

The politics of the Guardian split

By RANDY FURST
and HARRY RING

(Randy Furst was a member of the *Guardian* editorial staff beginning in October 1967. In January of this year, he was elected to the paper's five member coordinating committee. Shortly afterward, he joined the Young Socialist Alliance. In April, he was fired from the *Guardian* for his political views. Harry Ring has followed the political evolution of the *Guardian* since its founding in 1948.)

The two-week-old split in the work staff of the *Guardian* has plunged that newspaper into the most serious political crisis in its 22 year history.

Some of the *Guardian* workers have declared themselves on strike and are publishing a *Liberated Guardian*.

Another group — headed by Managing Editor Jack Smith and General Manager Irving Beinin — is publishing the original *Guardian* "clandestinely."

The latest crisis is the culmination of a series of convulsions including a number of previous walkouts and group resignations.

The current split, not accidentally, bears strong similarity to the political crisis of SDS that culminated in its disintegration.

There has already been a good deal said by both sides in the present *Guardian* dispute, as well as in the radical-movement media. But thus far no one has attempted an analysis of the political roots of the crisis. The purpose of this and subsequent articles is to offer such an analysis.

Briefly, this is what has happened:

Some 19 full- and part-time *Guardian* workers walked off the job April 9.

The workers — most of whom held art department, typesetting or clerical jobs — set up a picket line outside the *Guardian's* East Fourth Street office in New York. Their picket signs declared, "Workers Control" and "On Strike."

On April 12, some 50-60 people — including some of those involved in the current walkout, others who had been in previous walkouts on the paper, plus an assorted group of ideological supporters — invaded the *Guardian* offices by way of a fire escape.

According to the *Liberated Guardian*, non-*Guardian* participants included people from such groups as the underground paper *Rat*, *Newsreel*, the *Venceremos Brigade*, *Urban Underground*, *New York Media Project*, *Gay Liberation Front*, *Liberation* magazine, *American Revolutionary Media*, and women's liberation.

The *Liberated Guardian* declared: "We had banded together to overthrow an archaic, undemocratic, elitist structure and make the *Guardian* serve the new left movement it claimed to represent."

The *Guardian* responded that the walkout represented an "ultraleft," "anarchist" expression of opposition to the paper's "Marxist" policies and was triggered by a recent editorial scoring the concept of individual terrorism. The demand for "workers control" was branded as contrary to the *Guardian's* "democratic centralist" [!] structure.

The *Guardian* was occupied until the afternoon of April 13 when the building's owner told those holding the offices "that he would permit neither strikers nor bosses inside his building," the *Liberated Guardian* reported. "Under these conditions, we agreed to move to donated space and get on with the real work of putting out a paper."

While both factions are appealing to the radical public for support, neither offers much in terms of political program or goals. Those who have experienced life on the *Guardian* staff will see merit to many of the particular grievances voiced by those who walked out.

But "liberation" from the Smith-Bein-

in thumb is hardly likely to prove a sufficient program for building a new radical newspaper whose sole political thrust appears to be an amorphous, barely defined anarchism.

And certainly no serious revolutionary will approve the attempts to settle the issue by a forcible seizure of the *Guardian* office. What is involved is a split within the staff of a movement paper, not "class struggle" between capitalist and workers. Attempts to settle inner-movement disputes physically are becoming more common in var-

association of individuals on the basis of a common basic program — leadership, policies, disputed issues, etc., are decided by majority vote, with minorities assuming the obligation of publicly carrying through majority decisions in a disciplined way. The concept has meaning only if those involved are agreed on a common political outlook which binds them together.

It is utter nonsense to speak of invoking democratic centralism in the staff of a newspaper like the *Guardian* because —

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Guardian independent radical newsweekly

GUARDIAN OFFICE ATTACKED

The *Guardian* was published clandestinely this week. At this writing, the *Guardian's* tenement office on East 4th St. in New York City's Lower East Side is

opposed to the primacy of much smaller "revolutionary" actions against the war. The *Guardian's* attack on the Weathermen group and its adventures in line continued

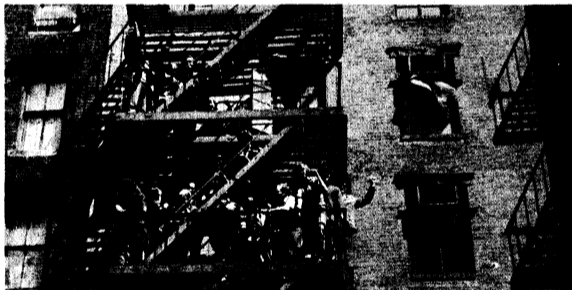
ating an invasion and an effort to wrest control of the nation's largest radical newsweekly from the hands of the staff collective, the *Guardian* decentralized its

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LIBERATED *Guardian*

Workers seize control

Guardian Workers' Collective
On Sunday morning, April 12, we seized control of the *Guardian's* national headquarters at 197 E. 4th St. in New York City. We were about 60 strong — 19 workers who had been on strike since Thursday, together with a number of discontented *Guardian* ex-workers and Movement supporters from such organizations as *Rat*, *Newsreel*, *Venceremos Brigade*, *Urban Underground*, *New York Media Project*, *Gay Liberation Front*.



ious ultraleft circles, with the disruption of numerous April 15 antiwar demonstrations a particularly disgraceful example. Such methods harm the entire movement and aid the enemy. No serious sector of the movement should tolerate them.

At the same time, the demagogic Beinin-Smith cry of "anarchy" and a self-defense plea of "democratic centralism" is utterly grotesque.

Part of the effort of the *Guardian* editors to carve out a base among the "new left" has been to encourage ultraleftism. In an unfortunate sense, it can be said that what is happening on the *Guardian* is a case of "As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

"Democratic centralism"

And it is difficult to even believe that the "democratic centralist" argument is meant seriously.

Democratic centralism is a particular form of organization developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks that has meaning and relevancy only as it relates to a political party organized around a revolutionary program. Lenin developed the concept that a revolutionary Marxist party has two basic aspects:

First, political homogeneity based on a commonly agreed upon Marxist program; and secondly, an organizational form designed to realize that program — that is, a vanguard combat party capable of organizing and leading the workers to power.

Within such a party — i.e., a free

a) Membership in the *Guardian* "co-operative" is not based on agreement with any thought-out, agreed-upon set of political ideas or program. There is, at best, a vague anticapitalist outlook implemented by a series of "positions" on current issues — positions generally hastily conceived, rapidly shifting and, more often than not, incorrect.

b) The *Guardian* is not a political party nor is it responsible to any defined political tendency or ideological current.

c) There are no genuinely democratic procedures within the *Guardian* to assure that everyone will have meaningful voice and vote in establishing the decisions they are obliged to carry out. To the degree there is centralism on the *Guardian* staff it is bureaucratic, not democratic, centralism.

"Workers control"

On the other hand, the demand by the split-off group for "workers control" of the paper is, at best, light-minded. Beinin and Smith are able to quite effectively, if demagogically, poke fun at the notion of turning a paper into a political merry-go-round, with policy for each issue being decided by whomever is helping out that particular week. (One of the split-off group's demands was that all distinctions between full-time, part-time, regular, temporary and volunteer workers be abolished in decision-making.) Yet here, too, the cry of "participatory

democracy" directed against the *Guardian* is, in part, of its own creation.

Since Smith and Beinin gained control of the paper in 1967, they have promoted the notion that the paper is a "collective" and that all staff members really do have a voice in decision-making, both in terms of functioning and political policy.

One of the factors feeding the ongoing *Guardian* personnel crisis has been the continuing explosion of that particular myth. People kept discovering that in practice a few people were making the decisions behind the scenes.

Yet this too was but a reflection of the basic political problem which in one form or another confronted the *Guardian* throughout its 20 year history.

The perspective of the *Guardian* since it was founded in 1948 was to become the voice of a broad radical movement, as yet to be created. The *Guardian* began as the newspaper of the Progressive Party which nominated Henry Wallace for President in 1948 and Vincent Hallinan in 1952. But by 1953, the Progressive Party had dissolved, an utter failure.

At that time the *Guardian* was largely in the orbit of the Communist Party and was dependent to a major extent on Communist Party circles for financial support and circulation.

The *Guardian's* major difficulties began when it sought to resist the CP moves to scuttle the Progressive Party and the New York American Labor Party. The CP was out to herd the faithful back into 100 percent direct participation in the "mainstream" of the Democratic Party.

Political problems loomed larger for the *Guardian* with the sensational 1956 Khrushchev revelations about the crimes of Stalin. During the momentous days that followed, the *Guardian* played a significant, positive role in the efforts that then developed to accomplish a regroupment of socialist forces. But a key problem for the *Guardian* was that it failed to think through the political basis on which a new party of American socialism could be developed.

This problem remained for the *Guardian* until, at the crest of the emerging "new left," Editor James Aronson was forced to resign by Smith and Beinin who sought to become the spokesmen for the new radical student movement.

The fundamental political error made by the pre-1967 *Guardian* was its attempt to use a newspaper that lacked a consistent, thought-out revolutionary program — a paper that vacillated between reformism and socialist ideas in typically "centrist" fashion — to somehow create a new political organization.

Beinin and Smith to the contrary, this essential political error was carried over and did not change one whit with the 1967 "revolution" in the *Guardian*. The *Guardian's* masthead was changed — from a "progressive" weekly to a "radical" weekly. On some issues the *Guardian* improved; on some it degenerated. But its centrist political approach did not change nor did it move any closer to revolutionary socialist politics.

We will chart the vacillations and political failures of the Beinin-Smith era in our next article.

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