

## Antiwar War Report by J. Barnes

Given to the Resident NC Meeting September 23, 1966

### The Background of the Cleveland Conference

While we were building for the August 6-9 International Days of Protest around the country, something was simultaneously happening to the liberal wing of the so called peace movement, especially to the professors, whom we hadn't heard much from since the first wave of teach-ins.

The Inter University Committee for Debate on Foreign Policy arose out of the original teach-in at the University of Michigan. It organized and produced the national televised teach-in and makes up almost the entire professorial wing of the antiwar movement. They carried on the teach-ins, wrote articles exposing the CIA and Michigan State, but were relatively isolated from the radical wing of the movement which got the mobilizations into the streets and carried on the fight for the withdrawal of troops. During the early part of the summer a discussion began among the professors who made up a sort of left wing of the Inter University Committee for a Debate on Foreign Policy. They had become convinced that the stage of trying to reason with the Johnson administration was over. If you remember the main axis of the national teach-in was to be a debate, a "dialogue," with the administration. Schlesinger showed up, even though Bundy chickened out at the last minute, and the liberal professors thought they had a genuine dialogue which they assumed LBJ and the Cabinet were watching.

But the concrete fact of the continued escalation and the absolute refusal of the administration to even pretend to listen to this wing of the professors, convinced them that they should try to find something new. After a series of internal discussions, the left wing of the liberals carried the day and they decided to call a conference in Cleveland, try to reach out to broader layers of the movement, and launch a fall action of some kind, taking advantage of the election period to raise the war question. So on July 22, at Western Reserve University in Cleveland the conference was called. The SWP, the YSA, the Communist Party, the openly working class tendencies within the radical movement or within the antiwar movement were not invited. They were in essence excluded. The entire panorama of clergy and liberal pacifist groups, local antiwar committees and the NCC, and all the established peace groups that you know about were invited.

The first thing that happened at the conference was a direct confrontation about this exclusion initiated by Emspak, to give the devil his due. He announced that he was from the NCC and that along with him was Hugh Fowler, the National Chairman of the W. E. B. Du-Bois Club, and he wanted to know why Fowler couldn't sit in on the meeting. Sidney Peck, one of the professors of the Inter University Committee and one of the hosts took the floor and said he thought it was a point well taken and they could accomplish nothing by excluding anyone who was against the war. He suggested that Hugh Fowler and a national representative of the YSA be invited. It was

put to a vote and passed, with all the pacifist groups and the professors voting to exclude neither the DuBois Club nor the YSA.

The second event of importance was a keynote address by Douglas Dowd, who is the chairman of the Inter University Committee. It put forth this general line: Whatever may have been a plausible interpretation of American involvement in Vietnam six months or more ago, it is now clear that:

(1) The United States seeks a military victory over all of Vietnam.

(2) The United States is steadily widening the war by daily bombing of Laos, etc.

(3) The United States is in the process of creating a permanent military base in Southeast Asia.

(4) There is increasing reason to believe that the policy of "containing China" is moving steadily toward direct military confrontation with China.

In the light of this analysis -- new for Dowd and most of the professors -- he proposed that the people gathering at Cleveland call a broader conference and try to mobilize a massive mobilization of a million Americans against the war for the fall around the time of the election campaign. They planned a meeting for August, later postponed to September, to carry out this proposal.

There was another side to this conference -- a tremendous demoralization was expressed by most of the participants. They had been involved in one way or another in the teach-ins and the antiwar movement from the beginning and from their point of view nothing was really being accomplished. That is, the war had been steadily escalated further, no significant national bourgeois figure had been won over, and it seemed like so much lost motion. They also hadn't involved any large section of the American population outside of themselves.

A. J. Muste attended this meeting and came back and threw a new element into the entire thing by throwing the reputation of the Parade Committee behind the September conference. This meant that the conference in September was going to have the authority to call a national fall action.

### The Cleveland Conference

We went to the conference with the desire to:

(1) Get a national action called for the fall to capitalize especially on the beginning of the new term on campus, and

(2) Try to get this group to project on as broad a scale as possible a massive spring action which there would be time to organize, which would involve a march on Washington or a march in New York. We wanted either a massive action against the war, or a massive action in which the antiwar movement would try to involve the civil rights movement, and if possible, the union movement, if something changed between now and then.

So what actually happened in Cleveland September 10 was that for the first time since what we call the antiwar movement began, the whole spectrum of pacifists, professors, radical youth, and socialists were all represented in one place. Harry's article in The Militant lists all the major organizations which took part. It was the whole spectrum. There was no new significant representation from either the Negro movement or the trade union movement.

The tone of the meeting was established by Professor Peck at the beginning. He said that the meeting had come together to discuss really two things: (1) a fall mobilization, a national days of protest, and (2) to project a broad group of sponsors who could agree on a fall mobilization and carry it out, for them to be the basic sponsors of a massive spring action, which he proposed would be a march in New York for the East and a march in San Francisco for the West. The job of the antiwar movement would be to take the initiative in attempting to mobilize a layer of the Negro movement and a section of the trade union movement if possible, to make this spring march a massive protest against the administration, revolving around the war question, but bringing in the issues which concern the Negro movement and the trade union movement. And in essence the rest of the conference revolved around discussion of this proposal.

The morning and afternoon session revolved around various gimmicks for the fall -- fasts, general strikes, etc. We made the point from the floor, that we thought the fall mobilization was the single most important thing; we thought it was very important that it be left to the local groups as to what kind to carry out; and that the worst thing would be a group of this breadth getting together for the first time with agreement on nothing other than opposition to the war to try to nail down different lines and slogans. If this group could hang together and carry out the national action, that would be the major accomplishment.

This line was challenged really only once. Emspak of the NCC put forth the proposition and demanded a vote on it by the body that the action in the fall revolved around three points: (1) opposition to the draft, (2) opposition to "the breakdown of the electoral system," the lack of time the candidates were really giving to the war question, (3) in defense of civil liberties of all protest movements.

We opposed this from the floor and it was defeated by a very large vote.

The only other major conflict was the attempt by Emspak to take authority and credit for the NCC for the calling and organization of the big November mobilization by setting the administrative center up in Madison. He proposed himself as administrative head, or co-head with Muste and one of the professors. This was the biggest open conflict of the conference. It was resolved by making Muste the chairman of the November 5-8 Committee; Pat Griffith the secretary of the Inter University Committee, administrative secretary; and Emspak the field secretary. The door was left open for the addition of more field secretaries.

What was really involved was the future of the NCC as an organization. I think a big step was taken in the diminution of the authority of the NCC.

(1) The NCC did not call this conference. It was not even a major factor in the call. They went so far as to call a national conference the day before the Cleveland meeting in Toledo to which they got 28 people.

(2) The NCC was simply put on a par with other national organizations. Emspak was not made one of the co-chairmen.

(3) The editor of the Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter, as an equal national organization, as an equal national representative, was included in the list of sponsors -- over Emspak and the CP's objections.

A motion passed to the effect that the committee would not dissolve immediately after November 8 but would call a similar conference after November 8 to evaluate the success of the fall action, and to consider future national actions against the war in Vietnam.

There is another aspect to the Cleveland conference that should be mentioned as there was some confusion among our own comrades about it at the time. The call for the November 5-8 action was a call against the war, for human rights, and economic justice. Almost everyone there thought it was important that the most general goal of the Negro movement and the trade union movement be included.

Thus in addition to the opposition to the war, the general goal of the Negro movement and the trade union movement were added in the hopes that this gesture would indicate the desire to involve these two sectors of the mass movement in the fight against the war and secondly, if the fall mobilization was successful, that this would indicate that what we want to aim for in the spring is a mobilization that somehow or another will involve one or both of these sectors in the protest.

We did not oppose this. One, because what was happening was not that a multi-issue organization was being proposed or formed; secondly, there was nothing in this call that would press us to make any change in the work we are actually doing in the single-issue antiwar committees; and thirdly, we are the most anxious of all to involve these two sectors of the mass movement if at all possible in the spring action. The fall action is not even really a multi-issue action, in that it is called and organized by the antiwar movement; it is going to revolve around the war question; and these points will be symbolic points which may be used as levers with which to get a little Negro or a little trade union representation in some areas of the country in the antiwar protest. The addition of these two points served in no way to dilute the antiwar protest, as the general multi-issue advocates seek to do.

What's involved now is a struggle nationally and in the local areas to actually carry out large scale mass mobilizations. One role the CP did play in Cleveland was to advocate the idea that what

was needed was not a large mobilization of significant numbers in the streets against the war, but small educational actions in all the local areas taking advantage of the elections, peace candidates, and things like that.

What we need in the fall is a mass mobilization against the war that can be seen and counted in public, in the papers, on t.v., in the streets. This more than anything the professors and the liberals need. The success of the fall action will have a large bearing on whether or not they'll go ahead with a spring action and continue to push and stay in league with all the radical organizations. We are fighting the entire weight of the administration and the professors' demoralization and pessimism.

Questions:

Q. What was the effect of the "peace candidate" phenomenon?

A. Morse and Gruening have not been joined by as much as one additional "dove" from the Congress, one person against the war. The whole Democratic party machine has held completely tight. LBJ hasn't even had to throw a couple Congressmen to the antiwar movement. It was very interesting when the peace candidate supporters took the floor at Cleveland. What they wanted more than anything to say was that Congressman X from X, because of the pressure of the antiwar movement has already come out against the war and we should push and get more such "victories." They couldn't even say this. They were reduced to statements like, "Harriman flew into the New York State Democratic convention in Buffalo to urge a moderate antiwar plank because of the pressure of the reform movement." They were reduced to statements like that which impressed no one and had no wind in their sails when they took the floor at the Cleveland conference. The large defeats that have been handed the so called peace candidates in the Democratic primary elections have also discouraged them. The Democratic party set these up everywhere, pretending they were a test of "real public opinion." This was the source of a lot of the pessimism which swept over the antiwar movement.

Q. What about the Fort Hood Three? What was the attitude at Cleveland?

A. The Cleveland Conference was unanimous, including everyone of the conservative peace groups, in its support for the Fort Hood Three and its support to Muste's proposal to take the message of the Fort Hood Three and spread it as widely as possible, including among the troops themselves. It became standard later in the conference when people would take the floor and throw out two, three, or four things that they thought it would be good to do in their local areas in November, to include "defend those three G.I.'s, get the word out about the Fort Hood Three," things like this. This was kosher and seemed totally accepted.