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THE STATE OF THE MOVEMENT

(Editorial Note: We are proud to reserve this issue for an article on the state of the Left by Professor Leonard P. Liggio. Of all the libertarians in this country, Leonard Liggio has had the closest long-time association with the New Left and with its most important publications. In the light of this special knowledge, Professor Liggio's analysis of the current state of the Left takes on particular importance. Leonard Liggio teaches history at the City College of the City University of New York.)

BY LEONARD P. LIGGIO

I

The Movement has been facing the disintegration of the primary centers of the New Left, especially SDS, with confusion and dismay. What is really necessary is rational, cool-headed and realistic analysis. First, the general reaction of confusion and dismay reflects both emotionalism and conservatism (the same thing ultimately)—sadness at the loss of something familiar. Second, it reflects a refusal to face reality, to understand the current state of the Movement on the basis of analysis of the past and allocation of responsibility.

The Movement is defined by the central issue of American politics—foreign affairs. American imperialism, abroad and imposed on the Black nation on this continent, establishes the American political spectrum. The Movement is the opposition to that imperialism. While the issues were not presented as clearly in the first half of the 1960's, in 1965 it became unquestioned. Vietnam has been world historically significant on a multitude of levels. The Movement's progenitors were the remnants whose commitment to anti-U.S. imperialism survived the New Deal's intervention in 1941: the Old Right, pacifists, and independent socialists. What had not been united by common ideology before, was fused by the common fate of sedition trials, FBI harassment, draft resistance convictions, etc. during the Second World War. A decade later this decimated group provided the chief opposition to U.S. intervention in Korea.

Draft resistance is the major focus of anti-imperialist activity. As a result those imprisoned for draft resistance have historically been the moral leadership of the Movement—after what they have suffered there is little more that the State can do. Dave Dellinger served his prison term for heroic opposition in the Second World War just as Larry Gara and Staughton Lynd did during the Korean War. Of that period, Michael Harrington wrote:

Thus the leading figures in the pacifist peace movement in the early '50's—among them A. J. Muste, Dorothy Day and David Dellinger—were from an earlier political generation. By and large they were isolated from the mainstream of American liberalism which supported the containment policies of the Truman Administration, backed the Korean War and

had not yet reacted to the H-Bomb. And being without any great political influence, they found themselves having to devote most of their efforts to defending their own political ideas: raising funds to aid conscientious objectors and draft resisters and fighting the government, particularly the FBI, which tended to confuse all opposition with support of the Soviet Union. ("The New Peace Movement", *The New Leader*, August 20, 1962.)

Opposing corporate liberalism, aiding draft resisters and fighting the government—the essentials remain constant!

When the Johnson-Humphrey administration escalated the U. S. intervention in Vietnam in early 1965, a unique grass-roots response developed on college campuses—the teach-ins. Spontaneous individual opposition to the government was offered the dual opportunity of immediate protest and of information for continuing protest. The teach-ins were organized by faculty and student groups, frequently including the local SDS chapter. The government's reaction was swift: to try to discourage them and where that was not possible to send out government speakers to repeat Dean Rusk's brilliant analysis of world affairs. On each campus the teach-ins became the starting point for long-term organizing against the war among the students and among their neighbors. But, their non-continuation relieved the government of the daily indications of grass-roots opposition represented in every college teach-in.

SDS played a central role in these events, since its radical opposition attracted thousands of students who were awakened politically by the war. SDS itself became temporarily paralyzed after the summer of 1965. Its opposition to the government had lost its last friends among defenders of the American welfare state, starting with Irving Howe. It was in that milieu that some of the old guard SDS leadership had received its inspiration; and yet the popularly elected president, Carl Oglesby, and vice president, Jeff Shero, represented the large number of new members drawn from all over the country (bad-mouthed as "Texas anarchists" by the Old Guard). This newer group was described at the time by Staughton Lynd:

In SDS as in SNCC workers seek to apply the participatory philosophy to their own organizations, ask that central offices be abolished, leaders rotated, and executive committees be curbed by general staff meetings . . . For the moment participatory democracy cherishes the practice of parallelism as a way of saying No to organized American, and of initiating the unorganized into the experience of self-government. The SNCC or SDS worker does not build a parallel institution to impose an ideology on it. He views himself as a catalyst, helping to create an environment which will help the local people to decide what they want . . . In the meantime the very existence of the parallel institutions is felt to be a healthier and

more genuine experience than any available alternative. It seems better to sit in the back of the room in silent protest against the bureaucrats up front than to seek to elect a man to join the executive committee. ("The New Radicals and 'Participatory Democracy'", *Dissent*, Summer 1965.)

With native American genius the SDS mass membership opted for direct opposition to U. S. imperialism—by confrontation with the draft. Coming from within the American people, they did not fear the Justice Department, Federal Courts or the rest of the U. S. apparatus of repression. The SDS Old Guard, however, faced by the FBI, sought the familiar cover of the government's apron strings, and using its vast liberal contacts in the Johnson-Humphrey administration, it managed to blunt SDS opposition during the fall of 1965. In this situation, others began to fish in troubled waters.

II

A coalition of groups was formed in Berkeley in the fall of 1965 to hold a mass demonstration against the war. Instead of the long-term organizing and hard ideological work that characterized the New Left, the Berkeley march was based upon the idea that U. S. aggression in Vietnam could be stopped quickly by the impression made upon the government by a mass demonstration. While one-shot mass action appealed to the traditions of the Old Left, the underlying conception was something different—the politics of theatre. Emphasis was placed upon publicity, any kind of publicity, for its own sake. The march was supposed to shake the foundations of imperial America by the "energy" that theatrical politics represented. This introduction of the theatre of politics alongside serious political work has had profound consequences, for it occurred simultaneously with the widespread introduction of the drug culture and was viewed as the politicized aspect of that culture.

That this occurred at Berkeley was not accidental. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement in the fall of 1964 against the educational factory system was one of the most revealing events of the 1960's. Its target, Clark Kerr, was the monarch of the academic establishment. One of his foremost contributions to contemporary civilization was the recommendation that to prevent rebellion against the "new slavery" (Clark Kerr's own term) that current American bureaucracy represents, the general use of drugs among the population should be introduced during leisure hours. Is it accidental that as the opposition and resistance to the Vietnam aggression became widespread among educated American youth, vast infusions of drugs occurred throughout the United States? Principals of high schools in major metropolitan areas permit the known selling of "foreign mud", as the Chinese call drugs, since it maintains their primary objective—order, which would otherwise be disturbed by the students' rage against the compulsory education system. As Henry Anderson has noted:

What is needed is not more people blasted out of their minds. There are more than enough people out of their minds already, including almost all the world's statesmen. What is needed is more people in their minds—their right minds. It is not really humanizing to hallucinate that everything is lovable, loving and lovely. For everything is not. What is needed is more people who can see what is really there . . . Nothing pleases the keepers of our political-economic zoo more than contented, amiable, unambitious inmates. Nothing displeases them more than critics who voice their discontents and do something affirmative about them. Aldous Huxley perceived this clearly in *Brave New World*, and it is one of the ironies in this vale of ironies that Huxley himself became enthralled by what he had earlier perceived as one of the techniques of Anti-Man.

That irony is all the more significant for libertarians since

Huxley's example contributed mightily to getting libertarianism of its promising organizational and literary potential (in southern California typically); mescaline cultism in the late 1950's made libertarianism the weak reed it is today.

The Berkeley Free Speech Movement raised very significant issues about American society and its domination by corporate liberals. The role of libertarians in its leadership was heartening. However, it may be meaningful that once the Vietnam intervention had escalated and raised the level of consciousness, local libertarians tended to abandon their leadership roles and refused to participate in the development of the anti-war protest that led to the massive Vietnam Day rally at Berkeley in late May. Local libertarians were indeed denouncing the anti-war activists and leading the "filthy speech movement" instead. Why? Libertarians must examine their attitudes to explain their continuous failure to participate in meaningful opposition to the government, and their attraction to irrelevant actions. Libertarians must be credited with positive stands opposing the draft and contributing to the New Left's attack on conscription. But once that was achieved there was a tendency to reject long-term commitment to the practice of that policy and the inspiration of other policies consistent with it. Except for the rare individual libertarians, young and mature, who wrote, spoke or acted publicly against the war, the libertarians' silence on such real issues have been deafening. And then they wonder why they are not taken seriously.

III

During 1966 the Movement regained its momentum and its media-centered politics was balanced by serious organizing programs. This new impetus in SDS was the result of the emergence of "Prairie Power"; a real takeoff in the Movement had occurred. (Those interested in Movement thinking during this transition period should read the essays of SDS and SNCC organizers, and comments including Ronald Hamowy's "Left and Right Meet" in Andrew Kopkind (ed), *Thoughts of Young Radicals*.) SDS engaged in quiet, efficient and successful organizing. It boycotted all mass demonstrations.

Among the reasons they were successful was the loose organizational and ideological nature of SDS. With almost no real national bureaucracy, each organizer and each autonomous chapter established its own forms, its own place, its own image. Since there was little official SDS ideology, and what there was was populist and libertarian, it was attractive to the large numbers of American students who were growing conscious of their opposition to the educational factory system, the bureaucracy, the draft and the war. They could develop politically in a Movement which could desire victory of the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam while wishing their own victory in America on a different set of priorities and philosophy. SDS's decentralization permitted the articulation of people's natural instincts for freedom.

If numbers of libertarians had participated in this development there was every reason to expect that libertarian inclinations could have been clarified into a consistent libertarian philosophy. At the time Movement people hoped very much that libertarians would participate actively. But libertarians generally attacked the New Left and criticized the few libertarians who understood the importance of the Movement to the future growth of libertarianism and the importance of libertarianism to the future growth of the Movement. No libertarian can honestly criticize the Movement who has participated in it. To those who bemoan the current situation of the New Left, one must legitimately ask: where were the libertarians when their participation would have made a difference?

Thus, in the absence of any number of consistent libertarians in the Movement, the natural instincts in SDS

became confused. This confusion was aided by the entry into SDS of members of traditional socialist groups. Although traditional socialist groups hated SDS for its anarchism, *their* response was not criticism but participation. Just as libertarians assumed important roles in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and anti-draft resistance because they had a consistent ideological analysis of affairs, so with the refusal of libertarians to participate, others with a consistent ideological analysis, in this case socialists, naturally assumed leading roles. In the reaction of SDS activists to this process, many became psychologically exhausted and retired, while others sought to fight the socialists organizationally without opposing their philosophy. In the end these activists rationalized their complete alienation from the rank and file of SDS and, in the last year, abandoned the rank-and-file SDS (after pestering them with their socialistic harangues), and sought a new rank-and-file among the street corner youth and the drug culture.

The roots of that turn in direction had two sources. One was the recognition after these elements in SDS had adopted socialism that the American blue- and white-collar worker as well as the SDS-oriented college student all rejected socialism as the means of liberation from total slavery in America. Second was the widespread growth of the hippie culture with its adoption of conservative, i. e., communitarian, ideas. The hippies with their biblical coats of many colors, modes of life, etc. became a ready attraction for the picture-oriented newsmedia. Their publicity attraction to the media was a magnet to those who, in contrast to the serious SDS organizers for whom anonymity was a primary premise, felt that publicity and politics were the same things. Some of the publicity-minded organizers of the Berkeley mass march, such as Jerry Rubin, had made the claim that the hippies were the revolutionaries. Along with Abbie Hoffman, a protest at the Pentagon in the fall of 1967 was turned into a hippie "happening" to levitate the Pentagon. (While politicized hippies were charging the ranks of the airborne division—once they had broken through they did not know why they had done it and withdrew—a last-minute SDS decision to send experienced organizers resulted in their convincing several dozen troops to defect and led to the new development of GI organizing.) From that "happening" the sky was the limit for media-oriented politics and the Yippie party was established to run a pig in the 1968 presidential election. Membership in the Yippie party never exceeded three but the media treated it as though it had fifty million. Why?

Perhaps some explanation is to be found in the following comment by Irving Howe, prince of the right-wing socialist gang who form the intellectual vanguard defending the existing academic system and who represent everything that libertarians are against. After abstracting the political New Left from his comments, he discussed the cultural New Left:

The "new leftist" appears, at times, as a figure embodying a style of speech, dress, work and culture. Often, especially if white, the son of the middle class . . . he asserts his rebellion against the deceit and hollowness of American society. Very good; there is plenty to rebel against . . . He tends to think of style as the very substance of his revolt, and while he may, on one side of himself, engage in valuable activities in behalf of civil rights, student freedom, etc., he nevertheless tacitly accepts the "givenness" of American society, has little hope or expectation of changing it, and thereby, in effect, settles for a mode of personal differentiation.

Primarily that means the wish to shock, the wish to assault the sensibilities of a world he cannot overcome. If he cannot change it, then at least he can outrage it . . . But "the new leftist" is frequently trapped in a symbiotic relationship with the very middle class he rejects, dependent upon it for his self-definition: quite as the professional anti-Com-

munist of a few years ago was caught up with the Communist party which, had it not existed, he would have had to invent—as indeed at times he did invent. So that for all its humor and charm, the style of the "new leftist" tends to become a rigid anti-style, dependent for its survival on the enemy it is supposed to panic. To *épater le bourgeois*—in this case, perhaps, to *épater le pere*—is to acquiesce in a basic assumption of at least the more sophisticated segments of the middle class: that values can be inferred from, or are resident in, the externals of dress, appearance, furnishings and hair-dos . . .

Victimized by a lack of the historical sense, the "new leftist" does not realize that the desire to shock and create sensations has itself a long and largely disastrous history. The notion, as Meyer Schapiro has remarked, that opium is the revolution of the people has been luring powerless intellectuals and semi-intellectuals for a long time. But the damnable thing is that for an almost equally long time the more sophisticated and urban sectors of the middle class have refused to be shocked. They know the repertoire of sensationalism quite as well as the "new leftist"; and if he is to succeed in shocking them or even himself, he must keep raising the ante. ("New Styles in 'Leftism'", *Dissent*, Summer 1965.)

The shared commitment of adult and youth to physical externals explains the media's insatiable hunger for new sensations and avoidance of serious political values. Among the media's creations has been the Black Panthers.

IV

Huey Newton had a brilliant approach to resistance to oppression: by tailing the Oakland police in the ghetto and insisting on police observance of ordinary civil liberties; Newton's insistence on the vindication of every person's right to carry arms was another positive contribution. However, the media found this a new sensation, and instead of encouraging Black people in other cities to develop similar neighborhood self-defense programs the Panthers launched a national party that imposed local units in other cities. The media trap has been literally fatal to the Panthers. The ever-thoughtful Julius Lester has offered an excellent analysis:

I see around me almost an entire generation of black youth being martyred needlessly and because I have been a part of the movement, because I have contributed my thinking to this revolution of ours, I must bear some of the responsibility for the needless deaths. It takes more than guts to make a revolution. It takes more than courage to risk one's life for an ideal. It takes more than a willingness to die. It takes sense enough to know when to say "Advance" and when to say "Retreat". It takes sense enough to know what your organization can do and what it can't do. Because one has a gun and some bullets doesn't mean to go out and shoot a cop. Cops, guns and bullets are not in short supply. They'll be there whenever one is ready. Prior to that, however, one needs to build himself a base, so that when he proceeds to shoot that copy, he has minimized as much as possible the dangers of losing his own life . . . The deaths of Hampton and Clark were needless because they were totally without protection against what eventually happened. If they had a base in the black community, the police would not have dared come in and shoot them in cold blood. The Black Panther Party has support within the black community, but it has no real base. Its base is among the white radicals. Black America has related to the Panthers as involved spectators at a football game. They have not been involved as active participants. And because they have not, it is a simple matter

for the police to come into the community and take off whomever it wants to . . . Just as it hurts the parent of a soldier killed in Vietnam that his child died for no reason, it hurts to say the same about Hampton and Clark. But it must be said in the hope that some lives will be saved . . . The young are the revolution's most valuable resource. The Panthers have used that resource irresponsibly, endangering lives when it was not necessary, and most of all, by adhering to a politics of romanticism, not revolution, a politics which enshrines the dead and does little for the living . . . And tactically, the Panthers should be supported . . . Though I find the politics of the Panthers to be, in great part, but not wholly, destructive, it is impossible to forget that the Black Panther Party is composed of individuals . . . I must oppose the organization and support the individuals in it whom 'the man' is trying to take off. (*Liberation*, February 1970.)

White radicals have been committed to media showmanship and not to serious politics. When SNCC in 1966 emphasized the concept of Black Power among Black people, the white former organizers of SNCC were asked to organize their fellow white people. For white America's liberation was the best thing possible for Black America's liberation. But this path was not pursued, since it was realized that organizing white Americans was not possible when grounded on the socialist concepts being espoused in SDS. Instead, SDS's leadership attacked those in the Movement who did begin such work. Thus, in April, 1969, at the Austin national council meeting, SDS condemned SSOC (Southern Student Organizing Committee centered in Nashville), which along with SNCC was SDS's fraternal associate. SSOC had been founded by the southern whites who had worked in SNCC. With the Confederate flag as its symbol it sought to develop political consciousness of their oppression among southern whites on the basis of their equally separate culture. The assault on SSOC was the clearest signal to the Movement of the New Left's organizational disintegration. Carl Oglesby has commented:

At the last SDS Thing I was at, the Austin NC, the handwriting was already on the wall . . . For a long time I was baffled. Last fall the word began to reach me: It was being said that I had "bad politics". How could that be, I wondered, since I thought I had no politics at all. But by winter I conceded the point: no politics is the same as bad politics. So there followed a time in which I experimented with only the "mass line". It didn't come to much. My mind and my instincts only became adversaries. By spring I had to deactivate, couldn't function, had to float. What I know now is that this did not happen to me alone. On every quarter of the white Left, high and low, the attempt to reduce the New Left's inchoate vision to the Old Left's perfected remembrance has produced a layer of bewilderment and demoralization which no cop with his club or senator with his committee could ever have induced . . . SDS will have to take its share of the blame for this. Much more interested in shining with the borrowed light of Panther charisma than in asking all the hard practical questions, much more interested in laying out the metaphysical maxims that identify the "vanguard" than in assuming real political responsibility, this SDS, which so often chews its own tongue for being "petty bourgeois", must shamefully confess its origins precisely when it tries to vainly transcend them in worship of "solidarity" which really amounts to so much hero-worship . . . it is not lost causes, however heroic, or martyrs, however fine, that our movement needs. It needs shrewd politicians and concrete social programs. Not theoretical (really theological) proofs that The People Will Win in the End, but tangible social achievements now. Not the defiance of a small, isolated band of supercharged

cadre who, knowing they stand shoulder to shoulder with mankind itself, will face repression with the inner peace of early Christians, but a mounting fugue of attacks on political crime of all sorts, on all fronts, at all levels of aspiration, from all sectors and classes of the population, so that repression can never rest, never find a fixed or predictable target. (*Liberation*, August-September 1969; this special issue has not been as widely read as it deserves.)

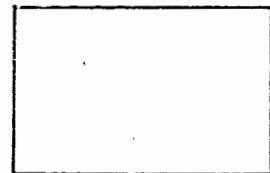
V

The restoration of good politics is required for the Movement's future. The disappearance of organizational efforts which practiced bad politics is a very favorable development and is a reflection of the basic health of the Movement. Furthermore, the conditions from which the Movement sprang have intensified. The factory educational system has not been restructured; the military system has not been abolished. Yet those who are subject to those systems, who are in schools and have to arrange their future choices facing taxes on their bodies and on their incomes to maintain militarism, are increasing daily. The overwhelming significance of this was presented in a special issue of *Fortune*, "American Youth: Its Outlook is Changing the World" (January 1969), which is must reading for anyone interested in the Movement; particularly important are the articles "A Special Kind of Rebellion" by Daniel Seligman, and "Student Activists: Free-Form Revolutionaries" by Charles Burck. The latter concludes: "Philosophically, what seems likely to be most durable is the Movement's strong individualism and its quest for personal freedom."

Seligman emphasizes that youth would be important today if only by their sheer numbers; additionally, "there is undeniably something special in the educational level of today's youth. Educated youth have to be taken seriously in any society; even when they condemn it bitterly, they are presumed to be its future leaders. Almost eight million members of the young generation today are or have been in college (versus about two million for that 1938 group). No other society in history has ever had to deal with mass educated youth." But *Fortune* is concerned not merely with college youth but with what it calls the "forerunners" among college students. "Forerunners", now almost 45% of college students, are those whose attitudes differ from others in college, but whose attitudes will become increasingly prevalent in society. Thus, *Fortune* emphasizes that it is not a question of a generation gap, which has the agreeable implication that this younger generation will accommodate eventually to the State. It is the attitudes of the 'forerunners' that will become dominant in America; "this particular young generation is by all odds the most interesting to come along in all of U.S. history," *Fortune* editorialized, "it will shortly preside over the revolutionary changes that await us."

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