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REPORT FROM ST. LOUIS:

The Revolution Comes To YAF

BY JEROME TUCCILLE

The place was Stouffer's Riverfront Inn, St. Louis, Missouri.

The time, August 38-31, 1969.

The occasion, the annual National Convention of the "conservative" student organization, Young Americans for Freedom.

It had been apparent for six months and longer that the leadership of YAF, a traditionally conservative youth organization since the days of its inception in 1961, was being challenged from within by a persistent group of disaffected intellectuals. Just how strong they were, how many they numbered, was impossible to say. Their presence within YAF was revealed every now and then through the publication in *The New Guard*, the official YAF magazine, of an occasional article dealing with anarchist philosophy or the organization and operation of an anarchist society. But, by and large, *The New Guard* reflected the conservative thinking of the majority of its readership.

On the surface, there was no indication whatsoever of any major confrontation arising at the convention. Key speakers for the occasion, secured by the conservative YAF leadership, included the usual right-wing luminaries: William F. Buckley, William Rusher, Al Capp (Yes, Al Capp!), Fulton Lewis III, Barry Goldwater, Jr., Phyllis Schafly, Phillip Abbott Luce; major emphasis in the various seminars was placed on formulating an effective strategy for combatting the New Left on campus. All in all, if one merely read the proposed agenda circulated several weeks before the convention, it promised to be a routine exhortation of everyone to the left of Richard Nixon and Billy Graham, with maybe a few wrist-slapping comments for George Wallace and the fire-breathing ultra right.

However, several hours before opening session a group of New York rebels distributed the August 15th issue of *The Libertarian Forum* which contained an open letter to the convention from Dr. Murray N. Rothbard, urging the libertarians to split completely from the conservative movement.

At the same time, rumors were circulated to the effect that Karl Hess was arriving in St. Louis to address the convention on opening night. Since he was not a scheduled speaker, the implication here was that a demonstration would have to be staged by the radicals to demand that Hess be given a chance to express the opposition point of view.

The conservatives, applying their overkill mentality to this potential crisis, were visibly dismayed by the fact that the rebels had come up with a "name" speaker of their own. The fact that the YAF leadership had loaded the convention with some sixteen hard-line conservatives of impeccable *anti-communist* credentials was, apparently, not enough. The enemy had come up with Hess as a gesture of defiance, and the only thing to do, of course, was "escalate" their side of the conflict.

To make matters worse for the conservative point of view, Barry Goldwater, Jr. sent word prior to the convention--evidently upon hearing that there might be some 'trouble' in St. Louis--that he could not attend. He suddenly felt a need to be with his constituents over the Labor Day weekend.

At approximately 4:30 P.M., just three and a half hours before William Buckley was scheduled to deliver the opening address, Karl Hess' son, Karl Hess IV, received word that his father would not be permitted to speak on the floor of the convention. Also, many of the anarchist and radical libertarian delegates discovered that they were having difficulty receiving the proper credentials which would admit them for the voting session on Saturday. Young Hess announced to the press that a 'mini-convention' would be held under the arch, the symbolic gateway to the west, at 11:00 P.M. following Buckley's speech. His father was arriving later that evening and would speak to any dissident YAFers who wished to hear his remarks.

Realizing that a major split was underway--made all the more apparent by the heavy television and press attention the anarchists were receiving as they arrived in St. Louis with their black flags unfurled--William F. Buckley called a press conference at 5:30 P.M. Buckley was questioned mainly as to the nature and seriousness of the imminent split which now threatened to disrupt the entire convention. He denied that the confrontation was serious, claiming that the dissident element was too miniscule to be of any real importance. At this point, Karl Hess IV, leader of YAF's Anarcho-Libertarian Alliance, Walter Block and myself acting as spokesmen for the Radical Libertarian Alliance, broke into the conference and invited Buckley publicly to debate with Hess under the arch later that night, since the YAF leadership would not provide for such an encounter as

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part of the official proceedings. Buckley declined, stating that he had an article to write that evening and, in any event, he did not think the issue was important enough that it could not wait until a later date.

Now the breach was visible, having been made an issue in Buckley's own press conference, and the only question that now remained was *how many* dissident YAFers would split off to the open-air meeting in support of the opposition. The matter remained in abeyance until 8:00 P.M., at which time the convention was officially declared open. But before Mr. Buckley could be introduced to the crowd, a delegation of California anarchists staged a demonstration, demanding that their chapter chairman, Pat Dowd, who had earlier been dismissed for his radical views, be given a seat with the delegates on the stage. The demonstration would have remained a procedural one, rotating around the seating of the ousted chairman, had the conservatives not sent up a ringing chant in support of Buckley. Cries of, "We want Buckley! We want Buckley!" now dinned throughout the ballroom, only to be met with the opposition call, "We want Hess! We want Hess!"

It was only now that the press and the conventioners themselves had a chance to estimate the size of the dissident faction. The ferocity of the cries in opposition to the conservatives clearly startled the traditionalist contingent which now stated chanting the official slogan of the convention:

"Sock it to the Left! Sock it to the Left!"

"Sock it to the State! Sock it to the State!" was the answer to this new attempt to drown them out.

Finally, after a half-hour delay during which the ousted California chairman succeeded in claiming his seat upon the stage, William F. Buckley rose to deliver the official opening remarks of the convention.

The fact that he was, indeed, more than just a little concerned over the size of the opposition forces present in the hall was immediately apparent by the direction of his speech. The first fifteen minutes was devoted to a ringing denunciation of Rothbard's open letter to the convention, and criticism of some remarks made by Karl Hess in the same issue of their *Libertarian Forum*. As usual for Buckley, his excoriation dealt with the style rather than the content of the letter, as if the main crime committed was their bad manners in confronting the issues head on rather than fondling them like gentlemen. He continued his speech with the usual conservative tirade about the perils of international communism and our need to arm ourselves at all costs and defend our nation even "unto the consummation of the world."

Presumably, then, we would all go to heaven with the Pope for blowing up the earth in the name of God.

Another interesting fact worth mentioning here is Mr. Buckley's attitude on the question of freedom. In his speech he mentioned that freedom is for those who agree to live within the framework of our traditions. Those who deny these traditions become "*excommunicants*" who then lose their right to the freedom guaranteed by our constitutional republic. Here, precisely, is the mystical element in the conservative mentality which has pushed them so far apart from their former allies: the notion that freedom is a gift to be dispensed among our worthy citizens by a moralistic government. The anarchists claim that freedom is a natural right, and if the state denies it to its citizens, they have a right to seize it themselves.

At 11:00 P.M., following the opening ceremonies, a slow trickle of students began heading for the silver arch dazzling in the moonlight. Gradually their numbers grew, swelling to a crowd of some three hundred sprawled along the hillside beneath the arch facing the Mississippi. Hess, surrounded by his son and other leaders of the radical faction, then delivered his now familiar message. The

YAF Power Play

In an article written on the St. Louis convention, "Young Authoritarians for 'Freedom'", our anarcho-libertarian comrade, Joseph M. Cobb, former editor of the *New Individualist Review*, contributes an important insight about the racket inherent in the YAF organization. Speaking with one of the founders and long-time leaders of YAF at the convention, Cobb was surprised to find this leader admitting the following:

The anarchists, he charged, were "ruining everything". Why? Because, Cobb reports, the "National Office of YAF is playing a double game with the older generation of businessmen and politicians, and making it pay"—pay in the form of plush offices, high salaries, and expense accounts. From these right-wing moneybags YAF raises a great deal of money for such theocratic programs, beloved of the right-wing, as the "Campaign for Voluntary Prayer" in public schools. But few students would be attracted by such programs, so programs such as the prayer campaign "generated money which was used to cover money-losing projects, but ones which the kids dig --such as abolishing the draft." Thus, the YAF leadership obtain money for right-wing causes, but then must use part of the money to attract a mass base of kids, without whom the money would disappear in the long run--thus making YAF a kind of two-way racket. Cobb adds that "YAF is upset because these crazy kids, with their principled opposition to the state, are going to overturn the National Office's carefully balanced financial-ideological system."

Cobb concludes with the important insight that "the only way the National Office people can get away with their programs for fund-raising and semi-reformist free-marketism is to promote the philosophy of "fusionism"! . . . Fusionism is a pseudo-philosophy which attempts to reconcile the libertarian anti-statist position with the traditional conservative authoritarianism. The fusionists are almost perfect examples of the Marxist sociology-of-ideas theory: each social class will invent ideas which further its own class interests."

Right had abandoned its stated principles championing the individual. Power to the People was formerly an old Republican concept, and was now a policy of the New Left. The conservatives, heretofore critical of our expanding federal bureaucracy, were now aggrandizing more power unto the state in order to fight 'the communist menace'. The chief threat to liberty in the United States was not the splintered radical left, but the efficient, and near-omnipotent United States government. Decentralization and neighborhood control was the only answer for the growing urban crisis, and the Right must join forces with the New Left in a united attempt to realize these goals.

The Hess message was a popular one for those assembled on the hillside--an estimated 20-25% of the total 1200 attending the convention--but his endorsement of a Libertarian Right and New Left coalition clearly polarized the group into two broad camps. The more radical element was enthusiastic about joining forces with at least some libertarian (voluntary commune) factions of the New Left; the more conservative were visibly disturbed and registered some doubts about the "inherent totalitarian tendencies" of collectivism, whether voluntary or otherwise. After Hess' speech, the crowd broke up into discussion groups, and that's how the night ended at approximately 3:00 A.M., with a dozen units of concerned students debating issues under the stars.

The main hope of the conservatives the following morning was to divide their opposition into two weak and ineffectual camps. These would be the more "conservative" liber-

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tarians who were interested in working within YAF to elect their own directors to the National Board which was completely controlled by hard-line Buckleyites, and to adopt a few libertarian planks into the official platform, calling for: active resistance against the draft; a denunciation of domestic fascism as a twin evil to international communism; legalization of marijuana; immediate pull-out from Vietnam; several changes in YAF's official Sharon Statement; and an assortment of other pertinent resolutions. These libertarians, led by Don Ernsberger and Dana Rohrabacher, were by far the larger of the two dissident groups, claiming over three hundred members for their Libertarian Caucus.

The second faction of rebels consisted of radical libertarians of anarchists, most of them belonging to Karl Hess IV's Anarcho-Libertarian Alliance. This contingent was more interested in splitting off from YAF entirely and forming a new alliance with New Left anarchists and anti-statists. They numbered no more than fifty hard-core radicals, but had high hopes of siphoning off as many of the libertarian group as possible by the end of the convention.

The second day proceeded pretty well along the lines that the conservatives had planned. Except for Dr. Harold Demsetz' speech in the morning enumerating various benefits of the free market, the general tone of the speeches of the day was a hammering away at the negative theme of anti-communism.

But if Friday was a field day for the conservatives, Saturday would be remembered as the day on which all those of even quasi-libertarian sentiment consolidated their forces in general disgust against the whole tone of the convention. The session opened at 11:30 A.M., an hour and a half later than scheduled. The first ninety minutes were occupied by challenges from the floor on the seating of delegates, with the libertarians charging that many of their people were being purged by the conservative leadership in order to minimize their strength during the voting for directors to the National Board and platform resolutions.

Finally the rollcall of states began. The Libertarian Caucus was basing its hope on a slate of nine candidates ranging ideologically from moderate libertarian to anarchist. If two or three of their candidates were elected, and perhaps one or two of their minority plank resolutions passed, the Ernsberger group would have considered it a victory and divorced themselves entirely from the radical Anarcho-Libertarian Alliance. However, this was not to be the case. Before half the roll was called, it was evident that every one of the libertarian candidates was being thoroughly routed and the conservatives eventually succeeded in electing all their candidates to the nine available positions. It was at this point that talk of a walk-out began

Note On Libertarians

It is dramatic and heartwarming that the Revolution has come to YAF. But the euphoria engendered by St. Louis must not be allowed to obscure the fact that this Revolution has not yet succeeded, for the moderate "Libertarian Caucus" has largely decided to stay within this authoritarian organization, to work from within for change. As long as they continue to do so, they will continue to provide a libertarian cover for fascism. They may have been radicalized by the confrontation at St. Louis, but they clearly have not been radicalized enough. To discover why this is so, the curious phenomenon of "conservative" libertarians or even anarchists must be analyzed at length, and this will be done in the next issue of the *Libertarian Forum*.

to spread, for the first time, into the ranks of the moderate libertarians.

Next came the voting on the minority platform resolutions. Disaffection spread rapidly among the entire opposition as, one by one, they saw their resolutions hammered down by the conservatives: immediate withdrawal from Vietnam--defeated; legalization of marijuana--tabled; denunciation of domestic fascism--hooted down and defeated. Then came the issue which was finally to polarize the convention into two hostile, openly-warring camps. The libertarians offered their resolution advocating active resistance to the military draft, and saw it trampled by a solid majority. It was after the reading of the majority plank on the draft which limited anti-draft agitation to legal channels, that the event took place which was to force everyone present to make an instant decision: either in support of the conservative majority, or against them with the radical libertarians. There could no longer be any room for fence-straddling.

A young man, who shall remain nameless for obvious reasons, stepped forward and grabbed a microphone in the center of the floor. Clearly announcing that it was the right of every individual to defend himself from violence, including state violence, he lifted a card, touched it with a flame from a cigarette lighter, and lifted it over his head while it burned freely into a curling black ash. For fifteen or twenty seconds the hall was locked in numb silence, finally to be shattered by an enraged war cry:

"Kill the commies!"

The next second can best be described as the instant radicalization of the moderate libertarians. While the first onrushers were knocked back by five or six radicals surrounding the "criminal commie", the ranks of the Libertarian Caucus solidified into a barrier separating the radicals from the howling conservative majority. In the swinging and pushing which followed, the young student who had triggered the melee escaped outside the convention hall. The libertarians, stepping on chairs and raising their fists against the conservatives, sent up a chant:

"Laissez faire! Laissez faire!"

There was no question where they stood now: in clear opposition to the conservative majority.

The majority found their own voices, and howled back in reply:

"Sock it to the Left! Sock it to the Left!"

This was countered with:

"Sock it to the State! Sock it to the State!"

The issues were clearly drawn, and three hundred and fifty libertarians suddenly found themselves in violent opposition to their former conservative allies numbering some eight or nine hundred strong. It took the best part of the next half hour to calm everyone down and get them outside the convention hall. In the early evening hours that followed, the conservatives met privately and passed a resolution condemning the card-burning act as "illegal", and denouncing the radicals as being "outside the mainstream of Young Americans for Freedom" (echoes of 1964).

This was not to be the end of the visible conflict separating the two groups. Later that night, while the libertarians were conducting their own meeting to discuss future strategy, a swarm of conservatives went stomping throughout the floors of the inn shouting: "Kill the libertarians! Kill the libertarians!" Suddenly it dawned on the minority opposition exactly who their main enemy really was. The New Left? New Leftists had never demanded the blood of the anti-statist Right. The situation was so shocking to some of the instantly-radicalized that there was even talk of traveling only in groups, and locking themselves into their rooms.

However, this defensive attitude was not to last for any considerable length of time. The smell of success had been

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too exhilarating. In the corridor outside the main convention hall, Dana Rohrabacher, Don Ernsberger, and several of the "moderate" libertarian group were actually setting the pace for the radical anarchists. The former moderates were now painting placards with anarchist slogans--"Smash the State!" "I am an enemy of the State!"--and posting them up on the walls. While a chorus of boos greeted them from conservative onlookers, Rohrabacher mounted a chair and started the now-familiar cry:

"Laissez faire! Laissez faire!"

This was picked up instantly by about a hundred fifty of the former moderates, and now it was their turn to go tromping through the corridors of the hotel, forcing the conservatives to scurry into locked rooms. When the

counter-demonstration finally exhausted itself, the conservatives managed to muster a small counter-counter-offensive, chanting the cry, "Lazy fairies!" as they passed the radicals, thereby putting themselves in the unique position of repudiating their own economic philosophy and openly embracing our current system of state-corporate fascism.

The climax of the convention for the radicals came in the form of a meeting of all the libertarian and anarchist groups, including two SDS anarchist chapters. The meeting decided to form a communications network to keep all the organizations, including any New Left organizations that care to participate, in continuous contact with one another. This new loosely-knit organization will be called the Libertarian Confederation, and will be managed and operated by the Maryland-based Society for Rational Individualism.

Some of the radicals will split off entirely from YAF; others will remain on an individual basis and continue to proselytize among the conservative ranks. The most important thing to emerge from this convention is that, for the first time, the most influential forces on the Libertarian Right will be working to establish an open and working coalition with the New Left in their common struggle to resist the abuses of the United States government.

Recommended Reading

The *Tranquil Statement*. A brilliant, rip-roaring statement, adopted aboard the S. S. *Tranquil*, by the Anarchist Caucus of the Young Americans for Freedom. 15 pp. Available for 35¢ from Elizabeth Crain, 1085 National Press Building, 14th and F Sts., N. W., Washington, D. C. 20004.

Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (Pantheon). A great and unusual book. Not only the best scholarly but angry dissection of the intellectuals in the ruling class, centering on their role in Vietnam. But also excellent for World War II Revisionism in the Pacific, and Spanish War revisionism (pro-anarchist). Professor Chomsky has a clear fondness for the anarchist position.

David Horowitz, ed., *Containment and Revolution* (Beacon Press, paper). Good essays on the origins of the Cold War; includes a fine paper by Todd Gitlin on the origins of the Cold War in Greece during World War II, and an appreciation of Senator Taft by a young New Left historian.

F. J. P. Veale, *Advance to Barbarism* (Devin-Adair). It is good to have this outstanding early work of World War II Revisionism, hitherto only published in Britain, at last available in the U. S. The first work that showed that it was Britain, not Germany, that began deliberate mass strategic bombing of civilians.

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