south. In the summer and fall of 1934, they brought their organizing into the open and began to prepare the croppers for militant local action.

In this new organizing drive, a unique spirit began to emerge, one which had not been seen in the South since the days of the Populists. At mass meetings called throughout eastern Arkansas, white and black organizers, sharing the same platforms, told audiences of thousands of tenants to put aside racial animosities and unite against the plantation owners. Fundamentalist ministers and preachers, the "natural" leaders of the tenant population, became the most dedicated union organizers. When planters moved to arrest black organizers, mobs of white sharecroppers sometimes arrived to liberate them from jail. By the beginning of 1935, the union had a membership of more than 10,000 in 80 local units.

Faced with a range of problems staggering in variety, threatened with reprisals at every point, the union emerged as a "total institution" that absorbed the entire life process of its membership and commanded a loyalty that was passionate and unrestrained. To make an impact on the degradation of the sharecropper's life, the union had to organize against schoolboards, relief agencies, courts, health programs, and police forces as well as the planter. With all of these agencies in the control of the same class and administered with the single objective of keeping the sharecropper docile and ignorant, the struggle for public services seemed as fundamental as the battle for control of the plantation system.

STRIKE!

During the summer of 1935, the union leaders felt confident enough to launch their first mass campaign, a cotton picker's strike in the fields of Eastern Arkansas. Spreading the word by handbills, by articles in the union newspapers, and by that system of underground communication that poor people everywhere seem to develop, the union led tens of

thousands of sharecroppers out of their fields in an attempt to raise wages from 50¢ to \$1.25 per hundred pounds of cotton and to win written contracts. As a demonstration of worker solidarity and a stimulus to organizations, the strike was remarkably effective -- sharecroppers in a vast area of the Delta stayed away from work -- but negotiations with the planters did not ensue. For most of the croppers, staying out on strike meant hiding in the swamp or barricading themselves in houses, and the only bargaining that took place was non-verbal and indirect. After a month-long war of nerves, marked by considerable bloodshed, most of the sharecroppers returned to work at considerably higher wages, but without written contracts.

Although hardly a paragon of planned and disciplined action, this strike provided the union with an enormous injection of energy on several different fronts. First, it gave a powerful stimulus to the union's organizing drive. The strike brought the union into direct contact with tens of thousands of unorganized sharecroppers, many of whom joined the union when the strike was over. In addition, the economic success of the union's campaign, unprecedented in recent southern history, brought about the organization of union locals in sections of the country that the strike did not even touch. Sharecroppers spontaneously organized chapters in Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee and Mississippi. By the end of 1935 the union claimed a membership of 25,000. On a political level, the strike had an equally important impact. The dramatic quality of the sharecropper's protest and the brutality of the terror which greeted it focused a harsh beam of light on the New Deal's agricultural programs. Reporters eagerly catalogued the shootings, the burnings and the whippings which followed the course of the union's campaign, provoking a cathartic display of concern by liberals for the "plight of the sharecropper." The pressures became intense enough to extract at least a symbolic response from the New Deal: when the strike had ended, Roosevelt announced that he was initiating a comprehensive review of the problem of tenancy and appointed a federal commission to study it.

During the next year, the union continued to grow in size, in militancy, and in political impact. Ten thousand new members were added, another cotton pickers' strike organized, a more sophisticated political program developed. As the union grew in size, it clarified its position as a "movement of emancipation." Union literature railed against the poll tax, the discriminatory administration of federal programs, the denial of unemployment relief; suits, petitions strikes and boycotts were employed to make the tenants' power felt. But as the New Deal responded with reforms to this attack on the southern social system, the union leaders began to perceive some of the limitations of their organization's power. Roosevelt's tenancy program was a beautiful example of symbolically gratifying palliatives. Increasing the tenants' share of parity payments from 15% to 25% and providing that their distribution be direct was an open recognition of the union's attacks on the AAA but had little meaning so long as planters controlled the administration of the program on a federal, state and county level. The appropriation of fifty million dollars per year to place impoverished tenants on subsistence farms was a nice gesture to the cropper's quest for self-determination but was only a quixotic diversion in a sector of the economy where large-scale units alone could be profitable. The plantation economy was mechanizing and reducing its need for labor; small scale gains in income and power won by programs of this kind would be wiped away like dust by the broad sweep of technological change. Roosevelt's "War on Rural Poverty" reaffirmed the union's need to make functional control of the plantation system and its political supports an immediate goal of the union's campaign -- not just as a philosophic or religious ideal, but as a pre-condition of any final and permanent improvement in the sharecropper's status.

However, the STFU leaders clearly observed that the continuation of the union's growth along current lines would not achieve that goal. No matter how large the union grew, no matter how

organized its constituency became, it would continue to be an interest group worthy only of temporary concession so long as its power remained regional. For the success of its program, the union needed to become part of a national radical movement capable of defeating the New Deal coalition and smashing the power of the planter in the national arena. The Socialist Party and the religious groups who had supported the union up to now could not supply such a force. For an alliance to transform American politics, the STFU began to turn to a newly vitalized wing of the labor movement -- the CIO.

THUNDER ON THE LEFT

For most Depression-era radicals, the growth of the CIO was an inspirational event that evoked great dreams of political success. Born of a power struggle in a collaborationist labor movement, led by a Republican and a disciple of Samuel Gompers, the movement became, in two short years, the self-conscious advocate of the unorganized and unemployed worker and a sometimes bitter critic of the policies of the New Deal. Fighting lockouts, Pinkerton's agents and federal troops, the CIO organized four million workers into industrial unions and seemed to radicalize everyone connected with it. By 1937 John L. Lewis, a man who had begun his effort with the hope of "winning the American worker from the isms and philosophies of foreign lands,"² had begun to espouse a program which seemed anticapitalist. Proclaiming that "it was the responsibility of the state to provide every able bodied worker with employment if the corporations which control American industry fail to provide it" Lewis called for the organization of 25 million workers in nationwide industrial union and the formation of a farmer-labor alliance to radicalize the Democrats or develop a third political party. This program, limited though it was, seemed to offer a hope of uniting the American working class into a conscious political force.

The STFU, with more optimism than the facts

would justify, saw itself playing an important role in the "CIO Crusade." If Lewis seriously intended to create a third party which could break through the New Deal stalemate on questions of unemployment and job security, the union leaders reasoned, the allegiance of southern workers to their conservative political leadership would have to be broken by intensive organization. The STFU began to see itself as an "advance guard for the labor movement in the south" supported by its more affluent and powerful brethren in return for the political appeal it would bring to their organizing drives. It was with such hopes in mind that the union leaders began to press Lewis for direct affiliation with the CIO, a relationship which they expected would provide much needed funds to expand and solidify the union organization.

However, although the political rhetoric of the CIO seemed to suggest an important place for the union, its organizational decisions reflected a different dynamic. The evident failure of capitalism to rationalize itself had impressed Lewis (who, if an opportunist, was an intelligent one) but his natural strategic response was to unionize everybody in centralized industrial units rather than to transform capitalism politically from above. When the STFU leaders met Lewis, they were surprised at the kind of questions he asked: What kind of dues could the union pay? How long would it take before it could become self-supporting? The political appeal of the union and the quality of its program seemed less important to Lewis than its potential financial stability. While praising the union's work, he carefully avoided committing the CIO to support it.

Lewis' evasion reflected a quality of the CIO movement which the union leaders, in their enthusiasm, had totally failed to see: its dependence upon collective bargaining as both an economic and political technique. The CIO built its organizing drive around the recognition of vast industrial unions as the sole bargaining agents of workers in American industries; the great majority of its strikes were fought around issues of union recognition rather than wages or working conditions. These highly centralized units



because of the influence of the Communist Party, the most powerful and disciplined radical grouping in the movement. During the Popular Front period, and in its work in the CIO, the C.P. functioned with a split personality, each side of which was excessively stilted and false. In their public roles, Communists took the position of brutal pragmatists, comfortable with the most narrow and pro-capitalist definition of organizing if it succeeded in building unions. In their private roles, on the other hand, party members struggled to attain the maximum orthodoxy in what they conceived to be Marxist theory, an enterprise which, if nothing else, could maintain the notion that its participants were revolutionaries. This duality, exceedingly sharp in many CIO communists, worked against the development of a popular socialist ideology in the great industrial unions. In the case of the southern tenant farmers' union, for whom the struggle for socialism was a matter of survival, it worked toward the destruction of a movement.

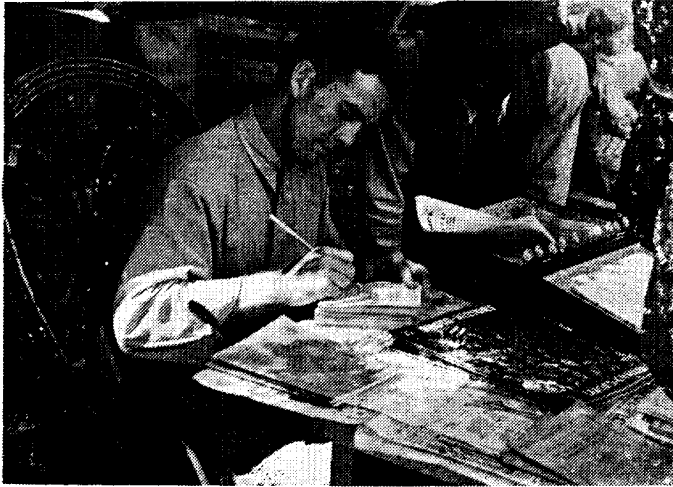
A DISASTROUS AFFILIATION

In March of 1937, when the CIO finally entered the field of agricultural organization, it was the CP rather than the STFU which took the initiative, and it did so in a manner which would be acceptable to the most conservative business unionist. Rather than the CIO granting direct affiliation to the STFU or forming a national farm workers' federation, CP strategists proposed an international union to organize farm workers and cannery workers simultaneously, arguing that the presence of the latter would give the organization a better chance of becoming self-supporting. Lewis approved the plan and appointed Donald Henderson, a prominent communist theoretician and the head of the National Rural Workers' Committee, as the international's first president. The STFU, invited to participate in the new organization (called the United Cannery, Agricultural Processing and Allied Workers of America, UCAPAWA for short), were told that this was the only way that they could be assured of a connection with the CIO.

To the STFU leaders, frustrated by the (to them) inexplicable reluctance of the CIO to support their organization and its program, the formation of the UCAPAWA was a nightmare whose reality they could never quite accept. Donald Henderson, whose thinking the structure of the International reflected, was a bitter and open critic of methods and style by which the STFU operated, who had openly declared his desire to see the union broken up. In Henderson's viewpoint, the STFU's greatest achievement-- its development of an independent socialist consciousness based on agrarian and religious symbolism--was a dangerous political deviation. Like many communists of his time, Henderson believed that a true revolutionary consciousness could only stem from an industrial proletariat, and that movements which drew their base from groups other than a strict working class had to be subjected to rigid ideological and organizational control. His 1935 article in Communist, the "Rural Masses and the Work of Our Party" had warned of the need to tie agrarian movements to a proletarian base in order to prevent "political vacillations and organizational collapse," and the structure of the International seemed designed to meet precisely that objective.³ The STFU leaders knew that if they linked up with the International, their organization would be under constant pressure to adjust its program and tactics to C. P. directives. But in spite of these doubts, the STFU prepared to affiliate. It really had no choice. By joining the International, and working to persuade the CIO of the importance of the union's work, the STFU could at least keep alive the possibility of a political reorientation which could give meaning to its local struggles.

DECLINE AND FALL

The relationship with the International, chosen in the interest of long-term strategy, proved to be even more repressive than the STFU leaders imagined.



UNION ORGANIZER

The centralized framework of the UCAPAWA, modeled on that of CIO unions in the basic industries, left the STFU leadership with very little control of organizing policies. From the moment the union affiliated (September, 1937) its organization was subjected to a discipline which provoked tensions and conflicts it had struggled mightily to repress.

The first serious tensions emerged over the question of dues and accounting procedures--an ideologically neutral question one would think. The International sent every local of the STFU a charter, an accounting book and a list of requirements for participation in the International. Members were to pay dues of 25¢ per month plus a 5¢ per capita tax to CIO headquarters. Local secretaries were to fill out balance sheets in quadruplicate, keep one, send one to district headquarters, (STFU office in Memphis) one to International headquarters (in California) and one to CIO headquarters (in Washington). These procedures were the basic organization cement of the CIO movement, and Henderson applied them without expecting a protest. But the union's organizers rebelled as a unit against those requirements. The southern sharecropper, deprived of education, burdened by debt, was in no position to pay the dues or do the paperwork which the CIO

demanded of an industrial worker. After seeing the charter materials, Mitchell wrote Henderson he was convinced that the STFU did not have ten local secretaries who could handle them. One organizer's suggestion was that they be kept for the next 50 years, during which time the croppers might be sufficiently educated to handle them.⁴

Henderson's response to the union's complaint was that both the dues and the accounting procedures had to be rigorously applied.⁵ When the union leaders went to Lewis to protest this decision, they were told that compliance was a precondition of their participation in the CIO. Helpless, the union leaders instructed their organizers to restructure the local units in line with international directives. At the same time, they revived their campaign to win a separate affiliation from the CIO.

The attempt to apply the international's guidelines, as the union leaders feared, began to undermine the basis of solidarity which the movement had developed. On a local level the STFU held and expanded its membership by two basic techniques: organized action to increase the sharecropper's standard of living and protection in times of crisis; and the cultivation, through rituals, mass gatherings and demonstrations, of an almost religious belief in the justice of the union's cause and the ultimate success of its program. To force the union members to pay high dues would hinder its efforts in the first dimension, for it would siphon off a major portion of the economic gains that the union was able to win, but to bureaucratize the union's structure would be more deadly yet, for it would draw energy away from the emotional bonds which held the union members together and which were, in the long run, the basis of the union's strength.

By the summer of 1938, nine months after the affiliation had occurred, the STFU was in serious difficulty. A recession of considerable magnitude had complicated the dues' collecting drive by dramatically reducing the effectiveness of the union's economic program. For the first time in its five-year history, the STFU was experienced as a burden by the sharecropper which drew upon, rather than

added to, his tiny cash income. In addition the remoteness of the union's leadership from activities in the field, imposed by long and fruitless negotiations with the CIO and the international, brought suspicions of misconduct to a dangerous level. Almost half the union locals went inactive, waiting for the old personalized style of leadership to revive, and serious racial tensions began to develop. In one section of Arkansas, E. B. McKinney, a Garveyite minister who was one of the union's organizers, had become so incensed by the declining effectiveness of the union's program and the increasing distance of the union's (mostly white) executive board that he began to advocate the formation of an all-black union, McKinney's proposal did little more than get members demoralized, but it warned union leaders that their movement would be destroyed unless they restored the program and the spirit which had been its original basis. It was clear to them the STFU was in no position to rationalize itself along industrial union lines. In August of 1938, the union halted its campaign to collect dues and membership reports for the UCAPAWA office.

Henderson, a former Columbia instructor who had never organized in the South, was infuriated by this action. He found it inexplicable that a mass movement could be mobilized around ideology, and he interpreted the union's difficulties as a sign of incompetent leadership. After going to the CIO directors for confirmation, he informed the union leader that a separate affiliation for the STFU was unthinkable, and that its relationship with the CIO was contingent upon its conformity to the rules of the International. At the same time, he mobilized the C.P. apparatus for a takeover of the union from within.

During the succeeding three months, violent factional conflicts entered the STFU's ranks, paralyzing the union's effort to revive its local program. A popular union organizer, the Rev. Claude Williams, allowed a paper describing alleged CP plans to take over the union to fall into the hands of J. R. Butler, the STFU's president. When Williams was

suspended from the organization by the STFU executive board, he appealed to local chapter their support to Henderson, further confusing the demoralized membership. Then in December the International provoked additional tensions by cutting union representation on the UCAPAWA Executive Board to half of its previous level, a "punishment" for its failure to collect dues and membership reports. The STFU retaliated by filing a protest with the CIO and by issuing press releases denouncing Henderson.

The final break came in the early months of 1939, during a severe and unexpected economic crisis. Planters in the "bootheel" region of Missouri, spurred by "reforms" in the AAA which increased tenants' share of parity payments, shifted their labor system from sharecropping to wage labor, evicting 2000 tenants in the process. When union organizers spontaneously led the evicted families into a "camp in" on the highway between St. Louis and Memphis, a bitter struggle emerged for the loyalty of the demonstrators. UACAPAWA officials organized a separate relief drive from that of the STFU, and began to openly seek support for its "strict trade union" position. Owen Whitfield, the leader of the Missouri group, bounced like a shuttlecock between St. Louis and Memphis, alternately wooed by union and C. P. officials. In February, the STFU leaders lost their patience. They wrote letters to the CIO executive board declaring that the International had sustained a systematic campaign to destroy its effectiveness and warned that the union would be forced to leave the CIO unless it cleaned up the situation in the International.⁶ Soon afterward, Henderson announced that he was calling a special convention to reorganize the STFU and expel its leadership.

The CIO directors at this point entered the dispute and the position they took indicated their preoccupation with the bureaucratic side of union organization and their distance from the problems which the sharecropper faced. Although they disapproved of Henderson's plan to call for a dual convention, they would not stop him unless the union

leaders agreed to abide by the UCAPAWA constitution and meet outstanding dues and obligations. The union leaders' complaints that their movement could not survive within such a framework were deemed irrelevant; Henderson's action all fell within the bounds of standard trade-union practice and had been cleared in advance by CIO headquarters. After ten days of negotiation, it became clear that the CIO's approach to organizing was all too similar to that of Henderson, and that neither would allow the union to operate on suitable terms. On March 11, Mitchell announced that the union was breaking its ties with the CIO.

During the next few months, Mitchell chose to challenge Henderson's drive to reorganize the union. Rounding up whatever loyal members he could find, Mitchell crashed the dual convention, took it over, and led his supporters out.⁷ Henderson was left with a handful of croppers, most of them followers of Whitfield and McKinney. With no basis for an inter-racial movement, he was never to make a serious effort to reorganize in cotton.

But the STFU had been almost equally devastated by the dispute. In a survey of the field, Mitchell found only forty active locals out of a total of 200 which the union had at the peak of its strength.⁸ The faction fight had been so confusing to the people that they had simply shut down and quit for the time being, disgusted with all unions. The racial solidarity upon which the union had based its program, moreover, had been badly shattered by the fight. The best black organizers had left the movement, disillusioned with its declining level of performance, and the whites had gone inactive. But finally, and most important, the almost religious sense of mission from which the union had drawn its strength had been utterly destroyed by the crisis. From the union's earliest days, its members had been sustained by the hope that there were forces within America which could shatter the old plantation system and win a decent life for the sharecropper on its ruins. Now, no such hope could be maintained. The most radical mass forces for change in the society, the CIO and the Communist Party, had stood apart from the union's strivings, had smothered it with forms, had crushed

it with obligations. Not even on the distant horizon were there forces of sufficient strength to transform the cotton economy into a free and ordered system of production. From 1939, the STFU confined its work to education and lobbying, serving as a liaison between sharecroppers and federal tenancy programs it had regarded as hopelessly inadequate two years before.

THE MEANING FOR THE LEFT

The destruction of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union epitomized the basic limitation of the most dynamic organizing drive staged by radicals in the thirties -- the campaign of the CIO. With few exceptions, radicals within the CIO were willing to live with a definition of union organizing that made it impossible either to organize workers who were outside of an industrial system, or to concentrate on political organization that challenged capitalist institutions. In particular, CIO Communists, who should have known better, were so concerned with developing a working class base that they supported a strategy of unionization which had been consciously designed to rationalize a capitalist economy. And when they came in contact with a movement which could not apply such a strategy, whose economic problems were so severe that not even a temporary solution could be found within capitalism, they allowed and even encouraged its destruction because its supporters were not classic proletarians.

The consequences of these failures have been very serious and very lasting. First of all, they worked against the development of a broadly based radical party and the growth of a popular socialist consciousness. The obsession of many radicals with activities which created powerful financially stable organizations led them to neglect the very real opportunities to disseminate a cooperative, anti-capitalist ideology among the American laboring population. As the growth of the STFU indicates, workers in the most conservative, traditionalistic sections of the society were often receptive to a

radical outlook if it was phrased in terms relevant to their experience and combined with effective organization.

But equally important, the strategic orientation of CIO radicals reinforced the isolation of the black population from the rest of the American working class, helping to set the stage for ghettoization and the social crisis of our time. The narrow definition of industrial unionism embodied in the CIO implicitly excluded most of the black working force, who operated within marginal sectors of the economy which could not be rationalized within capitalism. The colonized sharecropper on the southern plantation, living under conditions of dependence radically different from those of a factory worker, could not be organized in a centralized bureaucratic union. When old left strategists chose to avoid a campaign to reorganize the American economy, when they chose to neglect the program that the union had advocated, they were postponing the organization of rural black people to some vague and later date. The mistrust of white radicals by insurgents in the ghetto is one painful and indirect consequence of the failure of the union's program.



FOOTNOTES

1. Howard Kester, Revolt Among the Sharecroppers (New York: Covici-Friede, 1936), p. 27. The majority of the material in this article has been derived from manuscript sources--particularly the very excellent and complete collection at the Southern Historical Collection in Chapel Hill, N.C. However, the considerable body of secondary literature on the union has been very helpful in guiding the directions of my analysis. Students looking for a more detailed discussion of these events from a different political perspective should refer to the following books and articles. Jerold Auerbach, "The Southern Tenants Farmers Union: Socialist Critics of the New Deal," Labor History (Winter, 1966); David Eugene Conrad, The Forgotten Farmers (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965); Stuart Jamison, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture, U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin #836; Vera Rony, "Sorrow Song in Black and White," New South (Summer, 1967); M. S. Ventakaramani, "Norman Thomas, Arkansas Sharecroppers, and the Roosevelt Agricultural Policies, 1933-1937," Mississippi Valley Historical Review (September, 1960); also, H. L. Mitchell's interview in the Columbia Oral History Project and an unpublished PhD Dissertation, Donald H. Grubbs, "The Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the New Deal," (University of Florida, 1963).
2. CIO Publication, #10; the literature on the growth and evolution of the CIO is neither very good nor very extensive. However, the following works should be studied before beginning to develop a picture of these complex events: Saul Alinsky, John L. Lewis, an Unauthorized Biography (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1949); Walter Galenson, The CIO Challenge to the AFL (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960); Sidney Lens, Left, Right and Center (Hinsdale: Henry Regnery Company, 1949); Edward Levinson, Labor on the March (New York: University Books, 1936); Art Preis, Labor's

- Giant Step (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1964); Ronald Radosh, "The corporate Ideology of American Labor," Studies On the Left, VI (1966).
3. "The Rural Masses and the Work of Our Party," Communist, March 18, 1935.
 4. See H. D. Mitchell to Donald Henderson, October 11, 1937; and Mitchell to Gardner Jackson, October 23, 1937, in Southern Tenant Farmers Union Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.
 5. Henderson to Mitchell, October 27, 1937. STFU Papers.
 6. J. R. Butler, "To Members Executive Board, Congress of Industrial Organizations," February 14, 1939. STFU Papers.
 7. For a more detailed discussion of radical conflicts within the union see Mark D. Naison, "The Decline of the Southern Tenants Farmer's Union, 1937-39," (unpublished Master's essay, Columbia University, 1967).
 8. H. L. Mitchell to Norman Thomas, April 3, 1939, STFU Papers.

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Unions and Black Liberation

Martin Glaberman

The Negro and the American Labor Movement, Julius Jacobson, editor. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1968. 430 pp., \$1.75 (pbk).

This book helps to fill a great void in material on a crucial area of American life, making considerable information on black workers and the trade union movement easily accessible. Its early chapters, devoted primarily to the history of the problem, are especially valuable: August Meier and Elliott Rudwick on black leaders' attitudes toward the labor movement, Herbert Gutman on the United Mine Workers, Ray Marshall on southern unions and Mark Karson and Ronald Radosh on the A. F. of L. provide very useful contributions to an understanding of the current situation. The anthology as a whole, however, and particularly those parts dealing with immediate issues and arguments are marred by a traditional view of the struggle for black liberation. It is a view from before the time of Debs and, although it is somewhat modified here to remove the most glaring contradictions with current reality, it does not go much beyond the time-worn slogan of "Black and White, Unite and Fight."

The Negro and the American Labor Movement deals primarily with the organized union movement, which is a reasonable enough area of discussion but does not justify either the tendency to identify the unions with the workers as a whole or the distinctions that are made when the two are viewed separately. Jacobson, in his introduction, notes "that the efforts of the CIO leadership to raise the rank and file to its own level of equalitarian consciousness were inadequate." (p. 8.) The idea that the labor

leadership (or any significant part of it) has had a more radical consciousness than the rank and file worker is a myth with widespread support. But when union leaders use a language that is constantly belied by their acts it seems much more reasonable to believe that their consciousness is reflected in their acts and that their language is a reflection of what they believe to be the consciousness of their constituents. The leaders universally use the harshest disciplinary measures against their members on such questions as wildcat strikes or violations of company-union contracts. When they begin to show as little regard for prejudice against Negroes as they do for prejudice against no-strike pledges, it may begin to be necessary to take them seriously.

White workers are shot through with prejudice against blacks. It would be difficult to imagine it to be otherwise after centuries of slavery and a system of education, entertainment and communication completely dominated by racist doctrines. But there have been occasions when workers have attempted to overcome this heritage and have been pushed back by their leaders. The Detroit auto plants during World War II are a case in point. Thousands of southerners, whites and blacks, men and women found themselves working side by side. Most southern whites, propagandized by years of stories of race mixing, were prepared to accept the "worst" when they came North. In many plants social intercourse across race and sex lines became common. By the end of the war, it was apparent that the basic characteristic of the union leaders' ideology was not equality but timidity, and the racism inherent in this society was quickly reaffirmed. Neither the union nor its leaders ever gave anything more than verbal allegiance to racial equality. The gains made were made by the direct pressure of black workers. When national unions, such as the UAW, moved against the overtly racist practices of some southern locals, it was not from any equalitarian consciousness at all but from the need to placate the powerfully-placed black workers in their membership in the north.

UNIONS AS UNIONS

More fundamental than the "consciousness" of union leaders (best left to psychoanalysts) is the role of the union as such. Jacobson says that "the unions' right to organize, to bargain collectively, to improve the welfare of their members must be fortified constantly by progressive, democratic social and economic legislation. Similarly, the position of the Negro worker in American society, not merely as a worker but as a Negro with unique needs and interests, cannot be improved without a continual growth and application in life of democratic principles." (p. 22.) This is traditionally the objective basis for the Negro-labor coalition. The problem is the union institution and how it has changed in time. Old categories no longer apply and there is little point in talking as if this were 1938 instead of 1968.

Let us be specific: "The unions' right to organize, to bargain collectively," is no longer equivalent to "to improve the welfare of their members." One could ask whose welfare was improved by John L. Lewis' right to bargain away the jobs of 150,000 miners in the 1950's by accepting unlimited mechanization of the mines; whose welfare was protected by Harry Bridges' notorious waterfront contract which reduced the younger workers to second class status in the union and on the job; and whose welfare is improved by Reuther's contracts which steadily destroy the working conditions of the auto workers for trivial fringe benefits. These were among the most militant of the industrial unions. Most unions are much worse. It is not accidental that the right to organize and bargain collectively of the great industrial unions is strongly protected by the forces of law and order in most circumstances. (This, of course, does not apply to newer unions in peripheral industries, such as agriculture). The basic function of the union has become to participate in the administration of production and to protect the relative position of a favored few. This should be visible to anyone familiar with

conditions in basic industry, whose head is not still back in the 'thirties.

Under these circumstances the objective mutuality of interest between black and white workers has to be sought elsewhere. It can be found in the union only in the sense that the union has become hostile to the basic interests of both black and white workers. It cannot be found on the simple questions of race, but rather in the fact that their conditions of life and work force black workers and white workers to fight the same enemy, an enemy which is not simply the abstract "system" but the particular institutions of this society that oppress those whom it dominates, including the government, the corporations, and the unions.

The need to struggle within the union movement against racism and racist practices should not blind either the student or activist to a sense of historic and economic development. Battles over "consciousness" in itself have accomplished little here. Sumner M. Rosen, in his article on the CIO, notes: "Most advances secured by Negro industrial workers during the CIO's life time were due to dominant economic forces, specifically the acute and prolonged labor shortage which prevailed during the Second World War." Thus, economic forces will not secure advances without struggle, but struggle will not secure advances that have no relation to the specific historical conditions.

And it is the point of history at which the book is weakest. There is little recognition of the continuing, even growing, power and significance of the black industrial working class. On the one hand, blacks continue to serve as a "permanent reserve army of the unemployed," for a blue-collar sector in which the absolute number of jobs has risen in the last decade. On the other hand, they (along with the white industrial workers) continue to reside in a critical position for the possibility of a successful socialist revolution, at the basic gears of the social order. The presence of black majorities in major auto plants, particularly Ford and Chrysler, is the

basis for such developments as DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) which has shut down the main Dodge plant several times. Black workers do man significant segments of American industry from the inside. They can shut it down; they can transform it or destroy it.

The motion of millions of workers in the 'thirties to transform American society led to effective unity between black and white industrial workers and prevented the unemployment from leading to race wars. But the struggle for liberation was then, and is today, countered by the reaction. The growth of the Klan, of the Black Legion, of the movements of Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith attempted to counter the unrest and the revolutionary outbreaks. Their equivalents are everywhere evident today as a response to the struggle for liberation. The radical rejoinder must go beyond defense onto the offensive, based on the strategic strength of the black industrial worker and his ability to carry the white workers along with him. The greatest barrier to such a development is the notion that struggles of black and white workers have to take place within the framework of the labor unions.

An example of this latter notion is Jacobson's defense of preferential hiring for Negroes (pp. 13-14.) He is forced to reduce the question to terms that are manageable within a union framework: isn't the graduated income tax preferential? etc., etc. In fact, of course, preferential hiring barely scratches the surface. If black workers were preferentially hired everywhere they would still be the last hired and, by seniority standards, the first fired. But the union has no choice but to defend the seniority system which discriminates against black people, young people and women. Its function in this society is to administer the rules by which its members are protected against capitalism's worst evils, and there is no way it can relinquish this function without ceasing to be a union. What is required is not preferential hiring (except as a

modest local demand) but a complete reorganization of jobs. And that is possible only on the basis of a new society, one in which jobs are not dependent on the requirements of managers but on the collective decision of the workers. That may be a Utopian ideal or a practical possibility, according to how one sees it. In either case, it is in fundamental opposition to the unions as they now are or as they may conceivably become.

Notes on the S.S.C.

James Gilbert

There couldn't have been a better setting than Rutgers for the Fourth annual session of the Socialist Scholars Conference. Riding out from New York City through the New Jersey industrial wasteland was like seeing an unedited vision of the future, a moving picture of the debits of our progress. What land is not yet highway or torn up to become highway looks like a giant parking lot overgrown by weeds, gullied by motionless polluted ditches, and spotted by occasional housing projects, fenced off like residential reservations.

The three days of sessions were strung together by one idea, that an examination of the new radical constituency in the universities and among ethnic and racial groups which might make up a new radical movement was crucial at this time. The progression of the conference from analysis of the past to planning, however tentatively, for the future gave the meetings a momentum they had never demonstrated before. The first sessions raised two immensely important questions: the role of the intellectual in social change, discussed by Christopher Lasch of Northwestern and

Warren Susman of Rutgers, and the nature of the American working class, examined by Herbert Gutman of Rochester University. The problem of the intellectuals involved in one sense, the very essence of the conference for clearly, the assumption of most of the participants and the audiences was that intellectuals had an important role to play. Genuine disagreements about this role erupted at the session and remained an undercurrent for the remainder of the conference. Gutman, in his important paper, examined the ethnic make-up and behavior of the American working class and challenged the mechanical Marxist scholarship which has often dominated the traditional Left's view of the proletariat.

The second day's sessions sharply focused on the black movement in the United States and more specifically on the peculiar ethnic division of the left, between blacks and Jews. The major speaker was Harold Cruse whose devastating book, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, raised (and probably also settled) the question of black-white relations in the American radical movement. The morning speeches provided a few clear moments of importance as Cruse spun very personal observations into important criticisms of the Left's paternal, even racist attitudes toward Negroes. The session itself reflected the current division and minimal possibilities for cooperation between the white left and the black movement.

By afternoon, at a general discussion of the earlier speeches, the dilemma of getting the history of black-white radical relations straight became a heated argument about the present. Perhaps it had been Cruse's personal tone in the morning that inspired Morris Shappes, editor of Jewish Currents, to give an intensely personal account of his own radical activities as a response to Cruse and as a vindication of the American Communist movement's attitudes toward blacks. In so doing he brought the meeting to one of its few moments of excitement, and forced the audience to reconsider the special relationship of Jewish radicals to the black movement--united so the theory goes, because Jews suffered also from racism. Shappes' own story was one of

successful transformation, from immigrant to left-wing publisher and editor. Yet his recounting of it revealed a break-down in elemental communication. Shappes recalled that he had "read Stalin in the 1920's" and discovered the Negro Question. He had become active in Negro relations with the radical movement and had, from there, moved on to the Jewish question. He and many in the audience continued to equate anti-Semitism in America with racism. But very clearly, the few blacks in the audience did not. That such questions of ethnic origin must still agitate the Left and divide its potential constituency is a legacy of the disastrous past of American radicalism. It lingers because of the need to confront that past honestly, but also because the radical movement reflects the ethnic splits of American society.

On the final day, the conference moved to the other end of the sprawling Rutgers campus; the road between the two sinking down into New Brunswick, where a wrong turn one way leads abruptly into streets out of the 1930's or another into the timeless alleys of the Black ghettos where wooden housing juts up against the stilts of super highways leading out of town. One's presence in this sort of museum city reinforced the sense of the past's claims upon the present and underscored the need to strike out in different directions and reach new understandings.

Several things at that last session helped to do so. The paper by James Weinstein on the prospects for planning a new socialist party gave meaning to many of the ideas which had been expressed during the previous two days. Clearly, everything was leading up to this proposal. Radical students, disaffected members of the new middle class, and blacks, Weinstein argued, were the potential constituency for a new party.

Weinstein's analysis attempted to direct planning for a new socialist organization along the lines indicated in many of the papers and comments of the previous two days, and on yet there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction in the audience. This resulted in part because of what was not said, and partly because no important movement figures were represented on the panel that last day. But more

important was an issue surrounding the Conference, and of great importance in the radical movement everywhere, which came up only at the end of the session and then boiled over into the business meeting that followed. Whatever intellectual way one slices the movement, the Left is deeply divided into generations; into Old-New Left and New-New Left; into professor and graduate student and student; into political revolutionist and cultural revolutionist; into tradition-oriented Leftists and those sympathetic to mind-expansion drugs and hippie culture. Neither constituency designated as part of the new movement was present in great numbers at that last session or represented on the panel. There were no black representatives, and the students who were there resented the implication that their activism in Chicago or perhaps even Columbia was mindless. They, in turn, struck out at professors (and some, by implication at all intellectuals) who dominated the conference.

Underlying the major split at the conference were dissimilar relationships to the university and a potential hostility between elements of the radical movement. The professor (and most of the speakers were professors) is currently in the position of being a minor part of the ruling body of the university in a parallel structure or shadow government of the administration. Most faculty members probably prefer this structure. If they are required to assert their potential power in a kind of de facto revolution against the administration it would not be, as Columbia seems to demonstrate, to carry out student demands, but to negotiate from a different direction, only somewhat more favorable to students. Most faculty members do not want power and even avoid it, thus enabling the administration bureaucracy to expand. Faculty members may even sense a threat to their position if they are forced to exercise power. Academic isolation and academic freedom mean the right to practice expertise in history, sociology, literature or the sciences, and even to carry on the principal preoccupation of most academics, career advancement.

The radical movement today is certainly rich

enough to sustain good scholarship in addition to all of the other things it does. The time has not come to check anyone's activist credentials. From a different point of view, the radical movement is yet desperately poor, and the time has apparently not come to stiffen in the face of some coming confrontation with society. Rather, it is time to think seriously about a working relationship between two generations of radicals, two concepts of the movement, and perhaps even two interpretations of civilization. To make matters harder, this discussion must be carried out primarily within the university where the ground rules are essentially authoritarian and where the generation gap is a sign of status.



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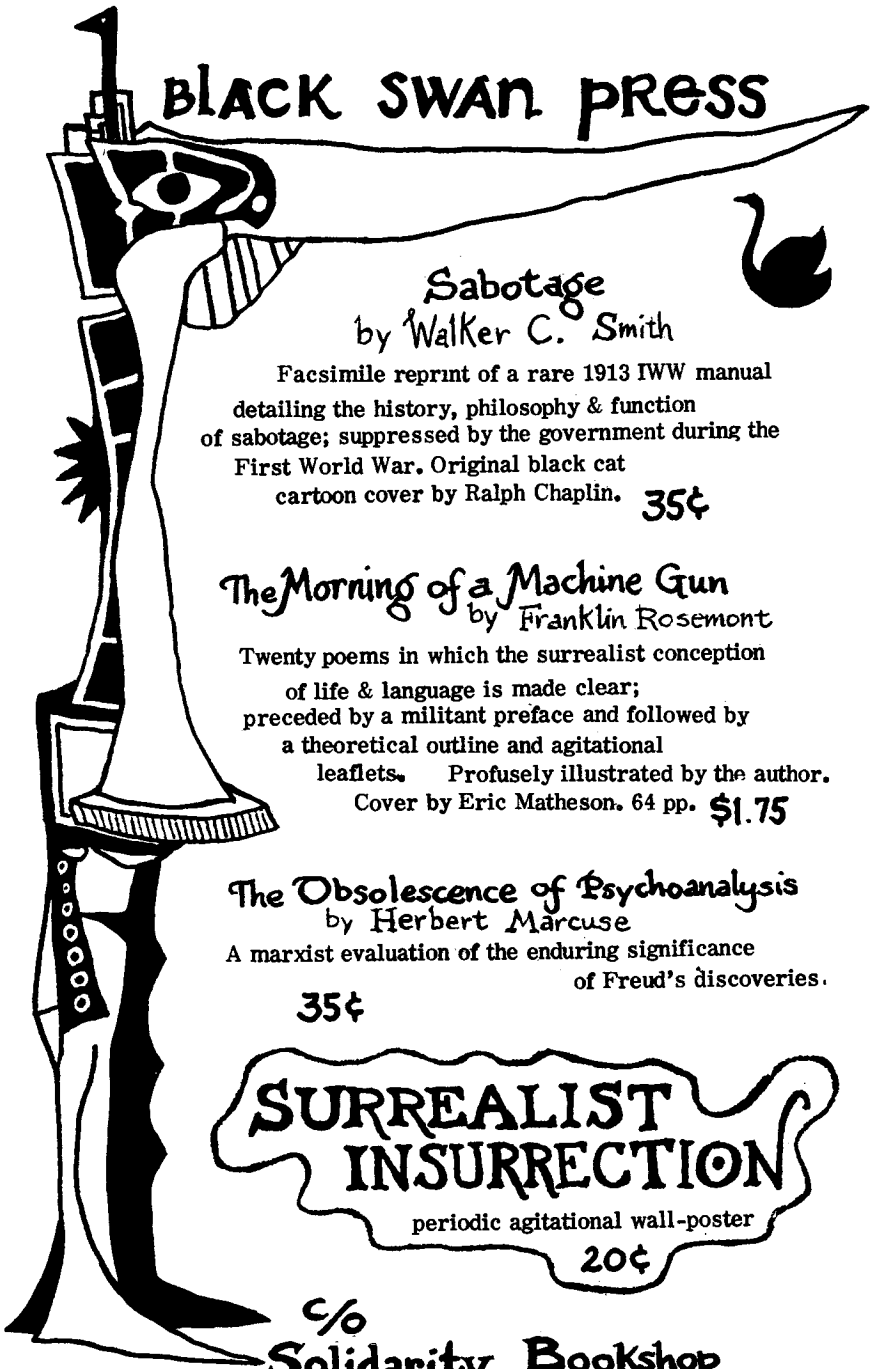
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