



AMERICAN YOUTH

REVOLT: 1960 -

1969

Youth Report to NEWS & LETTERS Plenum -- Sept., 1969

NEWS & LETTERS 1900 E. Jefferson Detroit, Mich. 48207

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YOUTH REPORT TO NEWS & LETTERS PLENUM

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Never before in American revolutionary history has a decade belonged more to the youth than the decade we have just lived through. From Greensboro, N.C. Sit-In, Feb. 1960 to the Free Speech Movement, Berkeley, 1964; from Freedom Rides, Jackson, Miss. 1961 to Columbia U., 1968; from anti-Vietnam teach-in, Ann Arbor, 1965 to Peoples Park, Berkeley, 1969.

Many of us date our birth with the birth of the sit-in movement, Feb. 1960. Those of us who have just joined the movement enter onto what has been built over the past nine and a half years, mostly by young people in this country. Even to those whose history goes beyond the 1960s, it is the 60s which has given the clearest signs of a developing American Revolution.

It is this ten years which we must look at--the history of the 60s in America.

It began in the South. The black youth's South of the Sit-Ins. By the seemingly simple act of going to a lunch counter and saying we will not leave, a whole new movement of young radicals was born. All of us, especially the youth, are linked to it. The black youth who began it, inspired hundreds upon hundreds of other black youth across the South, who within days conducted sit-in upon sit-in. At the same time it inspired whites, particularly white youth, to realize a new generation was around which would not take the American racist way any longer. Support picket lines in the North involving many white students springing up. The lie was thereby given to all the talk of the apathetic, silent, at the most, rebels without a cause, generation.

The movement of the 1960s from the beginning had as its base the black revolt, just as 130 years previously the Abolitionist Movement had begun to be built on the revolt of black slaves in the South. As that movement had done, the new one of the 60s established a unity of black and white.

The Freedom Rides of 1961 re-enforced this unity. White youth from the North joined black youth from the South and rode to Jackson, Miss., when they could get that far. The Freedom Rides established CORE as an organization. SNCC was organized and began doing community work within the South. Meridian, Hattiesburg, Yazoo City, Oxford,--we know their names today because of young Civil Rights workers, black and white, who worked there in the mid 60s. They were called the New Abolitionists who worked within the South. The Mississippi Summer Project of 1960 was the end result.

Now something happens with this experience on the part of both the black youth and the white youth. Let us follow the white youth first. Berkeley is the best place. They have had the experience of the Sit-Ins, the Freedom Rides and finally the Mississippi Summer Project. They come back and begin to try and raise some money for the Civil Rights Movement. But in seeing the opposition to that by the university, they discover that the question was not only the black man in America, but all of America, including themselves at the elite schools, the knowledge factories. The question was not just middle class student sympathy for the other America of black and poor, it was now kinship. Kinship, because the same powerlessness felt by black people was found to be felt by the students, first in terms of their own universities when they wished to enroll

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them as partisans in the Civil Rights struggle. This led them to question the whole concept of education. Education for what, if not for freedom now. Second, the powerlessness was now extended to the crucial subject of the Vietnam War, which in Feb. 1965 began its tremendous expansion with the bombing of the North. This awakening brought forth the teach-in movement beginning at the University of Michigan. And with it the attention of the white youth shifted to Vietnam. In fact, we can say that there was unfortunately somewhat of a desertion of the Civil Rights movement on a part of many white youth who moved to oppose the war in Vietnam.

Students for a Democratic Society was born in the early 60s and gained its first push when it sponsored a nationwide demonstration in Washington against the war in 1965.

The first ideas of teach-ins and peace marches--a sort of moral persuasion effort--some gave rise to more active means, mobile tactics in Oakland and New York, active resistance to the draft, escape to Canada, and organizing within the army.

Now the black youth. Sixty to sixty-four had been a beacon and much changed within the South. But '63 and '64 had shown black-white tensions and frustration with the pace of the movement. One reason was that the Southern movement now tried to move north. The fight for voting rights and lunch counters, while a revolution in the South was not a revolution in the North. It was there already and yet conditions were disgusting. The white-black unity had not only included youth but white liberals. Now it was found that the white liberals who had given money and vocal support for the movement in the south wanted nothing to do and in fact opposed much of the northern movement. Thus they continued to live in segregated neighborhoods and to have interests in various businesses which exploited blacks. They wished to dictate the direction and pace of the movement in the north and the blacks rejected this. At the same time the white youth who could have fought together with the blacks were now not around. They had moved to the anti-Vietnam war movement and had in some cases been unwilling to accept black leadership.

The blacks now began to move in new directions. Black power was raised as a slogan. The inspiration of the Southern movement and the dissatisfaction with the pace and direction of the movement in the north became evident in the Revolts in Watts, Harlem, Detroit and a hundred other cities.

New organizational forms appeared. If SNCC did not choose to be more than an organizers' organization, the Black Panther Party did come forth. The movement which had been born on black Southern campuses, now found that it had to fight in Black Student Unions on predominantly white Northern campuses. Young black workers in the shops found the white liberal union leadership seeking to contain them and therefore sought out new forms of organization--black caucuses.

We have traced the 60s in one way--in terms of activities. Let us go back and retrace the 60s not so much the actions but in terms of ideas coming from and influencing those actions.

I tried to show a flow from Sit-Ins and Freedom Rides--the early Civil Rights movement to the Free Speech Movement of 1964. The flow is not explained merely by saying one followed the other and it was a natural action to support the Civil Rights movement of the South. Rather, it was the flow of ideas. The

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flow of ideas from the Civil Rights which really freed the white youth for Berkeley, 1964. What were the ideas coming out of the movement? The debates of violence versus non-violence were not the key. No, it was the idea of humanism which was coming out of the movement. Humanism is the self-activity of masses in motion. In America it surfaced first in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of '56 and now reappears in the 60s with the sit-ins, Freedom Rides, work in the South, and with youth leading the way. Here is how Robert Moses phrased it:

"...We got freedom schools. You form your own schools. Because when you come right down to it, why integrate their schools? What is it that you will learn in their schools? Many Negroes can learn it, but what can they do with it? What they need to learn is how to be organized to work on the society to change it. They can't learn that in schools...

"Now nobody sat down and theorized all this. It's just that you went down there and started to try to do something...College kids come down, some of the Negroes who have come down, and are now trying to get back in school, can't relate to it. That raises for them the whole question of education. What is the degree? What do I need it for? What do I do with it after I get it?...

"We asked this one guy why he came; what he was doing. And he said, for his own personal self, he found out what work meant. He found out what it meant to live. What it meant to relate to people. What society meant. That's what he was getting in SNCC. Because who determines what work is? How many people come up to the SNCC people and say, 'Well, when are you going back to work?' And they mean, 'When are you going to fit into society?'

"Now what the SNCC people have found in a slow process is that they don't have to accept that definition of work. That they can define their own. And that they understand a little better what it means to work. That is to really put energy into something and to make something that's meaningful to yourself.

"In the process of that they begin to understand what it means to relate to people, to being at least able to break down all these things that happen in our society." (from The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution, News & Letters Detroit)

The humanism which emerged was not yet fully developed, not yet concretized and thus searching for a full solution. At the same time various tendencies within the movement or on the fringes of the movement or in opposition to the movement were seeking to put their imprint upon this humanism that the Southern blacks had first raised. Most successful in doing this was its wedding with Christian, Gandhian non-violence as a philosophy. This was one of the dominant influences seeking to channelize the humanism, the self-activity of fighting for freedom, into special compartments. Kennedy and the New Frontier wished to crush the humanism altogether by passing a little Civil Rights legislation and mousing much verbiage, or at the most reduce it to mere bourgeois humanism. The radicals--Trotskyist, Socialist, Communist and ourselves, Marxist-Humanist, were also around and subjected in the early period to no little red-baiting.

This humanism was the driving force. It is what caught the white students and created the ground upon which FSM was built. It concretized itself in the Free Speech Movement by the students raising the question of alienation. Alienation in their schools, alienation in society in general. Humanism for

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the students struck home in such phrases as "I am a UC student. Please do not bend, fold, spindle or mutilate me."

The power of the actions and ideas of the early Civil Rights movement was not limited to America. Sit-in, Freedom Ride, We Shall Overcome, Civil Rights, became international, not just as words, but as the name, the idea, of freedom in the United States. The same can be said for the Free Speech Movement--here is what one of the leaders of the French Revolt of '68, Cohn-Bendit said of Berkeley: "In Berkeley in 1964--well in advance of Berlin or Paris--the students defended their right to participate in politics. The students put their point of view in the bimonthly Free Speech Movement News Letters; which brought hundreds and later thousands of students without previous political experience into the movement. The Berkeley model was copied at Berlin university a few years later with Paris following suit soon afterwards." (Obsolete Communism)

Post '64 is a very different world. Gandhian non-violence and Christianity are out. There is nothing wrong with this. It represents the force of humanism trying to concretize itself. The false forms which had tried to impose themselves upon the movement were being thrown off, and we welcome this. These false forms could not deal with the totality of crises found in America. This is the search, the battle, which the movement is still engaged in. How does humanism concretize itself for a total transformation?

The search has brought dramatic changes. Where before red baiting was in order, today the radicals seem to be rampant everywhere. Where before the world revolution was taboo, today revolution is an accepted and welcomed word. Revolution should be the order of the day, but what we are faced with is that after the black masses and white youth have freed the movement of one philosophic concept being thrown on top of them, they now find a second or third or fourth comes forth in the name of revolution. Just when the masses are coming to the conclusion that a total reorganization of society--a social revolution--is necessary, they are besieged with half a dozen varieties of so-called revolutionary activity and thought--guerrilla warfare, several varieties of Mao's thought, Stalin on the National Question, etc. The concretization of humanism for our age is again in the process of being diverted, channeled, substituted for. Instead of Christianity and Gandhism, it is Maoism, instead of more civil rights legislation, it is instant, pre-cooked, pre-packaged urban guerrilla warfare.

This is the challenge that we, especially the youth, today face. How do we see that the concretization of humanism for our age that is genuinely called for--both historically and objectively today--comes to fruition.

We have by no accident called this coming to fruition Marxist-Humanism. This is the concretization of humanism for today. Not because we say so, not because we try and layer it upon the movement as others have done, but because we have seen it come from the movement itself.

Let us retrace for a third time the 1960s, this time concentrating not so much on actions or ideas, but on their unity--Marxist-Humanism. What have we done organizationally to push for that concretization of humanism, for we are the organizational expression of Marxist-Humanism. Let us first go back to the fifties. In the late fifties there was no youth movement as we know it in this country. It was the so-called apathetic generation. No revolt on the campus, McCarthyism was just finished. Black people had begun something in '56 in

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Montgomery. All that was really on the scene was rock n' roll and a few street gangs. Within our own organization it was the same, very few real youth. A couple of us were in our teens and some in their twenties, but this no longer meant youth because there was no youth movement, no way those out of high school or college could really be part of a youth grouping.

But in '57 we said youth would be important to the movement. We recognized something in their dropping out of school, in their acts of vandalism against the schools, in their disruptive attitude as some called it. We tried to put it in one of our leads for News & Letters--Rebels With A Cause, to contrast it to James Dean's Rebel Without a Cause.

And we tried to formulate it again when we wrote our constitution in 1958-- "We feel that the youth are a most precious source of our development. We recognize that even though the youth are not directly involved in production, they are the ones who²⁰ idealism in the finest sense of the word combines with opposition to existing adult society in so unique a way that it literally brings them alongside the workers as builders of the new society." (News & Letters Constitution)

It was a recognition of an element which historically had alined themselves with workers, most recently in the Hungarian Revolution, and could be the spark for revolutionary action. Eighteen months later the sit-ins occurred, and youth became the spark in America. We recognized this element as humanism in America because we were constantly looking for new impulses in America and had recognized black and youth as two impulses which were sure to come to the foreground.

The immediate task was to let these new voices speak and if you look at News & Letters beginning in March and April 1960 you can see direct reports written by the sit-inners themselves. This even though we were so small as to not have our own youth participating in the South at the beginning.

The principle was to let this new humanism begun in the Sit-in movement express itself--search for its concretization. The thoughts of the Civil Rights activists were put forth in the context of a Marxist-Humanist paper with a black worker as editor, worker writers, Marxist intellectuals as contributors.

The next stage of the Civil Rights movement was the Freedom Rides of '61. Here two of our members became Freedom Riders and we had reports from them and others on the rides. We again saw the major task was letting the Freedom Riders speak for themselves--thus the pamphlet by that name. (Freedom Riders Speak For Themselves, News & Letters 1961)

We can pick many other examples of this period. It is the participatory history of the Civil Rights movement in America. The pages of News & Letters 60 to 64 are I think the best history--history in terms of human thought and activity--of the Civil Rights movement.

Now comes '64 and Free Speech Movement. We, as many others, did recognize that as something very significant on the scene. But we felt we had a unique task which other radicals were not doing. First, to elicit from the activists themselves and second, to help the concretization of humanism. It is not eliciting per se, but with a certain ear or pen--to capture what ideas, what forces, were driving to concretize humanism in a total way. The ability to do so is what

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makes us Marxist-Humanists.

We had caught humanism, the movement from practice to theory, in 1953 in two ways. Raya Dunayevskaya's letters which she wrote while studying Hegel's Absolute Idea first caught the movement from practice to theory, theoretically. (Archives, News & Letters) A few weeks later, the East German Revolt against Stalinism without Stalin occurred and was the living proof of the movement from practice to theory. The Hungarian Revolution reaffirmed it. On the American scene we could see it in the Civil Rights movement.

The Free Speech Movement pushed it to a new level when students raised the concept of alienation. It pushed the movement very far. First because thousands in Berkeley and in the end hundreds of thousands across the nation recognized themselves when the concept of alienation was raised. They could now see themselves linked to the movement of the other America of poor and black, not as an addendum to the movement, but as part of it. Second, and this is what we tried very hard to develop and I think is a central part of our role--it allowed us to speak and raise for discussion the relationship of the movement to Marxism on a philosophic level. Marx and Hegel had raised the question of alienation and now in the 1960s students were again raising it. Now I am not saying everyone grasped what we were trying to do with the appendix to Free Speech Movement on The Theory of Alienation: Marx's Debt to Hegel. These questions have to be raised again and again at each stage of the movement. But we as Marxist-Humanists have to see why they have to be raised, we have to understand that our role is not only participater or eliciter of various activities, but raiser of these questions. We have to raise them because humanism can be concretized, made real, only as a totality.

Let us look at some other ways we have tried to raise the totality of a developing humanism. Take two of our pamphlets--Workers Battle Automation and Maryland Freedom Union. 1960 was the sit-ins, but '60 was also automation and workers. We put out Workers Battle Automation that year. It dealt with workers and was addressed in large part to workers. But listen to the names of several sections--The Youth, Employed and Unemployed; Rebels All; another called The Army and a third, The Best Generation Rebels With A Cause. Here is a pamphlet on workers in the factory and we bring youth in. It is part of this humanism as a totality--the concretization involves not just workers but youth and this we felt necessary to put in. Now look at one of our most recent pamphlets, Maryland Freedom Union, here we are jammed together black, youth and worker--all together. So that is one way we have of raising the questions.

A second way was another type of pamphlet or journal. Before Free Speech Movement and after the experiences of the Sit-ins and the Freedom Rides we tried another way of trying to concretize this new humanism. We gathered the young News & Letters members together and put out The Young Marxist-Humanist, which we had hoped to make an on-going youth discussion bulletin. Its primary purpose was to try and start a dialogue with others. Unfortunately we did not have enough youth forces within the organization to continue it. But what I think was exciting about it was that we had tried to start a Marxist-Humanist magazine--we were willing to step out with that name and try and begin a dialogue on our terms. On local levels there were two other attempts to carry on this type of discussion. On the UCLA campus, The Marxist-Humanist was published for three years '63 to '66 while in '67 and '68 some high school youth in Los Angeles published a new version of The Young Marxist-Humanist.

Now let us deal with the year past and the year ahead. I spent so much time covering the past decade in terms of activities, ideas and organization because.

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unless we understand the movement of the '60s and what we as News & Letters have been trying to do in that movement, the opportunity which we have now will go amiss. I think we have a great opportunity because for the first time we are beginning to have the forces we need to have a concrete influence on the direction of the movement among youth. I know when we look around us it seems we are very small, and we are, but in terms of youth we have grown several fold. Thus despite the fact that objectively '68 seemed much more on the move than '69 has, organizationally I believe we are far better off. I will leave the concrete reports of what youth in various locals have done for floor discussion. I want to concentrate on the youth scene nationally.

I did not speak historically about SDS. But I think it is obvious to all of us that SDS today is on the verge of being transformed into its opposite. But I think we have to understand that our organizational attitude to SDS cannot at this time simply be to hell with SDS. First, if the government stupidly decides to strike out against SDS with actual arrest, they could make them into martyrs and therefore despite the Maoist mess, they could once again grow and become a mass movement.

Secondly, even if SDS does turn entirely into its opposite, this does not mean the end of it. It can well remain on the scene as a force and not simply disappear. Therefore we have to understand how SDS became transformed into its opposite. What is the attraction of Maoism in America? How are we going to combat Maoism among the youth?

Despite all the horrible fights we were involved in in various SDS locals during the past year, what SDS has meant to us organizationally has been a national platform for our ideas. Our discussion on Race and Class which appeared in New Left Notes had an impact which will not be lost despite the transformation of SDS. (New Left Notes, May, 1969) What I am concerned with is how do we continue what we have just developed in the past year--a national platform for our ideas. If we don't have SDS then we have to look for alternatives. We were just beginning to be recognized and I hope we don't have to take a backward step and have no national platform. I am not saying that we should or should not work in SDS. Each locality has to decide what is best for its functioning. One alternative to SDS which I believe will be reported on is functioning in independent groups of students who feel they can no longer work in SDS. One such group is in the process of being formed in Detroit.

In looking for a national platform for our ideas I would like to raise three organizational possibilities for discussion. First, the possibility of an on going youth bulletin similar to the Young Marxist-Humanist which we might put out once every three or four months. It could both have a Marxist-Humanist stamp on it and yet be free and easy for a wide variety of contributions. We should discuss whether such a bulletin would be useful for their work.

A second possibility would be a continuation of the youth pamphlets similar to the French pamphlet we published last year. (France, Spring 1968, Masses in Motion Ideas in Free Flow, News & Letters Youth Pamphlet). A youth pamphlet put out by high school students is one possibility.

A third possibility which I think we should discuss is how to make better use of the youth page in News & Letters. I think that the quality of that page has been mixed over the past year and that we as youth are not paying enough attention to developing that page. One of its weaknesses is that we have not always had enough participant reports of activities. I think what makes the Auto Shop page exciting is the concrete struggle which one sees in the stories.

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Sometimes we achieve that on the youth page, but a number of times we have not. I have the following two suggestions for the youth page. First that on the agenda of discussion of youth in the various locals material for the youth page in particular be discussed along with normal assignments for the paper. And second I have spoken with the youth columnist Bernard and we both agree that a rotating youth column between the various locals would allow the youth page to reflect better what is happening around the country.

The new for us I believe is that we now do have the forces to begin to influence what is occurring in the youth movement. If we keep in mind the objective situation and our Marxist-Humanist method than each local can decide for itself where it wishes to function, whether that be organizing university workers on campus in Detroit, high school students in Los Angeles, or students at Columbia in New York.

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